

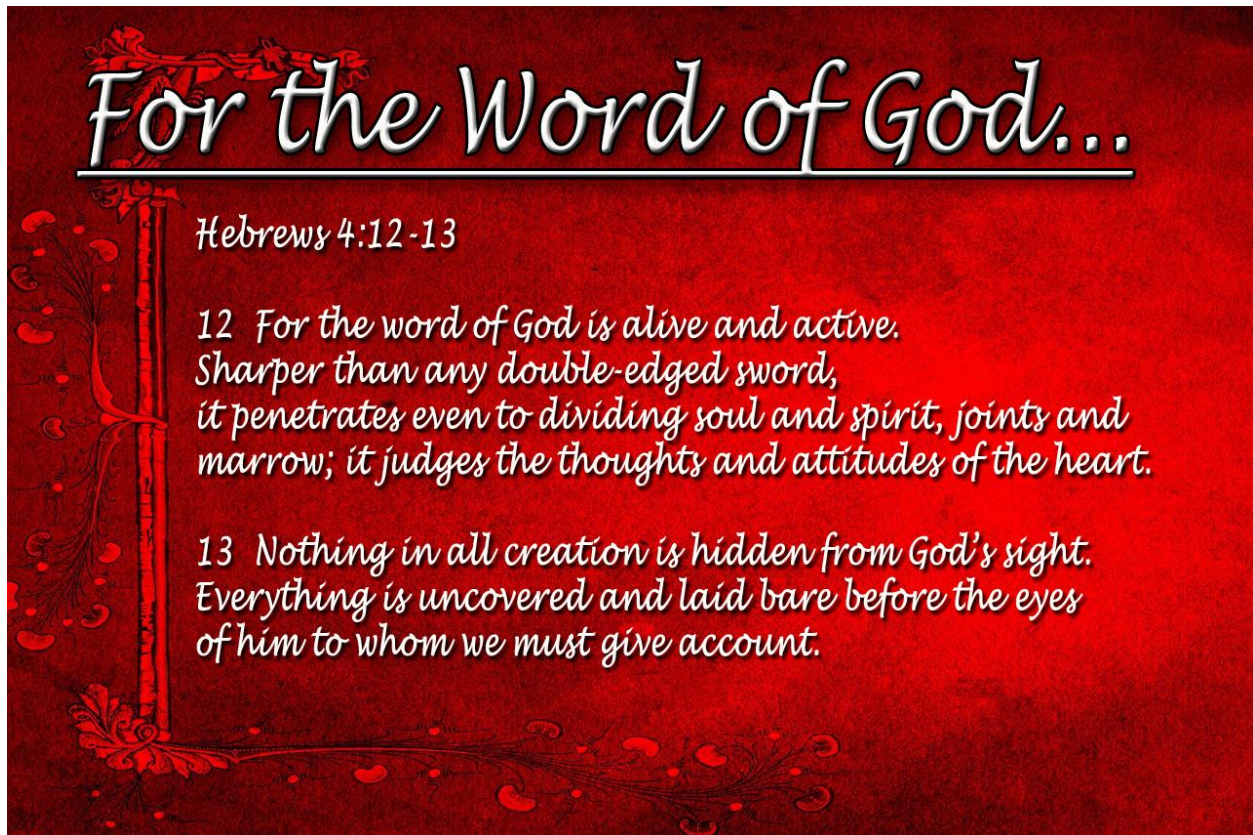
October 13, 2024

Hebrews 4:12-13

“For the Word of God...”

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.



Special Music: “Word of God Speak”

Mercy Me

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqsNGE3_dsg

KNOWING THE AUTHOR

As the door swung open, it struck the bell to alert Paige Turner that someone had entered the bookstore. She was busy working on a display for Beyond the Words..., a new book by Eric Kimball. She often found this part of her work frustrating because she didn't feel like she had a creative bone in her body. And a good display should be able to grab someone's attention both from the street and as they entered the store. So far, the books were just stacked on the table as she searched for an adequate plan to present the new title to the public. She wiped her hands on her apron and glanced around the display wall to see who had just come in.

The black bearded, elderly man with a cane and a fedora, stood just inside the doorway. He was a lanky gentleman with a topcoat reminiscent of Humphrey Bogart in Casa Blanca, only taller. He wasn't wearing glasses, but Paige could tell that he normally did by the indentations on the side of his nose. He removed his coat and hat, placing them on a coat hook by the door. He was not a resident of Parable, and his demeanor suggested a man of means and probable intelligence. The man turned and noticed Paige eyeing him from behind the display wall. He gave her a gentle grin and began familiarizing himself with the layout of the store.

Paige was embarrassed, although she wasn't sure if it was because of the dust on her hands or the fact that she had been caught checking out the

gentleman. Rather than think about the awkwardness, she stepped from behind the wall and greeted the man.

“Welcome to Fine Reads, sir. My name is Paige Turner and I am the owner of this book nook!” she said with a grin. “How can I help you?”

“I’m just passing through, Ms. Turner. I’m on my way to Austin for a book convention. But I just love the bookstores that I find in small towns like Parable. There are always treasures lurking on the shelves for those who wish to dig for gold among all the fodder. If you don’t mind, I’d just like to look around. Who knows what I might find that I must add to my collection!”

“Of course, sir. Take as long as you like. If you are really into older books, I have a few in the back section near the counter. But do let me know if there is anything I can do to help you.”

“Absolutely, Ms. Turner. I appreciate that,” said the man with a rich baritone.

“And please, sir, call me Paige. We’re not very formal here in Parable.”

“Of course, Paige, and thank you.”

There was something familiar about the man even though Paige knew that she had never met him. She must have seen his picture in a magazine or a newspaper somewhere. Paige wasn’t very good at names, but she always remembered faces. She walked back to her display to continue her work, but her

mind wasn't on the display as she continued to try and remember where she had seen the man before.

Paige rearranged the display boxes again and started stacking the books upright on the display. Yes, she felt she was beginning to make progress. Pausing her work, Paige left the display to check on how the man was getting on. He had found the antique books that Paige had mentioned and carefully examined the binding and the pages on each one. The man ran his fingers over the leather covers of the five-volume set of The Works of Lord Byron and seemed to smile. It was as if he could sense the words without even opening each volume. Paige treasured that set, but business is business. It was obvious to her that the man needed no help and knew what he was looking for.

Paige went back to her display. It was coming together at last! She carefully placed the last book in its place and picked up the cardboard box the books had come in. As she turned, the box clipped the top book and it fell to the floor with a loud clap, face down. On the back of the jacket was a photo of the author, Eric Kimball, as well as some blurbs about how much people liked it. As she picked up the book to return it to the display, it struck her. How could she have not noticed before? Of course, she had seen the man's face before. This man in her store was Eric Kimball.

Nervously, she took the book and started walking to where she had last seen the man. He was no longer at the antique books section and the Lord Byron volumes had been returned to the shelf. But a rare 1857 edition of *Aurora Leigh & Other Poems* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning rested on the sales counter.

“Ahh, Ms. Turner, I mean Paige,” the man said coming up behind her. “Please, I didn’t mean to startle you, but I did find something that I would like to purchase from you,” he said as he pointed to the book on the counter.

“Oh, Mr. Kimball! I am so sorry that I didn’t recognize you earlier. The display I have been working on is for your new book, Beyond the Words..., I just love it. I’ve read all your books!” Paige’s tongue felt thick in her mouth as she spoke.

“Oh, please, Paige, don’t make a fuss. I don’t often get recognized, and I prefer it that way,” Kimball said as he gave her a reassuring smile.

“Mr. Kimball...”

“If I am to call you Paige, then you must return the favor by calling me Eric.”

“Mr. Kim..., Eric, I just don’t know what to say. I have never had one of my authors visit my store before. This so... well... amazing!”

“You have a lovely store, Paige. I am pleased that you allowed me to peruse your collection,” Kimball spoke the words like they had a hallowed purpose.

“Eric, this might be an imposition, so please don’t feel pressured to answer, but could you tell me the meaning behind the title of your book?” Paige took a step back realizing that she may have made things even more awkward by asking such a question.

“Oh, Paige, my new friend, surely you know. I can see in your eyes that you love books, or you wouldn’t take such care of them in your shop. Close your eyes. Don’t look at the titles. Can you hear them speaking to you even when you don’t open them? Each volume filled with passion. Each volume begging to not only be read, but to be heard. Each one clamoring for your attention. The soul of each tome crying out to be heard above the chaos of the world. Each filled with answers to unasked questions. The soul of every author pleading for your loving embrace.”

“Oh, Eric, you make me blush,” said Paige behind a shy smile.

“And you should blush, Paige.” Eric ran his hand over the backs of the books on the shelf. “Each author laying themselves bare before you, knowing that you, the reader, can easily crush their spirit or raise them up to fly. There is every reason to blush when you see their unclothed soul sandwiched between leather or hardboard covers. It’s not the words on each page, but where those words take you. What those words show you. How those words give wings to your own spirit.”

“Oh, Eric, I don’t know how you do it, but I just love your books, and I am so proud to have both them and you in my store.”

“The pleasure is all mine, my dear lady. Now, I wish to purchase that volume of Ms. Browning’s works, if it isn’t too much trouble,” Eric said with a grin.

“Of course, Eric. Of course. But I do have a huge favor to ask. Would you be so kind as to autograph a few of your books before you leave? It would mean so much to my customers.”

“The honor is mine. Consider it done, Paige. Bring forth the books, a pen will be my instrument, and I will begin to inscribe them at once.”

Eric and Paige laughed and conversed the afternoon away as they worked. And that is the reason that Paige did not get her display done until the next morning. For it is one thing to lean into the words, but something else entirely to be able to lean into the author.

This preacher before you, wrapped in the skin and bones of a man, is always a little hesitant to bare his soul when he knows that what he is about to say will make those to whom he is speaking uncomfortable, and possibly irritated as he steps into the muddy sands of questionable and unsubstantiated learned doctrine.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was with God in the beginning.

3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.

8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

I read this scripture for us today to better help us understand the nature of God's Word. But now I want to change the 14th verse into the way so many people think about this scripture.

Verse 14:

And the Word became a Holy volume of 66 books plus a collection of books numbering 14-60 books of the Apocrypha, depending on one's denomination. We have seen the glory of this Holy volume, the glory of the one and only Bible, which has come to us from the Father, full of inerrant words describing grace and truth; a book to be worshiped by the followers of an Almighty God.

Just doesn't sound right, does it? At what point in Christianity did we relegate the Bible to being the primary source for our beliefs? If we use the Bible as our primary source for living a Christian Life, we can justify just about all of our decisions and actions. We can take away our accountability for our sins and claim them as the words spoken by our precious Lord as we twist them to fit our own needs and desires. Everything! Including slavery, adultery, theft, anger,

hate, malice, discrimination, devaluation, and segregation. All of which have been preached from pulpits at various times in history to justify sin in a world given to chaos. A world seeking to justify errant beliefs and actions rather than embrace the truth spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ. I often hear people say, “if you are struggling, turn to the Bible. You will find your answers there!” We have elevated the Bible above the worship and instructions from our Heavenly Father to the point that we set God up as our fall back. We do this by saying that the Word of God is “The Bible,” our primary source of repentance rather than falling to our knees before God himself.

One of the most obvious occurrences of alternate theology that we have expressed over and over, is when we teach our children by singing, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” Jesus does not love us because the Bible says so. Jesus loves us because God loves us. Having and reading the Bible does not make God love us. God loves us because we are his creation, and he would love us whether there was a Bible or not. And the people cry out “Semantics” to which I counter with this phrase, “In this case, semantics is everything! It is the difference between idolatry and the truth.” The Bible does not save us. The Bible did not die for us. The Bible cannot love us. Only God can do those things. And when we relegate God to a corner of the room or even stick him out in the hall, and put this love letter in the center of the room with a spotlight on it, we manage to create an idol out of one the most holy of gifts that God has given to mankind.

Let’s return to our Hebrews scripture today.

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

That is not the description of the Bible. That is a description of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

One of the most difficult things for me to accept is that many Christians have absolutely no knowledge of the history of the Bible itself, or the miracle that we still have it after thousands of years when so much other literature has been lost. So many Christians are willing to embrace the empirical truths that they find in the Bible without ever looking to find out where those truths came from. While claiming our Christianity as the Church Universal, we can't even universally embrace a common canon. The Christian Bible as we know it was not even brought into being until the 4th Century, long after the original Apostles and disciples had gone home to be with the Lord.

The Council of Nicaea met in the year 325 to determine the canon that we are familiar with today. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written mostly in Greek. But Jesus spoke Aramaic, which then had to be translated to Greek. And then was translated to Latin and later into Old English. The first Bible printed was in Latin in the 1450's by Johannes

Gutenberg. Before that, each copy was done by hand by dedicated clerics striving to make sure that the words remained as close to the original texts as possible.

But when it comes down to brass tacks, the Bible as we know it, is a collection of stories, letters, events, observations, teachings, songs, and wisdom that have been collected over millennia, translated, retranslated, and expounded upon to provide insight into Theology, the study of God and who he is.

I may step on a few toes here, but I ask you to take a long hard look at how you perceive the Bible. Where does your understanding of the Bible come from? Does it come from what you have been taught by preachers and Sunday School teachers? Do you believe that those of us who teach are infallible? If one believes that, how do we explain all the different denominations and theological concepts? The Bible is supposed to present a common foundation for Christians. The words of its authors were brought together in one tome to give continuity to our belief system, our theology. So, why do so many of us believe different things?

Today's scripture comes from the book of Hebrews, and no one truly knows who wrote the book of Hebrews. For centuries it was taught that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews, but there is no authority for that belief, and the book is not written in the style that Paul used. Many theologians now have differing views on who wrote the book of Hebrews. Some say that it was just a Jewish Christian in the 1st or 2nd Century. Others think it might have been Apollos, a contemporary of Paul, or Priscilla and/or Aquila who were friends of Paul. Along

those lines, it is suggested that Priscilla may have written Hebrews, but with her being a woman it might have been felt no one would take the writing seriously if it came from a woman, so instead it was attributed to Paul. Some believe that Luke may have been the author because of the beauty of the language. Still others think it might have been a sermon preached by Paul in Hebrew that was later translated into Greek. The truth is, we simply don't know.

In the end, what we do believe about the Bible, boils down to prayer and discernment. The final interpretation of what we read in the Bible comes from our relationship with our Heavenly Father, his Son, and the Holy Spirit. Not the other way around. When we need greater understanding of our relationship with God, we need to be turning to the source, not the book. God may use the Bible to bring about a better understanding of who he is and what he expects of us, but he could also use the guiding nature of the Holy Spirit, the teachings of Jesus Christ, life examples around us, the wisdom of teachers and friends, and even world events. The Bible is not the only tool in God's toolbelt. Who has giving us the power to determine that the Bible is a better resource than God himself?

I ask this question in all sincerity. If we did not have the Bible, this love letter from God, would we still believe in God? Is the foundation of our belief the Bible, or our relationship with our Creator? Many cultures believe in a Supreme Being without ever having seen a Bible.

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

The Bible is that double-edged sword that can be used for both the good of mankind and the justification of evil on this earth. But the Word of God, Jesus, is sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating to the depths of our heart, soul, and spirit, to separate the things of God from the things that are not of God. To give consciousness to our relationship with God as we seek to please and serve him.

Now, I don't want anyone walking out of here saying that Rev Walt doesn't believe the Bible. I happen to love the Bible. It is God's love letter to us, a letter to teach us and bring us into a closer relationship with him. I deeply appreciate all that I learn from this collection of books written by people about their relationship with their Creator. I learn something new and wonderful every time I dig into its pages. I thirst for what it says. God uses it to help transform me into being a better servant. But I do not believe IN the Bible. The Bible, in and of itself is not the road to Salvation. Instead, it is a map, a guideline, that reveals the essence and truth of our Heavenly Father. Would we rather put our trust in the map, or in the hands that crafted it? Can we be content with knowing that we have the map, without ever pursuing where it leads us to? Would we rather have a relationship with the book, or would we rather have a relationship with the author who is able to teach us through the book? Who is the Author of our salvation? It is our Creator, not the book. There is a reason that the Bible is not part of the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Bible is an inspirational non-entity whose sole purpose is to be used by our Creator to enlighten us.

Remember. The Bible sees nothing. The Bible judges nothing. The Bible is not to be idolized. The Bible cannot respond to our pain or our joy. But...

13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

That is who I believe in. The one who sees and knows everything, even the agonies and joys of my heart. I do not need to worship the Bible because I intimately know the Author, who is the source of my redemption through Jesus Christ, his Son.

God bless you all.

AMEN

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God bless you all,

AMEN