

Introduction: It is a continual joy for your pastor to mine the riches of the Gospels in alternating sermons in the morning and in the evening at our church. There are many other portions of Scripture essential to study the whole counsel of God, but there is no substitute for frequently studying the Gospels. because they are crucial in learning to “recognize the voice of the Shepherd” (John 10:27). May these Bible notes on the Gospels be a blessing for our personal study and also attune us as a Church body to recognize the voice of our Savior in every situation.

Monday: Read John 5:24-25 and John 5:39-47

Leaky Buckets

The Holy Scriptures, from beginning to end, bear witness to the divine authority and saving power of the Son of God. “They testify of Me” is the claim which Christ makes of God’s Word in John 5:39.

What makes the Scriptures so powerful? It is that they are the Son of God’s chosen instrument by which He mightily saves sinners. When Jesus speaks of the coming hour when the dead will hear His voice and live, He is speaking of our day, when through the Word read and preached, Christ “speaks and listening to His voice, new life the dead receive” (Charles Wesley).

Jesus illustrates such saving power from His Word in John 5:1-11 when, by His bare command, the man who had lain for thirty-eight years is told to rise. He then takes up his mat and walks, healed by Christ. This powerful Word stretches from the beginning of the Bible to its end. “Moses shall testify against you,” Jesus declares at the end of John 5, because His audience stands condemned for refusing to listen Christ, the prophet of whom Moses prophesied.

Meditate and Pray: *Dear living Word of God, our Savior whose name is Jesus Christ, please give us ears to hear and hearts to remember and receive what you say to us in your Word. Forgive us for how many times your Bible leaks out of our lives. We are leaky buckets. Please fill us anew with the life-changing, soul-refreshing and heart-convicting Word of God. Change us by that Word. Please, cause us to live by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Amen.*

Tues/Weds/Thurs: read John 5:25; John 10:1-8 and Genesis 48:15-16

The Shepherd’s Voice

Another way to learn to appreciate the Bible as the life-changing power of God in the hands of our Savior is to learn that Jesus, like His Father before Him, continually speaks to us in it with the words and tone of voice that is characteristic of God *as our Shepherd*.

The Father revealed Himself as the “Lord” to the patriarchs and confirmed His promises to them. He was the “Shepherd who would guide them all their lives long” (Genesis 48:15-16). God’s Son speaks to lost sinners and they recognize His voice as the One who alone can shepherd them each step of the way in this confusing world.

How confusingly noisy the daily life of a non-believer is! There are so many voices to pay attention to and so many contradictory messages. No wonder people retreat from the cacophony of this chaotic world into spaces of self-made silence. How many even today are seeking to find answers to their lives through the silent, interned introspection which offers a false kind of spirituality. Such people pursue a silence without relationship and without content! The end result is profound loneliness and regret. Life becomes just an endless series of goodbyes as we realize we can hold on to none of it with our frail, mortal hands.

But with Christ Jesus, the “Living Word,” we have access to a recognizable voice which has been pursuing us all our lives. We never knew who it was until He backed us into a corner (as He did the Apostle Paul); until we are forced to ask the question, “Who are you Lord?” (Acts 9:5)

But when God chooses to draw us to Christ as Savior (John 6:44) we are irresistibly attracted to the very One whom just a minute earlier we would deny or ignore. By God’s effectively calling us, our hostile hearts are changed in a moment! We learn, like sheep, that there is only one true Shepherd whom we can trust.

Meditate and Pray: Sing this song about learning to trust Christ Jesus as our Good Shepherd:

1 Savior, like a shepherd lead us,
much we need thy tender care;
in thy pleasant pastures feed us,
for our use thy folds prepare:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast bought us, thine we are;
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast bought us, thine we are.

2 We are thine; do thou befriend us,
be the guardian of our way;
keep thy flock, from sin defend us,
seek us when we go astray:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
hear, O hear us when we pray;
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
hear, O hear us when we pray.

3 Thou hast promised to receive us,
poor and sinful though we be;
thou hast mercy to relieve us,
grace to cleanse, and pow’r to free:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
let us early turn to thee;
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
let us early turn to thee.

4 Early let us seek thy favor;
early let us do thy will;
blessed Lord and only Savior,
with thy love our bosoms fill:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast loved us, love us still,
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast loved us, love us still.

Friday: Read John 5:39-43 and Luke 17:17-21

Deep Set Problem

How does this call take place in our lives, so that we obey Christ’s command to come to Him by faith? This is an urgent question, because we need to find a solution for the deep-set enmity towards God which we hold onto in our heart of hearts. Yes, we don’t think such a hatred towards God exists in us. We assume that God cannot be offended with us since we mind our own business and deceive our hearts by our “live and let live” attitude. But to refuse to come to Christ (John 5:40) is in reality proof that our hearts are loveless towards God (John 5:42) and that we rebel at every overture God makes to woo us to Himself. The only solution is the inward work of the Spirit of Christ. This inward work, in fact, is the actual work of the Kingdom of God, as Luke 17:20-21 says. The Kingdom is not to be observed outwardly as a physical kingdom.

Meditate and Pray: Ask God to reveal the current and former state of our hearts in His time, so that we might realize that He loved us at our greatest evil and cannot love us less, now.

Sat/Sun: read John 5:25 and John 10:1-6 & 10:27

Deaf and Dumb

We began this week of notes with the question: What makes the Scriptures so powerful? We answered that they are the Son of God’s chosen instrument by which He mightily saves sinners. When Jesus speaks of the coming hour when the dead will hear His voice and live (John 5:25), He is speaking of our day, when through the Word read and preached, Christ “speaks and listening to His voice, new life the dead receive” (Charles Wesley).

This is Christ's greatest shepherding tool: His voice sounding forth from the pages of the Scriptures. But as we move to John 10, to introduce next week's focus on Christ's declaration, "I am the Good Shepherd," we are astounded that the crowd listening to Jesus in John 10:6 is not able to understand the basics about Christ's shepherding His own through His voice! How could they misunderstand the fundamental truth that Christ's sheep show they are His sheep by listening to Him?

The basic darkness of the sin nature makes us both deaf and dull to God's Word and to that Word embodied in Jesus Christ, His Son. This explains mankind's basic inability to hear and recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd. We are all rebellious sheep who are habituated to listen to our own voice, and to go our own way (Isaiah 53:6), instead of following the Good Shepherd's voice. What then is the solution?

The late Scottish pastor James Philip gives us the answer:

Into the silence and isolation of human sin there comes a gracious, enabling, life-giving word – the same word that in the beginning brought the universe into being, when God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light – (but in our case as hardened sinners) bestowing the grace of repentance in the very act of commanding it, and effecting a great and permanent liberation by which men are brought into newness of life. That is how Jesus Christ breaks through the bondage and the tyranny of sin to bless and to save, for in His Word all the infinite virtue of His atoning and reconciling work on the cross comes to men.

Let us close this week's Bible notes by singing this hymn about the all-powerful, saving voice of the living Word of God, followed by a quote from the Puritan John Owen on the living and active Word of God from Hebrews 4:12-13. First, hymn # 591:

1 Jesus calls us: o'er the tumult
of our life's wild, restless sea,
day by day his sweet voice soundeth,
saying, "Christian, follow me."

2 As, of old, apostles heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred,
leaving all for his dear sake.

3 Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us,
saying, "Christian, love me more."

4 In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these."

5 Jesus calls us: by thy mercies,
Savior, may we hear thy call,
give our hearts to thine obedience,
serve and love thee best of all.

Now, let's turn to Hebrews 4:12, "For the Word of God is living and active ... piercing even to the division of soul and spirit." Hear the comments of the Puritan John Owen as he reminds us why we are to hold Jesus Christ, as the Living Word of God, in awe throughout all our study of the book which He authored by His Spirit. In this quote, we are reminded that the Word of God is *living*, and therefore it should hold our hearts in awe and reverence for Christ.

The power of Christ in His word is by many despised and slighted. Few there are who seem to have any real effects from it produced in them or upon them. Hence it is looked on in the world as a thing of no great power; and those who preach it are ready to cry out, "Who has believed our report?" (Isaiah 53:1)

... But though men may close and hide things from themselves and others, yet they cannot exclude the power of Christ in His word from piercing them.

Meditate and Pray: *O Lord, we live in a day of de-sensitized attitudes to the Word of God. Please renew our hearts in your classically quiet and humbling way. We don't ask for dramatic revival, but for the invisible work of your Holy Spirit in our churches, through your Word, on young and old.*

In Christ's Name we ask, Amen.