

Text: Heb. 4:12-13

Title: "Help brothers believe with the Word of God"

Time: 11/16/2014 pm

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Our times in Hebrews together are often set aside for other things on Sunday evening, so every once in a while we come back to this book and need to refresh ourselves on what we have covered thus far that has led us to this point.

You will remember that one of the reasons Hebrews was written was the author's concern over the possibility that Jewish Christians would fall back and embrace Judaism once again. As your pastor I often find myself concerned in a similar way about Roman Catholicism and the hold it can have on professing believers in Christ.

To keep that kind of thing from happening, our author has encouraged his readers to consider Jesus, whom he calls the Apostle and High Priest of our profession (3:1). As the Apostle, the Sent One, of our profession, Christ is better than Moses (3:2 - 4:13). As the Great High Priest of our profession, Christ is better than Aaron and his priesthood (4:14 -10:39). In both cases the author's point is that to go back to the Moses and Aaron of Judaism and to forsake Christ is an act of damning unbelief.

The example of the death of a generation of the children of Israel in the wilderness provides this author with an instructive illustration from the history of Israel. Because not everyone who came out of Egypt actually made it to the rest of the promised-land, we must understand that not everyone who is called a church brother is necessarily saved (3:16-19).

So it is not enough to be called a brother and to be among the brethren to be saved (3:12, 4:1). We must also have truly believed (4:3).

And that raises a question for a church like ours, “What can we as a church do about this terrifying prospect, namely that some whom we call brothers are not truly in possession of saving faith?” The answer from chapter 4 is two-fold – live with a godly fear (4:1) and be diligent about the need to have faith (4:11).

The command to be diligent to help people have faith receives an elaboration in verses 12-13 that explains what the key is to helping people have saving faith. That explanation tells us that the Word of God is the key to this diligent care that we must provide for one another. The title of the message this evening is “Help brothers believe with the Word of God,” and I want us to see from these two verses why needed help to believe is to be found only in the Word of God.

I. The Word of God is the help to believe we need because it is living (v. 12).

Illustration: Do you have anyone you are looking forward to talking to in person someday in heaven? I would put my Pastor’s father in that category. I never had a chance to speak with Pastor William Ashbrook in person. I have read his words in a book I have that he wrote. I even heard his words on a tape of one of his sermons that I was able to listen to once. But some day when we are together in the presence of our Savior, I will be able to hear this man speak to me directly. When that happens, his words will be living words in a way his words in the book and on the tape are

not, because they will be coming directly to me from the living Pastor William Ashbrook.

Application: I think that helps us understand the first important way the Bible calls the Word of God a living word. It is living because it comes directly to us from the God who lives each time we pick it up and read it.

My reading this verse in Hebrews is just as much the living God's direct communication to me as was His speaking directly to Moses on the top of Mount Sinai. Stephen spoke of what Moses received then as "living words" (Acts 7:38).

The words spoken by God to be passed on to us are living words because God still lives to speak them directly to us each time we pick up our Bibles. Our Bibles are not dusty tomes about history and religion. Our Bibles are direct communications of the living God to us who read them. In this sense, the Word of God is a living Word.

Application2: But the Word of God is a living word in a second important sense. It is a living word because it is a source of life – it is a life-giving word. Remember Ezekiel 37 and the effect of prophecy on the dry bones? The Word of God gave them life. That is what happens when a sinner gets saved (1 Pet. 1:22-25).

So what do we do about the fact that some in our midst may not have saving faith? We give them the living Word. When they hear it, it will be God speaking directly to them, and when they hear it, it will be a source of new life.

II. The Word of God is the help to believe we need because it is powerful (v. 12).

Illustration: What makes a light bulb give off a light rather than being just a dim bulb? Turning the power on does.

Application: What makes a human nature dead in sin believe rather than disbelieve? Turning on the Word of God does. The word for *power* here is the word we get our English word *energy* from. The word is used in 1 Cor. 16:9, where Paul uses it of the opportunity for ministry in Ephesus. What made the door of opportunity for ministry in Ephesus a good one? It was wide. What made it wide? It was energized with God's power.

I want us to see that this energy gave Paul a pretty low opinion about the strength of the enemy. They were many, but they could not narrow the width of the door of opportunity. Let's read Acts 19:8-20 for a description of this period, and note the centrality of the Word of God to the energy of this ministry (vv. 10, 20).

God's book can do what nothing else can do. It has a spiritual energy or a power that is omnipotent—God's Word made the universe. It can create faith in the hearts of unbelieving men (Rom. 10:17; John 16:8-13).

III. The Word of God is the help to believe we need because it is sharp (v. 12).

Illustration: I read today that there is a Guinness World Record for the sharpest man-made device. Scientists at the National Institute for Nanotechnology and the University of Alberta (both Canada) have created a tungsten needle that tapers to a thickness of just one atom.

Application: That is pretty sharp, but God's Word is sharper. Our verse tells us what makes God's Word even sharper than that record-breaking device: "piercing even to the

dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow.”

I am told by the Greek expert Westcott in his commentary on Hebrews that the best way to take the grammar here is to say that the Word of God is sharp in the sense that it can partition the immaterial part of man – the soul and the spirit, from the material part of man – the joints and the marrow.

So the Word of God is sharper because it can deal with spiritual things, not merely material things. And it can correctly discern when a need we have is spiritual and when it is physical.

Modern psychology operates under the false assumption that we are only the physical and that all our needs can be dealt with in the physical realm by adjusting our body chemistry. The Bible begins with the truth that man is spiritual and physical, and that spiritual problems must have spiritual solutions. We cannot take a pill that convinces us that our problem is our sinfulness. We cannot take a pill that makes us trust the Lord to save us from our sins. We cannot take a pill that produces the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

These spiritual needs for which there are no pills, although denied by modern man, are our greatest needs (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Only the Word of God can discern and meet those needs.

IV. The Word of God is the help to believe we need because it is spoken by the One who sees all perfectly (vv. 12b-13).

Application: The Bible is clear that man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. With this

limitation, we have to be very careful about withholding judgment when it comes to matters of the heart (1 Cor. 4:1-5).

But what we are called to deal with by this Hebrews passage in our church requires the ability to distinguish between true saving faith and the kind of faith that does not save, or between true saving faith and self-deception. Asking us to determine that kind of thing on our own is like asking a blind man to read and explain the intricacies of the healthcare law. We are dealing with a realm – the human heart – that we simply cannot see, let alone understand and make sense of. So how do we do what we must do?

Illustration: I can see that you missed church for the third week in a row today, and I can ask you about that and let you know that I am concerned and praying for you, but I cannot see what in your heart made you miss so much church lately. Something in the heart did, but I cannot say what that is. I often cannot even tell what in my heart is making me not want to go to church today.

So it is very important that we not jump to conclusions about these things, but we are still left with the question, “How do we minister to people with heart needs that we cannot see and that we cannot understand on our own?”

Well, God has placed in our hands a tool that will deal flawlessly with the thoughts and intents of the heart, because it will be spoken directly to the person in question as the living Word by the living God who can see all things perfectly and judge all things perfectly.

He knows our heart, and His Word is designed to meet the needs of our heart – needs we may not even know we have at the time. God can even change the heart as needed.

The Word of God critiques our thoughts and our intents. It exposes our motives and our lack of motivation. It explains why we love what we love and hate what we hate. It cites us for too little reverence and too much fear. Nothing is hidden from its ability to diagnose our heart's problem, prescribe the remedy, and then to cure and change us.

Conclusion: Have you found your Bible to be in your life what this author says it is? When you read it, is it alive as the direct communication of God to you? Is it a life-giving and energizing power to you?

Do you understand your needs as it sharply defines your needs – spiritual primarily and physical and circumstantial only secondarily? Have we invited its critique of the thoughts and intents in our hearts?

If not, how shall we help one another believe? We ought to welcome this wonderful work of God's Word in our lives (Psalm 139). Let's spend time in it each day this week.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*