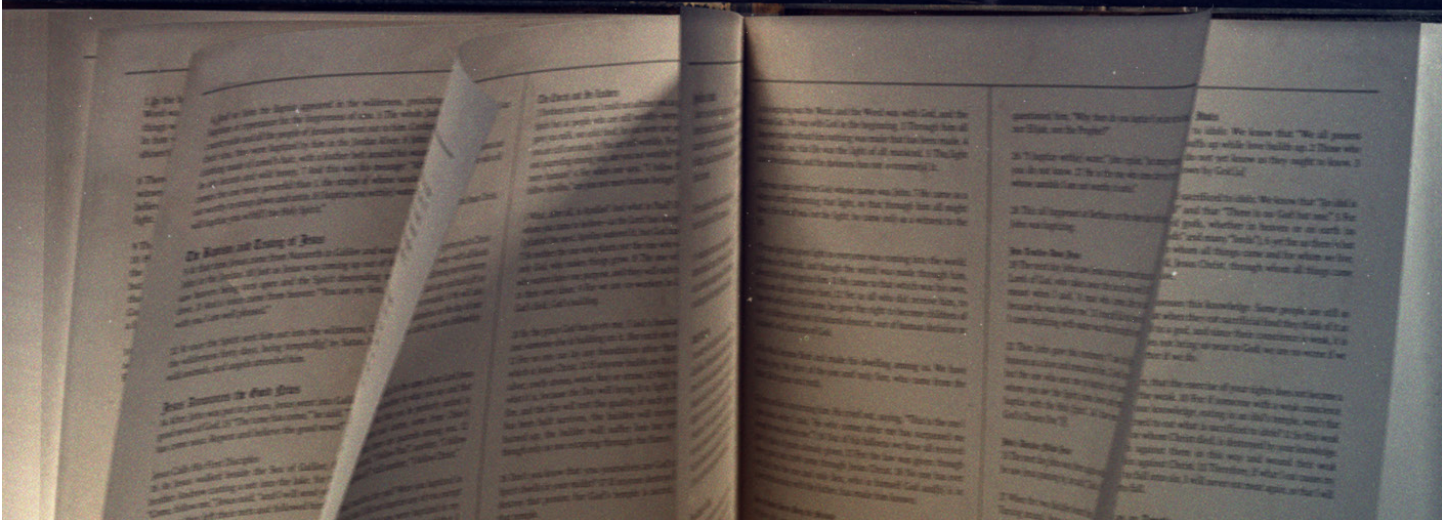


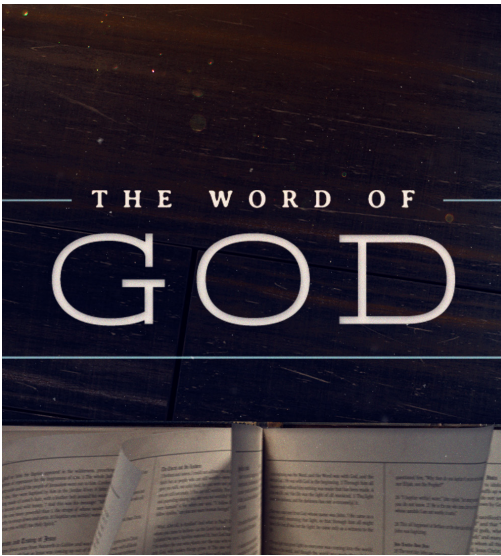
THE WORD OF
GOD



Sermon Growth Guide

November 24, 2024

Word Made Flesh



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Word of God - Word Made Flesh

Psalm 119:89-105

Key Verse: “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.” John 5:39

Big Idea: Jesus is the Word made flesh.

Foundations

Jesus made a stunning claim. He said very clearly that the entire canon of Scripture is there to do one thing and one thing only—to point us to him!

Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate. “The Word took up flesh and dwelled among us” (John 1:14). Jesus Christ should be read off every single page of Scripture. Tim Keller would say that every page speaks of Jesus.

Without the Word, we sat in silence. Without the Word, we sat in darkness. Give thanks for the Word of God we hold in our hands and how it leads us to the Word of God incarnate, our Savior Jesus Christ!

Understanding God’s Word

Take a look at John 5:39-40.

Imagine that you were a devout Jew, listening to Jesus as he spoke these words. What might you be thinking? What might you be feeling?

Applying God’s Word

How can a deep knowledge of Scripture lead to missing its true meaning? In what ways might we be tempted to put traditions, rules or human interpretations of Scripture over a relationship with Jesus? How can we ensure that our study of Scripture draws us closer to him?

Witnessing God’s Word

No matter what part of the Bible you read this week, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus as you read. Be watchful and reflective as you live out His teachings to experience His transforming power.

Is it too early for Christmas? Our decorations are already up here at church. We had a great time on Monday making it happen. This year Christmas comes early. "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." (John 1:14) That's a Christmas story. That's the real Christmas story. What does it mean? The Word of God became flesh. The Holy Trinity is the one, eternal God in Three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Son, the second person of the Trinity, is also called the Word. Jesus is God's self-expression, God revealing Himself to us. Jesus is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:2). The Word of God, all that God says and reveals about Himself, all that God the Holy Spirit inspired to be our written Word of God, all the truth of who God is, it is all found, in the flesh, in the man, called Jesus. That's why Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) If you want to know who God is, look to Jesus. We celebrate the gift of Holy Scripture. This Bible is a gift to us. But did you know that all the truth of this written Word was made flesh in Jesus? Jesus shows us all of it, and Jesus is on every page of it, Old Testament and New looking forward and back to Him. Jesus is the Word Made Flesh. Jesus is the Bible walking around.

So, some say, "I don't follow the Bible; I follow Jesus. We don't need to worry about what the Bible says, just follow Jesus. And Jesus is too nice to say all those mean things. Jesus would never make demands on my use of money. Jesus would never challenge my political leanings or make me deal with those people. Jesus would never make claims on my love life or how I choose to express my sexuality. Jesus is far too nice for all that. I don't follow the Bible; I follow Jesus." In more formal theological terms, there are those who draw a distinction between the Word of God Made Flesh, Jesus, and the Word of God written, the Bible. That distinction, if it creates a difference, is the exact opposite point of what John 1:14 is saying. Jesus is the Word made flesh, the Bible with

shoes on, the Holy Word of God up and walking around. There is no distance. The whole point is that what God has said of Himself, His Word, is seen and present and active and embodied, enfleshed. Jesus.

Jesus was in a fight in this passage. He healed a paralyzed man and told him to pick up his mat and walk on the Sabbath. But even worse, Jesus forgave his sins. Only God can do that. So they asked him, do you think you are God or something? "For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." (John 5:18) When people are trying to kill you, there is disagreement. These opponents were Bible experts. These were leaders and teachers and Scripture scholars. But for all their study, they missed something. "And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent." (John 5:37-38) God spoke from the heavens at Jesus' baptism. Jesus, who is God, was speaking to them right then. They did not have ears to hear. It is possible to hold the Word of God at arm's length. It is possible to study it, become an expert in it even, and never let it penetrate you. Your relationship with the Word of God can be like those who are "always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." (2 Timothy 3:7) And because you are not allowing it in, you can't hear God's voice. Jesus says the Word is not dwelling in them; it isn't in you. Why? Because you do not believe. You do not put your faith in Jesus. And so, the Word is out there. It is dead to you. It is meaningless to you. But what is worse is this: you can't see God's form and you can't hear God's voice. You look at Jesus and see just another man.

Why did they study the Scriptures then? The word we used to use is legalism. From the day we assume consciousness we are always trying to justify our existence. We try to prove our worth, our worthiness to receive attention and favor and love. People use anything at their disposal to attempt it. Some use

fame, money, love, power, influence, but you can even use religion. “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life.” (John 5:39) But they don’t humble themselves before the Scriptures; they consider them a possession to be used as an instrument. They learn enough to be right, more right perhaps than the next guy. More righteous. The Bible can be used, you know, as a cudgel to beat someone down until you feel a little superior to them. Or it can be used as a ladder, a ziggurat just like any other ancient religion, an attempt to raise yourself up to God. But it is not meant for either. These people were studying for the wrong reasons, to justify themselves. Jesus said they missed the point.

I was once, for a very short time, an instructor in preaching at Oxford University. A rugby player named John Money was training to be a vicar. He preached on Psalm 24, a psalm that says you can only ascend the holy hill to God if you have clean hands and a pure heart. John preached his heart out. “You’ve gotta get clean hands. You’ve gotta purify your heart. God wants you on that holy hill, now buckle down.” The end of the psalm calls for the ancient doors to be opened and the gates lifted up so the King of Glory can enter in. “Who is this King of glory?” it asks. “Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty— he is the King of glory.” (Psalms 24:9-10) John never got to that part. Afterward we sat together to go over the sermon. “John,” I asked, “how do we get into heaven? Do we clean our own hands?” No. Of course it’s Jesus. “John,” I asked, “Who is the King of Glory?” His face went sheet white. “Jesus! Oh no! I forgot Jesus!” When it comes to preaching, you are never finished until you get to Jesus, even when you’re preaching a psalm. We cannot justify ourselves no matter how hard we try. We cannot keep our hearts pure. We cannot keep our hands clean. No matter how hard we try, we find ourselves like Lady Macbeth walking the halls in madness trying to get the blood off our hands. We cannot ascend the holy hill. But God can come down. And He did. Jesus, the Word

made Flesh.

“You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.” (John 5:39) The Bible is not a place to build your holy ladder up to heaven and justify yourself. The Bible is not a place to gather information about how you are better than those around you. The Bible is a place to meet Jesus, your Savior. The Scriptures testify about Jesus, and Jesus on every page of the Scriptures. John Calvin wrote, “He [Jesus] is Isaac, the beloved Son of the Father who was offered as a sacrifice, but nevertheless did not succumb to the power of death. He is Jacob the watchful shepherd, who has such great care for the sheep which he guards. He is the good and compassionate brother Joseph, who in his glory was not ashamed to acknowledge his brothers, however lowly and abject their condition. He is the great sacrificer and bishop Melchizedek, who has offered an eternal sacrifice once for all. He is the sovereign lawgiver Moses, writing his law on the tables of our hearts by his Spirit. He is the faithful captain and guide Joshua, to lead us to the Promised Land. He is the victorious and noble king David, bringing by his hand all rebellious power to subjection. He is the magnificent and triumphant king Solomon, governing his kingdom in peace and prosperity. He is the strong and powerful Samson, who by his death has overwhelmed all his enemies. This is what we should in short seek in the whole of Scripture: truly to know Jesus Christ, and the infinite riches that are comprised in him and are offered to us by him from God the Father. If one were to sift thoroughly the Law and the Prophets, he would not find a single word which would not draw and bring us to him.” Jesus is the Word made flesh, and every page of the Word of God written points to Jesus.

What is the Bible to you? Is it a book for interesting study from time to time? Is it irrelevant, collecting dust? When you click the app does it have to reload because you haven’t used it in so long? Is it something you set aside apart from church when I read you a passage? This is God speaking, this Bible. This is the

Word of God. This is God's love letter to you and an invitation to relationship. This is God telling you who He is, what He is like, and what life has to offer. Ignatius of Antioch was a bishop long ago who wrote to churches on his way to being killed in the Roman Colliseum in 110 AD. He wrote to one church, "there is one God, who manifested himself through Jesus Christ his Son, who is his Word that came forth from silence, who was pleasing in every way to the one who sent him." Jesus is the Word of God out of silence. Unless God speaks, we sit in silence. Unless God sends His light, we sit in darkness. Pastor Ellen explained last week, the Word of God is our light, light for the cosmos and light for our own path. I loved her heart for Bible translation. So many people have a Bible in a nearby language, but not their heart language, their tribal or local language. Years ago, Abigail and I were in Kenya on a mission trip when we drove by a great gathering in a park in Nyeri. "What's happening?" we asked the driver. "They are celebrating," he said. "They have just received the Bible in their native language of Kikuyu. Would you like to stop?" Uh. Yeah. It was the Bible in their common language, not the stilted first attempt from the 50's. People were crying and singing. They were on their knees. They were laughing and reading and clutching it to their heart. God's love letter. What is this Bible to you?

"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:39-40) The Bible is a place to meet Jesus. You study the Scriptures to attain eternal life, to establish your justification for existence, to justify yourself, but you refuse, Jesus says, you refuse to come to me—the one revealed in this book. No, you cannot ascend the holy hill, even with your Bible in your hand. But what can you do? You can open the ancient gates. You can swing wide the ancient doors. The most ancient, the most eternal, the most glorious doors—the doors to your heart and your eternal soul. Open them to Jesus. Yet you refuse. The most important question you will ever answer

in your life is this: what do you say to Jesus? Jesus told his opponents the book was dead to them. Why? Because they did not believe in the one God sent. He said the Word did not dwell in them. Why? Because they refused to come to Jesus. What do you say to Jesus? The Scriptures say, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." (Hebrews 3:15) Do not harden your hearts against the voice of Jesus.

You say, "I can't accept the whole Bible." That's not what Jesus is asking of you. To accept the entire Word of God takes a lifetime, or more, of humility, and learning, and relearning. That's not what Jesus is asking today. Today He simply says, "If you would hear my voice, do not harden your heart; open the gates." Why? So that you may have life. Jesus died to bring you life. Jesus went into the darkness of death so you could have the light of forgiveness. Jesus was silenced on the cross so that you could hear the Word of God. I want to invite you to pray with me and open your life to Jesus today: Lord Jesus Christ, You are the Word I long to hear, You bring life, open my ears that I might hear, open my mind that I might believe, open my heart that the King of Glory may come in, for life and life eternal, in Jesus name. Amen.