

It's GOD's Word  
June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014

2 Peter 1:20-2:3  
Pentecost 3 A

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When you have something valuable, you treasure it. Whether it's something of immense sentimental value, like a photo album or painting by a child or a trophy you once won; or if it's of extreme practical value to us, like a house or a car. For many of us, more than stuff we may value certain people in our lives. Whether it's people or things, when we value something, we treat it differently than other things. We make sure it's well cared for, we give it plenty of attention and usually a place of importance in our lives. So thinking about the things you value the most in your life right now, how does your treatment of them compare to the spiritual treasures God has given you? And since we're on the topic today, let's think primarily about the Bible itself. God's word. Hear again what the apostle Peter tells us about God's word: <read text: 2 Peter 1:20-2:3>.

This collection of books, bound together that we read from every Sunday, that I would certainly hope you all have a copy of at home. These words written here are not some human invention. They are not a nice story to read and feel good. They're not some kind of rare curiosity. What is written here are the very words of God himself. Did you ever read one of those Old Testament stories when God speaks directly to one of his chosen people and think to yourself, "Wouldn't that be great? If God came and talked to me and told me what his plan was for me that would just do wonders for my faithlife. Then I could really trust him and do his work with some serious zeal!" Ignoring for the moment that the result of those Old Testament conversations rarely came out that way, *you already have this*.

You have God's word, written down specifically for your benefit. God himself speaks to you in these words. He lays out in these pages exactly what your life is, what it is about, what he wants from you, what he expects from you and most importantly, what he has already done for you. Don't say that's not the same thing. God has given you more detail about how your life will go here than he ever did to any of those ancient prophets. And God has spoken more to you in these pages than he ever did to any of those men. Most of them got glimpses and snippets of the plan. You have it laid out from Eden to Golgotha, the whole plan of how God worked throughout history to save a sinner from a death of their own making; you. How he gave up his son and let him die an innocent death so that you personally could be spared that death. And he wrote it all down for you. Written in verifiable words so we can be certain these are the words God wanted passed on to you, not someone else's twisting of it. This is what you have written for you in these pages. You have God's very word to you.

It's good to stop and just appreciate regularly just how amazing it is that we have the Bible at all and what blessings that means for us. As we've already mentioned, this means we have a place where God himself speaks directly to us in our lives as individuals. If you perhaps balk at that notion, that God can communicate directly to you through words he had written thousands of years ago, then I would suggest you're underestimating what God is capable of. This is the Father of creation, the author of our salvation, speaking to you in these pages. The fact that he would even take the time to talk to any one of us is astonishing. The content of what he has to say is even more impressive. That he would use this avenue of communication to primarily teach you how he rescued you from offenses you committed against him through giving up his Son to die, is even more mind boggling.

But even going past appreciating the fact that we have the Bible at all, and beyond the chief content of its message, there's even plenty to appreciate in its form. The fact that we have what he said to us recorded, written down in a form that cannot be questioned is a huge blessing for us as a gathering of believers in Christ. This means that, first and foremost, we can be sure what we believe is what God taught us. Not what someone else says it means, not what someone else even tells us it says, we have the words written for us that we can read ourselves and test any other spirits against.

And here's the chief blessing in that. Wherever there are sinful human beings, like all of us, there are going to be disputes and conflicts but when both sides are believers who trust God's word as GOD's word, then every dispute can be resolved. I'm not kidding. Because you're going to have one of two situations: either the matter is something God has spoken on and the people involved must submit to his authority on the matter, even if that means sacrificing pride and admitting they were wrong, or you have an issue God has not spoken on, in which case both parties can recognize that they are free to have their individual opinions without diminishing the unity of the body of Christ. Let me say that again a little more simply. Either God has spoken and you all listen to him or God hasn't spoken and you are free to your opinion and recognize the same for everyone else. When conflict stays and divides it's because either someone isn't listening to God or because someone isn't letting another have their free opinion. I'm not saying resolving conflict is ever as easy as just saying that, but with the word of God before us, it is always possible.

When we take God's word as God's word and realize that everything else is free, then there is true unity. Instead of the forced unity that other church bodies have where they claim unity but still haven't settled disputes on key matters like homosexuality and roles of men and women, we have real unity because we have a real source of authority to turn to during those difficult times. An authority we all recognize by virtue of our declaration of faith in being members of this church body.

And so in a number of ways and more we haven't spoken about here we see the immense value in having the very words of God recorded for us in a simple and accessible format. And so back to our opening point; do we treat it like the treasure it is? What does it really mean to treasure it? How do we do that? Well to answer that first we need to do a little defining. You'll have to pardon me for going a little afield from preaching and more into teaching here, but I want to talk specifically about what it means when we talk about "God's Word" or the "Word of God". I want to have that defined very carefully so we don't have any false ideas about what is or isn't God's Word.

When we talk about God's Word we can do that in two senses. The first sense, the one we use less often, is the literal, letter for letter, words on the page that God gave us through his authors. These are the words God gave us. In this definition we are talking only about the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek manuscripts, without spacing, punctuation or chapter and verse marks, because none of those existed in the originals. When we talk about God's word in this sense, it does not apply to the Bibles you read at home or the Bibles you grew up with. When we talk about God's Word in the word-for-word sense, it only exists in these original languages.

But that's not the sense that we usually speak of God's Word in. That's not even the sense that God himself uses when he speaks of his own word most of the time. The meaning we usually are using, the one we are most familiar with, is the *meaning* of what God wrote to us. God's word only has value in its meaning. If the meaning, the thought, the concept is not correctly conveyed, then it fails to be his word. For example, if I say to you "*houtos gar agapesen ho theos ton kosmon*", I would doubt that anyone here got anything out of that despite that I am quoting the literal words God gave us. But if I were to say "For God so loved the world...", that might trigger something for you. God's word is in the *message* not the letters or words chosen to convey it. If the meaning is conveyed accurately, then it is God's word.

This has a few practical considerations we need to keep in mind as Christians. First of all, this means that you do not have to quote a Bible passage word for word in order to be speaking God's word. You simply need to be speaking the message. Of course, you are going to need to know your Bible well enough to get that message correct. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for us, this means that the *words* of our Bibles will have to change over time in order to keep the *meaning* correct. Language evolves and the usage of words changes. That means that we need to change the words we choose so that the meaning does not become lost to time. For example, when you hear the word "charity" today, what do you think of? I know what pops in my head, something like "donating to a cause." Is that really what St. Paul meant when the King James reads, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."? (1 Co 13:13). Or is it more accurate in our language to use the word "love", instead? Words don't always mean what they used to, and so sometimes we need to change the words to keep the meaning the same.

Probably the biggest example of this that bothers a great number of Christians needlessly is the wording of the Lord's Prayer. The same principle applies here. Now, I'll tell you right now, I like the King James version. It's got a nice ring to the language. And since we study it in-depth with our catechism students, I'm not worried about the language being lost. But I also have no issue with praying the "modern" rendition of it either. Because the meaning is identical. If you want to think that you have to pray the Lord's Prayer in its "original", then your prayer better start off "*Pater hemon ho en tois ouranois...*". Anything less than that isn't the original.

So you see there's actually a double pitfall or danger in how we treat the Word of God. We can either become lax and not value it appropriately. We let our use of it slip and we face the danger that Peter warns us of here at the start of chapter 2. Or we can be tempted value the wrong part of God's Word, the literal words themselves, instead of treasuring what matters, the meaning of those words. (Of course to know we are doing that correctly we need people with a thorough understanding of God's Word in the original languages and that's why our Pastor training program is more than twice as long as other church bodies).

My brothers and sisters, treasure God's Word for what it is. Treasure it as the message from God himself sent specifically to you to teach you about how you are saved by Jesus' blood and can now be equipped for a life of service to him. Treasure what it has to say to you, treat it with the respect that the Word of God deserves and value it in your lives for the treasure it is. Amen.