

# The Word in Llife

## Romans 15:4-13

INTRO:

The Bible is God's gift to us to offer us encouragement and hope.

We have chosen to live by the demands of these ancient and inspired texts.

To follow Jesus is to hold ourselves to a higher standard of judgement than our own conscience.

ME:

I have turned to the Bible for hope often in my life.

I have even opened the Bible randomly and read a passage and many times it seems written just for me at that time.

Although that is not necessarily the best approach.

It is definitely better to drink from the well of Scripture daily to feed your soul just like you feed our body with food.

WE:

This is something we should all do.

**Have there been times when scripture seemed addressed to you?**

*Let's pray together and then see what Paul can teach us about this...*

GOD:

***Romans 15:4 Whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction so that we could have hope through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures.***

***5 May the God of endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude toward each other, similar to Christ Jesus' attitude.***

***6 That way you can glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ together with one voice.***

***7 So welcome each other, in the same way that Christ also welcomed you, for God's glory.***

***8 I'm saying that Christ became a servant of those who are circumcised for the sake of God's truth, in order to confirm the promises given to the ancestors,***

***9 and so that the Gentiles could glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,***

***Because of this I will confess you***

- > among the Gentiles,
- > and I will sing praises to your name.
- > 10 And again, it says,
- > Rejoice, Gentiles, with his people.
- > 11 And again,
- > Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
- > and all the people should sing his praises.
- > 12 And again, Isaiah says,
- > There will be a root of Jesse,
- > who will also rise to rule the Gentiles.
- > The Gentiles will place their hope in him.
- > 13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you > overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

During Advent we prepare for God to come to us and be with us in Emmanuel.

**How do we do that?**

By doing what we try to every Sunday.

We submit ourselves to scripture.

The church is sustained and encouraged and even criticized and challenged by the same scripture that the church produced. We meet Christ in scripture in a real and fruitful way. In our encounters with scripture we hear the voice, see the ways God works, and receive guidance from the living God.

The Bible was produced by communities of faith who had experienced God's presence and interaction in brilliant ways.

Something undeniable and real had happened to them and they wanted to tell everyone the news.

Not that all their accounts were consistent or communicated in the same way.

The diversity of the testimony is for many a proof that the events they were trying to relate were so mind-boggling and boundary-breaking that they were very difficult to put into words.

We benefit from their testimony; we are the result of the encounter that their testimony inspires in each generation.

**Why do we come to church?**

Not primarily to hear what the preacher has on his or her mind this week.

And not just to hear what you have on your mind this week.

My thoughts and your thoughts are all answerable to scripture.

The ancient Articles of Religion of the Anglican Church say that the Bible **“contains all things necessary for salvation.”**

We can be reassured by this idea that everything anyone really needs to know in order to be with God is graciously given in the Bible.

We don't need to look anywhere else for our ideas about God.

It's all here, more than we'll ever be able to process in a lifetime of sermons, devotions, Bible studies; all that we need to know of God and more.

Saying the Bible contains **“all things necessary for salvation”** does not mean that God's revelation is simple or self-evident.

One reason you are listening to this sermon is that you know that God's word requires humble listening, informed discernment, and prayerful searching.

We are people who have been taught by our culture to believe that we are privileged to stand on the pinnacle of human development.

From our contented contemporary perch we stand in judgment of everyone who got here before us.

We have made progress.

We are making progress.

We know so much more than they did.

To affirm that both Old and New Testaments, are a reliable guide for our salvation, our future with God, is to go against this modern prejudice.

We look for God and listen for God with these ancient witnesses who have gone before us.

We do our best to allow the various voices within scripture to share their distinctive testimonies with us.

We need not **“reinvent the wheel”** of Christian discipleship.

If we are brave enough to listen, the saints will show us the way.

To say that scripture ought to be read as a whole puts to rest the unfortunate stereotype that has downplayed the Old Testament. Some say things like, **“the Old Testament is a collection of laws and judgment; the New Testament contains books of love and grace.”**

There is love and grace to be found in all of scripture.

Some think we should disregard the Old Testament because Jesus has fulfilled it and begun something totally new.

This ignores the fact that Christianity does indeed need the Old Testament in order to hold together.

After all...

- Jesus is the second Adam, succeeding where Adam failed
- Jesus is the seed of Eve who will crush Satan's head
- Jesus is the second Israel, keeping the covenant flawlessly
- Jesus is greater than the Temple
- Jesus is a greater king than David
- Jesus is wiser than Solomon
- Jesus is a king-priest from the order of Melchizedek
- Jesus is the glorious Son of Man revealed in Daniel
- Jesus is our Great High Priest
- Jesus is our sacrificial lamb
- Jesus the promised Messiah who will rescue his people
- Jesus is our Passover sacrifice

All the scriptures speak of Jesus. Contrary to what some think, very little of the New Testament makes sense without the Old Testament.

In fact, very little of what Jesus said or did makes sense without the backdrop of the Old Covenant.

The moment you “**unhook**” your faith from the Old Testament, things start to go to pieces.

If all the scriptures speak of Jesus, then we can’t afford to ignore or downplay a huge portion of them.

If you do, you’re left with a half-baked Jesus who is stripped of so much of what makes him glorious.

**So what’s the solution?**

**What should we “do” with the Old Testament?**

Answer:

study it.

Learn how to properly interpret it and teach others the same skills.

Discover what Jesus meant when he said that ALL the scriptures point to him.

It’s true that the Old Testament can be confusing and difficult to understand.

It’s true that it has been distorted and misinterpreted over the centuries.

But the solution is not to be rid of the whole thing.

Rather, we should do the hard work of learning to interpret the Old Testament properly, in light of the New Covenant.

*See, here's the thing. Jesus is already irresistible.*

And part of what makes him so irresistible is the way he fulfills every aspect of the Old Covenant.

When we “**unhook**” ourselves from the Old Testament, we take away from, rather than add to Jesus' glory.

“**Proof texting**,” or searching for one passage to prove your pet doctrine or to disprove another's pet doctrine, is an abuse of scripture's unity and overall message.

All passages of scripture must be read in the context of the whole story that God is telling us.

*Martin Luther was fond of saying that the Bible is like the swaddling clothes that were wrapped around the baby Jesus and the manger in which Christ was laid.*

We don't worship the Bible; we worship the savior to whom all scripture testifies.

All scripture, Old Testament and New, points to and is to be evaluated by the supreme revelation of God, the incarnate Word—Jesus Christ.

As Jesus told some of his critics: **“You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life”** (John 5:39-40).

On the Easter evening walk to Emmaus, the risen Christ attempts to **“open the scriptures”** to two dull disciples (Luke 24).

Christ engages in a sweeping Bible study that begins **“with Moses and all the prophets.”**

The risen Christ interprets the resurrection by reference to the ancient Hebrew Scriptures.

And yet, the disciples understand nothing about the scriptures until Jesus, with them **“at the table”** (24:30), blesses, breaks, and gives the bread.

Only then are their eyes opened, and they see that the stranger is none other than their Lord and savior.

The Word in life. We need the presence of Christ to understand scripture.

All scripture ultimately points to Christ and must finally answer to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the one whose birth we prepare for, whose near presence we anticipate by opening up his word and by submitting ourselves to what he has to say to us.

This is the second Sunday of Advent, our second week of preparation for the birth of Christ among us.

In a sense, this grand mystery for which we prepare, the incarnation of the living God with us, isn't so strangely a miracle. It's experienced every time we open up the Bible and dare to listen, and in daring to listen hear God's word for our lives. The Word in life.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

***The Word in Life requires humble listening, informed discernment, and prayerful searching.***

YOU:

**How will you do it? How will you keep the Word in your life?**

Here are your action steps to try today and this week:

- Get a good translation!

One that is written in today's language.

- Read it!

Find a reading plan and get started reading your Bible every day.

- Live it!

Apply what you read to your daily life.

You may want to start with a devotional guide that suggests ways you can apply what you read.

Then you can read it and live it.

WE:

Imagine what this congregation would look like if we all lived life in the Word.

Imagine how God could transform us and use us to transform this community and this world.

Imagine how adding this discipline or habit to your life could change things.

CLOSE:

In his latest book, Robert Morgan shares the beneficial effects that habits can have in our lives:

*The word practice implies we must go to work developing certain skills until they become habitual or proficient, like an athlete or musician.*

*These are the Bible's perpetual habits for a gradual and glorious experience with the God of peace.*

*In her book **Better Than Before: What I Learned About Making and Breaking Habits**, Gretchen Rubin called habits "the invisible architecture of daily life.*

*We repeat about 40 percent of our behavior almost daily, so our habits shape our existence, and our future."*

Rubin went on to explain that habits reduce the need for self-control, saying, "**With habits, we conserve our self-control. Because we're in the habit of putting a dirty coffee cup in the office dishwasher, we don't need self-control to perform that action; we do it without thinking.**"

She also added, "**Our habits are our destiny. And changing our habits allows us to alter that destiny.**"

The Word in life.

Life in the Word.

## **Do they mean the same thing?**

I invite you to try them out and see! Turn to the Word in your life and live your life in the Word.

*Let's pray together...*