

The Sword of the Spirit

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. Now, I don't know if any of you have ever asked the question, which legendary swords through time and history is the most powerful. I've never asked it, but apparently lots of people have. If you go onto YouTube, you can find Viking sword challenges, Japanese katana sword challenges, and they're all trying to find out, do they match the legends? And so you can watch fairly geeky guys, scientists with swords cutting through ice and metal bars and steel, trying to figure out which is the most powerful. Well, in truth, it's neither, it's none of those. The most powerful sword is the sword of the Spirit. It is the Word of God. The sword of the Spirit has the ability to cut through the hardest material on this planet, a hard human heart in resistance to God, as we heard in Hebrews 4 verse 12. And one of the wonderful things that Jesus promised to his followers, John chapter 16, he said, wait for this wonderful gift. He promised a gift that would come to all God's people, that he would send the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit would lead his people into all truth. The Holy Spirit would speak God's truth about Jesus. And he would do that in such a way that lives would be utterly transformed. So the Holy Spirit wields a sword, and that sword is the Word of God is the Word of God. And what we read in Acts chapter 2 is a demonstration of what the Spirit does with his Word. He cuts through defenses, he cuts through lies, he exposes sin, he exposes our need, and it's a sword remarkably that brings life. So one thing I tried and failed to do this week, and maybe some of you can help me out here, I tried to find a story, a mythical story, a story in fiction where there's a sword, but the sword brings life. I couldn't find one, except in the Word of God. That the Spirit applies the Word in such a way that we have life as we come to believe in Jesus. So we're going to spend some time thinking about this dramatic scene in Acts chapter 2, where we see again the Spirit working powerfully. So at the beginning of the chapter, if you have your Bibles open, you'll find it super helpful. At the beginning of the chapter, just as Jesus promised, the Spirit is poured out. And what happens then is the apostles start to preach.

Peter preaches this sermon that's all about Jesus, and 3,000 are added to the church. And this wasn't a neutral crowd. From shouting just a few weeks previously, crucify Him. Peter could say to them, you put Jesus to death. To them asking, what shall we do? And we see them being baptized as followers of Jesus. So Acts 2 is showing us another powerful work of the Spirit, working through the Word of God, revealing and guiding us into the truth, convicting us of our needs, and giving the gift of repentance and faith. So let's get to our text and think about the sword of the Spirit, how the Spirit uses God's Word. So verse 36 is really the conclusion of Peter's sermon. Therefore, let Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart. Okay? So the Spirit is working through the Word of God as it is preached, and they are cut to the heart. Remember Hebrews 4, verse 12, the Word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged swords. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and the attitudes of the heart. And that's exactly what we see here. Acts 2 is remarkable. It has a remarkable sense of drama. But at the same time, it's very ordinary. Because what leads to all the drama is that Peter stands up and preaches a sermon. He preaches God's Word. So if you flick back a page to Acts chapter 2 and verse 17, you'll discover he preaches from the Old Testament prophecy of Joel. To say that what's happening is that promise being fulfilled. The Spirit is poured out, that Spirit that was promised by Jesus. And because of that, salvation comes to all who call on the name of the Lord. He's preaching God's Word. He also preaches from Psalm 16, from verse 25 onwards, making the point that Jesus is God's chosen King, that this is the King that death had no claim over. Death could not hold him because he was not guilty of sin. But that having died in the place of sin, Jesus, God's King, has been raised and exalted to sit on the throne of heaven. He uses God's Word to preach Jesus. And then a few verses later, verse 34, he preaches Psalm 110.

To make the declaration that Jesus is a son of David, one of David's family line. He is in that line where the great promise came, the great promise came that one of David's descendants would reign forever.

That's Jesus. But he's also David's Lord. He is superior to David. He was before David. He's the true Son of God. And this Son, this King, will judge his enemies and establish an eternal kingdom. So he's preaching the Word of God. And he's preaching Jesus as the Word. God's definitive revelation. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.

[6 : 42] And he points the people to what they already knew. He points to what they had seen and heard. Verse 22, Jesus was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through him as you yourselves know. So they have seen Jesus working with the authority and power of God, continuing his mission in the world, giving us a window into this perfect world, this perfect kingdom that Jesus has come to establish. He speaks to them in verse 23 of the cross as the plan of God.

He can say, you were sinful. You killed Jesus. But this was all done according to the Father's plan. That the Father lovingly sent his Son to pay the price for sin, to absorb God's wrath against unrighteousness. That this great exchange would take place where Jesus takes our sin, our unrighteousness, our death, and gives us his righteousness, his life, his grace. And he preaches about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as the confirmation of this promise about the Messiah King. He is the victorious King who rules and reigns for his people. And so Peter stands up on the day of Pentecost and he preaches that Jesus is the great theme, the great hero of God's story of salvation.

That in Jesus we find the fulfillment of every hope and promise in the Bible. That in Jesus we discover God's gift of love to a world that desperately needs it. He preaches. But as he preaches, we need to understand also that he preaches as one who is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2, verse 4, all of them, Peter included, were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. And then in verse 14, Peter stands up to explain what's going on and he says, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel, verse 17, in the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all people. So to go back to our sword imagery, it's not Peter's sword, it's not his logic and rhetoric that's doing the decisive work, it's the sword of the Spirit.

Yes, Peter's words are being used, but it's the Spirit working through Peter's words. As an aside, Tim Keller, the New York preacher, was once asked, what's the difference between a good sermon and a great sermon? And without skipping a beat, he said the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit coming in power. That's what makes the difference. Well, the Holy Spirit here shows up powerfully and he works through his word as it's preached, so it cuts to the heart. So we come to verse 41.

[9 : 44] Those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3,000 were added. 3,000 people in a day, they receive the word of God about Jesus. They stop resisting Jesus. There's no more denying he's the Son of God. No longer are they rejecting him, saying, we don't want this king. They're no longer rebelling against God's word and against God's will. They're no longer saying no to the clear. It's statements from Jesus. The sword of the Spirit cuts deep and brings life.

It's a powerful image, isn't it, to think about the sword of the Spirit. The Bible isn't afraid to speak about the reality of spiritual battle, of the realities of good and evil. And what this passage reminds us is that we need the Spirit's work to break through our natural defenses, to make us willing to surrender to Jesus as Lord. We need the Spirit to use the word of God powerfully to cut through all those excuses that we naturally make about trusting and obeying. You know, when the word of God confronts us, and we know what we should do, and we naturally then want to resist against, we need the Spirit to cut through our excuses. We need the Spirit to do His work through His word to cut through our defenses. We don't like naturally to hear that we are sinful and we are powerless. We'd much rather hear that we are basically good and we are fine without Jesus. So we set up a defense of our own self-righteousness, and we need the Spirit to expose and to break it down. We need the Spirit to work through His word to expose the lies that we typically believe. My sin is no big deal.

I have more freedom without Jesus. We need the Spirit to expose our hearts to God's truth.

That naturally we're living in darkness, we need God's light to shine, to see the truth. We need the Spirit so that we can appreciate the beauty and the goodness of Jesus, and salvation that's found in Him. We need the Spirit of God to work in our hearts so that we would gladly welcome God our Father, Jesus our Savior. We need the Spirit actually to generate the response that we hear from

this crowd. The end of verse 37, as they hear the message, as they're cut to the heart, they ask, brothers, what shall we do? Actually, we need the Spirit to generate that response in our hearts. [12:56] Every time we come to church, every time we read God's word, what shall we do? Because reading the Bible isn't just about gathering a bunch of information.

God, by His Spirit, is looking for transformation. He wants response. He wants worship. He wants confession. He wants faith and obedience. So that's the sword of the Spirit. Now let's think a little bit more about how the Spirit uses the words. And especially to think first about how the Spirit uses the word to expose our needs. So picture an epic battle scene of any kind that you like. Two armies opposed, two warriors locked in battle. You hear the clash of sword and steel. What's the key to victory in the heat of battle?

It's who's going to break through the other's defenses. Or to change our imagery, we hear this all too often in our news headlines. Big businesses, individuals, even governments, they have their systems hacked.

You know, personal information stolen. Systems messed up. A computer, hackers are able to cut through firewalls. And what that does is to expose weaknesses within a system.

The Holy Spirit uses the word of God to cut through human barriers and defenses against Jesus. [14:45] It's exactly what we see from the crowd in Acts chapter 2. All of a sudden, having been really happy to see Jesus crucified, now all of a sudden they realize they have a massive problem.

And as we think about their story, the text actually reveals two needs of every human heart. And the Spirit exposes and convicts those for us in a way that would give us life.

The Spirit wields the sword not to cut and destroy, but that we might be healed. Here's the first need that's exposed. We need forgiveness from God.

It's hard to imagine how these 3,000 must have felt. When they saw Jesus put on the cross and they gladly shouted, crucify him, they thought God was pleased with them. They thought Jesus was a blasphemer and he deserved to be done away with.

But now they discover Jesus is my Lord. Jesus is the promised Messiah that God sent to save me and to save my people.

[16:14] And I happily said, crucify him. God's verdict on Jesus, God has made this Jesus Lord and Messiah, and our verdict, crucify him, they don't match up.

And whenever our verdict and God's verdict don't match up, we have a problem. And a problem that shows our obvious need.

We need forgiveness from God. Acts chapter 2, they needed forgiveness from God. The Spirit opened their eyes in that moment to that reality. As Peter continued to preach, verse 40, with many other words, he warned them and he pleaded, save yourselves from this corrupt generation. How could Peter describe that generation as corrupt? Because they turned their back on God's Word. They weren't reading the Scripture to find Jesus as God's Son and the promised King and Savior.

They were turning their back on God's free offer of forgiveness. They were a corrupt generation. But it wasn't just that generation.

[17:36] We all need what the crowd received that day, that painful but necessary realization. Without Jesus to recognize, I have not loved God as I should.

I have not loved him with all my heart and soul and mind and strength. Often I have absolutely ignored him and ignored his commands. I have not loved my neighbor as I love myself.

I put myself at the center and love others when it's convenient. I have broken God's law and God is right to be angry.

God is holy and righteous and good and his laws are good. And when his laws are broken, he is right to be angry. So that without Jesus, without exception, we stand condemned.

And what we need is for the Spirit of God to take the Word of God to cut us to the heart.

[18:43] To cut us in our conscience so that we would understand that we need to be forgiven. There's a proverb that says the wounds of a friend can be trusted.

When the Spirit takes his Word and convicts you that all is not well, that your verdict does not match up with God's, or your life is not matching up with how God wants us to live, those wounds can be trusted.

It's a kindness. Forgiveness. And especially here we see that kindness where the crowd recognize, first of all, we need forgiveness. But also we can be forgiven.

It's a powerful thing to discover there is forgiveness. In a sense, there is a word for our generation here. All too often we hear the message of you do you.

Where we get to decide for ourselves the standards of right and wrong. Who is God to think he can tell me what to do?

[19 : 52] But the problem seems to be developing where if we ignore God as ultimate lawgiver, if we say there is no law, if we say there is no ultimate standard, if we try and do away with sin, we also destroy any prospect of forgiveness and any prospect of grace.

And aren't we seeing that in our society? Conflict and breakdown. And a lack of civility across deference.

And perhaps we can identify that sad problem that, okay, we're trying to get rid of the idea of sin, but people still feel guilt and people still feel shame.

It's written in our hearts and our conscience, but now it's got no name. And even worse now, there's that loss of the reality of God, so people don't know there is a place to be forgiven.

In rejecting God, we reject the one and the only one who can remove that great burden. And so our generation, like every generation, needs to recover and rediscover the biblical hope of forgiveness.

[21 : 06] That the cross of Christ, the crucified one, is God's grace to us. That there is forgiveness and salvation when we turn to him in faith.

So we need forgiveness from God. We also need the gift of the Holy Spirit. Back to verse 38.

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Why do we need the gift of the Holy Spirit? Because the greatest gift God can give is himself. And the promise that we've been thinking about, as we've been thinking about the work of the Holy Spirit, is he comes to fill God's people, and he comes to empower God's people.

He comes to live within God's people. And so the Bible says, when we put our faith in Jesus, if you put your faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit will live in you.

God is in your life. God will be at work to change us from the inside out, as he makes your heart his home. And here again, it is a hope for a modern longing that so many people still have.

[22 : 25] People are still, as much as we live in a secular society, we are still searching for the other. People are still looking for something above us, for ultimate truth, for spiritual encounter.

And as Christians, we come to discover this wonderful reality that God has answered that in wonderful ways. He meets with us, he speaks with us in his words.

And as we worship, and in coming to be with us, and within us. It's encouraging to hear around our nation that there seems to be a rising spiritual interest.

People who had abandoned faith coming back to faith. And we take heart, and we want to keep praying that God would give the Holy Spirit, would bring that change.

That power to say yes to Jesus, and that power to say yes to obey his word, and to say no to sin. That power within us that would change and shape our character, that would grow the fruit of the Spirit, love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control.

[23 : 42] That power that draws us wonderfully into life with God. So the Spirit exposes those needs for forgiveness and for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And the Spirit also works, thirdly and finally, to bring us saving grace. One more sword image for us.

Again, battle scene. Suppose you are captured, and you become a prisoner of war, and you find your hands and your feet are bound and tied.

In that moment, as much as we might long for things to be different, we are trapped, and we are unable to find our way to freedom unless someone comes to rescue us.

For the sword to cut through the ties that bind us to give us freedom. Peter preaches, repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus.

[24 : 46] Jesus preached, repent and believe the good news. repentance and faith is what we're talking about. And what we need to understand, that if the Spirit hadn't worked on the day of Pentecost, those 3,000 would have remained in spiritual chains.

For everyone who is a Christian, if the Spirit hadn't worked, we would still be without Christ. we would still be without salvation.

John 8, we find Jesus clearly declaring that he was sent by his Father, and he speaks God's truth, and he is God's way of salvation.

But then he asks a question of the crowd, he says, why is my language unclear to you? He says, you are unable to hear.

They are unable to hear, not because of some kind of physical deafness, not because Jesus is speaking in such a complicated way that they can't understand.

[26 : 03] They cannot hear because they are still spiritual slaves. They're still believing the lies of the devil. They have decided that Jesus is not worth listening to.

They have rejected him. And a vital part of the work of the Spirit, by his grace, he makes us both able and willing to seek Jesus our Savior.

That he has the power to unite us to Jesus for salvation. He cuts through those spiritual handcuffs, setting us free to enjoy forgiveness and life with God.

He speaks about repentance and faith. These are two sides of the same coin, the same coin of saving grace. Peter says, here are the actions you require.

You need to repent, and you need to believe. So those are human activities, but there's a divine origin behind that. These are not natural responses.

[27 : 11] These are spot responses that come when by God's grace and through God's Spirit, we are led willingly to repent and believe. Let's think for a moment about repentance.

So repentance is about having a turning of our heart and our mind, to have a new heart and a new mind. No longer are we turned away from God. No longer do we find ourselves at war with God, but there's an about turn.

Now our life is towards God. And again, remember, this isn't natural. Naturally, we hear God's word, we hear God's law, and we stubbornly put up defenses.

Or we present our own self-righteousness. Or we read about sin and we excuse ourselves. Or we point the finger of blame at others, including at God. And it takes a work of God's grace.

It takes the Spirit using the sword, using the word of God, to convict us. Jesus in John 16 said, when the Spirit comes, He'll convict you. Real sin, real guilt, real unrighteousness before a holy God.

[28 : 18] And again, we need that conviction so that we might know that we need to turn and that we can turn to Jesus for salvation. What we see in Acts chapter 2 is that by God's grace, that natural hostility to Jesus, that crowd that wanted Jesus crucified, has been transformed.

Now they're made willing to seek and find forgiveness. It's a change of heart and mind. That's not a one-time thing. It's a pattern for all of life.

Jesus spoke of it in the Lord's Prayer. Father, forgive us our death. Martin Luther, who famously wrote the 95 theses that sparked the Reformation, the first of those said this, when our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said, repent, He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance. So the Spirit's going to be working in us to keep on exposing, convicting us of sin. So as the people of God, we are to be those who are quick to confess our sin to God, knowing in Jesus our sins are forgiven, that God is faithful to forgive.

We should be quick to say sorry to others and to seek and practice reconciliation and forgiveness. The other side of this salvation coin is faith, is belief, believing trust.

[29 : 52] Faith is essential to salvation. We hear it so often in the Bible. We need to look to Jesus and live. We need to believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved.

And the focus isn't in vague faith. You know, I sincerely believe there is someone up there. Or I sincerely believe there is a God.

We need to know God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And to know the gospel. Nor is it a faith in my faith. My hope and confidence is not in my feelings and my performance.

The focus of saving faith is on Jesus. He is the object of our faith. Our song is always in Christ alone my hope is found.

Our song is always nothing in my hands I bring simply to your cross I cling. And the Spirit reveals that to us.

[30 : 55] And the Spirit then acts like a glue binding us securely to Jesus. So that we enjoy Christ and all the saving benefits of His death and resurrection through saving faith.

So repentance and faith are ongoing steps in the life of faith that keep us on the narrow way. We repent and we keep on repenting turning from sin turning to God with sorrow for offending such a

wonderful Father and seeking His mercy.

and then we live the whole of the Christian life by faith. We receive Christ for salvation and then we rest in Christ and His finished work.

We rest enjoying all His gracious benefits. By faith we live in love and obedience with the Spirit with the Spirit helping us to love God and to love our neighbor.

By faith we trust His grace that will keep us every step of the way until we reach journey's end. there is no sword like the sword of the Spirit.

[32 : 14] That sword that cut to the heart on the day of Pentecost the Spirit still uses that same sword the Word of God to cut to the heart today.

To cut through darkness and confusion to cut through our defenses and our sin and to expose our need to open our hearts to receive God's good news. That Jesus is God's Son.

That He is Lord. That He is King. That He died so we might be forgiven. That we might have eternal life. That He is risen so we can enjoy life in Him and with Him.

The Spirit moves us to respond in faith and in repentance. So as we close let's ask ourselves the question what shall we do?

What shall I do? What response do we need to make to God's Word? To the message of salvation? To God's Son today?

[33 : 26] Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.