

+Julian Dobbs- Sunday AM

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Preacher: Bishop Julian Dobbs

[0:00] Amen. Would you be seated, please?

If you have your Bible with you, or if you have the one in the pew there, would you just take it in your hand for a moment? If you have come to church this morning with an electronic Bible, you can hold that so long as your gadget is in flight mode and you don't get text messages or send me any.

Approximately 168,000 Bibles, just like the ones you've got in your hands, are sold or given to others in the United States every day.

168,000 of these. The Gideons, you know when you go to the hotel and you see the Gideons, this Bible in the drawer, the Gideons International distributed over 50 million Bibles worldwide last year alone.

So 168,000 of these are given away every day in the United States. 50 million by the Gideons last year.

[1:49] That's more, I did the arithmetic, you don't have to do it. In fact, I got Brenda to do it because she's much better at math than me. That's over 100 Bibles per minute that the Gideons are giving away a year.

More than 66,000 people are using a Bible app at any given second. 66,000.

Don't check your emails. 66,000. 66,000. And three people share a Bible verse on their social media and social network feed every second.

Every second. That's all about the Bible. It's not about Women's Day or, I don't know, some tabloid from Manhattan. It's the Bible.

In spite of the fact that the Bible remains in the United States, and the use of the Bible and the understanding of the Bible and the giving of the Bible remains high in the United States, I believe, but it's no exaggeration to say, that North American evangelicalism is facing a profound loss of confidence in the Bible.

[3:03] Even though 168,000 Bibles are sold or given away every day in our country. How do I know that?

Just look at Washington, D.C. Or, ask a person who owns the Bible about the Sermon on the Mount.

Only one in three Bible owners know that Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Most answer, the Sermon on the Mount was delivered by Billy Graham.

I mean, they could have at least said Bishop Benner or Caleb Evans. The fact is that over the last 100 years, there has been one wave after another of attacks on the Bible.

It's inerrancy, it's inspiration, and it's sufficiency. The trickle-down effect has even entered into our own beloved Anglican Communion.

[4:08] A poll of nearly 2,000 clergy, Anglican clergy, in one province of the Anglican Communion, revealed that only half of those clergy polled believe that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.

Have you observed the flood of gimmicks that have poured into the Church? In an attempt to excite the populace and heighten the relevance of Christianity among a superstitious and dispersed generation of millennials.

Have you noticed that? Some of you may have read about the Roman Catholic priest who used a hoverboard. You know what a hoverboard is? You probably don't want to use one if you don't want a broken leg.

But a hoverboard he used in his service to Greek congregants at the end of Mass, or one of the preacher in the Protestant Church, who zoomed into a pulpit on a zip line to illustrate the return of Christ.

And those are just two of a multitude. Some are not godly enough for me to talk to you about. A multitude of gimmicks from new generations of ministers, outrageous billboards, sex and technology related stunts, mock events in communities, all to get the attention and capture the buzz factor.

[5 : 29] Now, hoverboards are quite exciting. They have little lights on them that flash on and off. I've been on a zip line. I thought I was going to die at the end of it. It's thrill inducing.

I give you all of those. But those innovative antics will always fail to build a foundation of faith that will bear fruit in a human life.

If we believed what we ought to believe about the Bible, the living word of God, I believe people would be flocking to bring themselves under the authority of the Bible because it's life-giving. Did you capture that as it was read so beautifully for us this morning? It's life-giving. The Bible is not a dead book. The epistles are not dead letters upon a page.

They are life-giving, full of vibrant, heart-piercing life. The word of God is living. Would you say living? Living. It's powerful. Powerful. Powerful. Powerful. Powerful. Powerful.

[6 : 30] You're catching on. The Bible, have you noticed it's got hands? The Bible's got hands to lay hold of you. It's got feet to run after you.

It's got power just to search out deep thoughts within our minds. It is sharper than the sharpest of swords. So let's be reformed by it. Reformed in our thinking, in our lives, and in our actions by the living word of God.

So let's not just speak about it, but let's open it because I've always found that the Bible is much better open than it is closed. And if you'd go to our epistle reading this morning from the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, that letter was written primarily to say that Christ is better, Christ is more, and Christ is sufficient.

And in that letter, in chapter 4, it was the passage that was read to us. It's on page 1189 of the Pew Bible. Let's look from verse 12, where the author says, The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirits of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and the intentions of the heart.

In Anglicanism, in our Anglican doctrine, in our Anglican belief, the living word of God contains all things necessary for salvation.

[7 : 59] Do you believe that? Your answer is, yes, Bishop. We believe it. With all our heart. Thomas Cramner, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was martyred for his faith in the 16th century, he said this, and let me quote the good Archbishop, he said, Let us night and day muse, meditate, contemplate the Bible.

Let us ruminate, as it were, chew the cud, that we may have sweet juice, spiritual effect, honey, kernel, taste, comfort, and consolation of the Bible.

Is that what happens when you read your Bible every day? Do you chew the cud? Do you take from it the honey, and the kernel, and the taste, and the juice?

In fact, Cramner said the sweet juice. Chewing the cud, the living word of God, sharper than any two-edged sword. Two insights I want to bring to you about this this morning.

The first is this, the Bible is a powerful word. Would you say powerful? It's a powerful word.

[9 : 17] Think of what Paul says to the Christians in Rome. He says that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It's a powerful word.

It's also a word that brings a powerful light. Listen to those words in John's gospel. Many of you will know them. They're read in our Christmas services.

The light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it. So we're having an imagery of power, of a powerful light, of God shining forth into darkness.

As most of you know from my strong North American accent, I didn't grow up in these parts. I grew up in a little country called New Zealand, which is famous for much more than Lord of the Rings. It's famous most of the time for good cricket, but not yesterday. And it's famous for things like its scenery and its caves. One day back in New Zealand, I made a visit to the Waitomo Caves.

[10 : 25] It's always stood out for me. When you enter the cave, it's completely dark. And a guide takes you through the caves, otherwise you might get lost. And if you put your hand in front of your face, you could see nothing.

The darkness is almost palatable. You can feel it. And if you were told to scramble, or to walk, or to crawl, or to run, you wouldn't know where to go. You'd be utterly helpless, because you can't see

anything at all.

And then all of a sudden, as if to shock you back into existence, the guide hits a switch. And this incredible underground cathedral, I would like to say Anglican Cathedral, but that mightn't be appropriate, this incredible underground cathedral designed by God lights up around you in the middle of this underground cavern.

And it's like the word of God has been turned on and made alive. That picture of darkness in that cave is the reality of our world outside of the Bible.

It's an impenetrable darkness. It's the darkness of the ninth plague that afflicted Egypt in the days of Moses. It's the darkness of Jonah inside the belly of the great fish.

[11:45] It's the darkness that embraced Judas on his way to betray our Lord. And yet the word of God, when it comes as a light into that thick kind of darkness, is powerful.

And it's cast upon our feet and shed upon our path and upon our minds and upon our hearts. Many of you will know the verses of the psalmist, Thy word is a lamp to my feet showing me where I should go, a light unto my path.

In the same psalm, the unfolding of your words gives light. So God's word is a powerful light. God's word, we're told also in the Bible, is like a fire.

Is not my word like fire? declares the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah. God's word like fire is especially evident in the burning of the bush.

Do you remember from which God's word spoke? God spoke to Moses. In the New Testament, Paul describes the second coming of Jesus in terms of a blazing fire.

[13:01] It's going to be quite an event. an appearance that carries overtones of judgment as well as the mere presence of God. And in John's vision of Jesus in Revelation, we're told that Jesus appears with eyes like what?

Blazing fire. God's word, bright, burning, powerful. Are you seeing here with me that God himself through his prophets and apostles says his word is powerful?

It's powerful. It's like fire. Why? Because it's living and it's active. It's a powerful light, a powerful fire. fire. It's also like a hammer.

And this gets a little bit intense. Again, from Jeremiah, the prophet, is not my word like a fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that what?

Breaks the rock into pieces. That's not so pleasant, that one, is it? What does the Bible say about the conditions of our hearts?

[14:14] It says that we harden our hearts, don't we? And we stiffen our necks. Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks rock into pieces.

Have you noticed, as Caleb has been preaching Sunday by Sunday, as you've been reading God's word, each morning in your Bible reading, how God's word shatters the hard places in our hearts. God's still got some work to do in my heart, but I'm grateful that I'm a work in progress. In fact, Brenda is very grateful that I'm a work in progress. God's word comes and shatters the very hard places.

It's like a sledgehammer. That's the nature of the Bible. It can come to the most hardened of hearts. You will have seen this. Smash them into dust.

It can break and cleave wide open before the Lord. But we're also told in our passage this morning, do you see it there, in Hebrews chapter 4, look back, in verses 12 and 13, that the word of God is described in terms of a sword.

[15:30] specifically, it's able to pierce. It's able to cut. It's able to penetrate. And as that word is read and preached, all of a sudden a sword comes.

It's happening now. And it's cutting open our hearts and our minds. And the word of God searches us out. That's why we say often in some Anglican liturgies, let us hear what the spirit is saying to the church.

Because the spirit that speaks through the word opens up our hearts and our minds. Jesus describes the word of God in terms of a seed.

In his teaching about the parable of the sower, Jesus says, the seed is the word of God. And there's power of the word described in terms of a seed.

For most of us, we take those little packets of seed and we pour them into the palms of our hands and we look at those seeds and we think of them as inactive, relatively weak and helpless things.

[16:32] But not so when we think of them from another perspective. After church, don't do it now, after church when you put your telephones back into operational mode, you might Google the story, don't do it now, of the Judean date palm.

The Judean date palm is referenced in the Bible and it was extinct as a species since the 1300s. And for the Judean people, the date palm provided food and shelter and shade and helped civilizations and cities, some of which still exist today.

And the date palm is mentioned in several places of the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for it is temar or temar. We use that as a girl's name today, a popular woman's name.

But by the 1300s, the Judean date palm was extinct, gone from the face of the earth. But in 1960, excavations were underway in the Judean desert.

Many of you have been there to Herod's fortress called Masada. And there, as some were excavating that place, they found a small clay jar full of seeds.

[17:47] And for the next 40 seeds, 40 years, those seeds were kept in a drawer at Bar-Ill-lyon University in Tel Aviv. They were 2,000 years old.

And in 2005, a botanical researcher planted one of those seeds in a container filled with soil. And to everyone's shock, the seeds sprouted eight weeks later.

And it kept growing. And after church, I know no one's doing it now, but after church, you've gone to Google the Judean date palm, and you'll see the incredible picture of this date palm.

The Lord says He's come with an incorruptible seed. Incorruptible spores. That's the Greek word that is used for the Word of God in the New Testament. Incorruptible spores.

And there is life in those spores. And the seed of the Gospel, the seed of the Word, is sown into our hearts, blessed by the Holy Spirit, and nurtured, and cultivated, and it takes root, and it grows.

[18:54] In 2011, that Judean date palm flowered for the very first time. And they pollinated it with a date palm, a modern date palm, from this ancient Judean date seed, which was 2,000 years old.

And do you know what happened? It bore fruit. Half of it was 2,000 years old and still fresh.

Because the Word of God is living, isn't it?

It's active. It's sharper than any two-edged sword. Isaiah, that's how you say that word, by the way, Isaiah says, the Word of God does not return empty.

It does not return void. It accomplishes the purposes for which God sent it, always powerful and effective. This is the powerful Word of God.

Amen? But the powerful Word of God does not work in operation or separate from the powerful Spirit of God.

[20:00] That's the second thing I want to share with you this morning. One of the hallmarks of the 16th century Reformation from which Anglicanism was birthed, and consequently one of the hallmarks of our own doctrine and belief is the relationship between the Word of God and the Holy Spirit of God.

Listen to these words from a leading scholar. He says, the work of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is joined to the Word of God. The external Word is of no avail by itself unless it is animated by the power of the Spirit.

You see, that's why you don't need zip lines and hoverboards. We need a move of God the Holy Spirit as the Word of God is proclaimed. We would be presumptuous, I believe, to say we are looking for the ministry of the Holy Spirit while neglecting the Word of God.

This is the means that God has ordained. But we would also be presumptuous to say we are content just with the Word. And we would spurn or quench or refuse or seek to ignore the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Word and the Spirit go together. If it is not the Spirit without the Word, it is not the Word without the Spirit.

[21:28] The two are connected inextricably with one another. Another leading Bible scholar said this, no sword can cut on its own. No sword can cut without a hand to manage it, is this quote.

No word can penetrate my heart or yours without the Holy Spirit to minister it. And we should always think in those terms.

We have to listen to God with help from God because we cannot hear Him without Him opening our ears. We cannot see Him without Him opening our spiritual eyes.

We have to listen to God with help from God. When Caleb preaches in this pulpit, the ministry of God's Word, both the preacher in the pulpit and the people in the pew are powerless.

Preacher and people, pulpit and pew equally powerless if we are left to ourselves. But when God, the Holy Spirit comes to be our teacher, what happens?

[22:43] The Word of God becomes alive. And do you notice this morning that is how I prayed. Lord, may your Word be our rule, your Spirit, may He be our teacher.

journey with me through these three scriptures. Come on on a journey through these two scriptures in the book of Acts. Listen, in Peter's Pentecost sermon, he said, those who received the Word were baptized, and there were about 3,000 added to the church that day.

They heard the Word, the Spirit moved in their lives, and they responded. And then in Acts chapter 6, the Word of God continued to increase.

What continued to increase? The Word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and the author goes on, St.

Luke, he says, even a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. I've always thought it was a great thing when the priests become obedient to the faith.

[23:53] That's what happens when the Word of God is preached, and the Spirit of God moves as the Word is proclaimed. What are the implications of this? It is that God's Word has power, accompanied by the Spirit to do what?

To convert sinners, to give wisdom, to give joy, to give sanctification, to bring comfort, to heal. All of this comes about as the Word of God is proclaimed, and the Spirit of God moves upon our lives.

We sang asking this exact thing in our gradual hymn this morning. Do you recall it? Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds.

How is God going to speak? By the proclamation of His Word, by the moving of His Holy Spirit. Help us to grasp the heights of your plans for us.

Cause our faith to rise. Cause our eyes to see your majestic love and your authority. That's exactly what we were praying as we sang that hymn this morning.

[25:04] Treasure the Word of God, would you? It is living, it is active, it's sharper than two-edged swords. Many of you know that Brenda and I have spent almost 20 years working amongst Christian converts from Islam to Christianity.

Muslims would never treat their holy book the way Christians treat theirs. Muslims would never hold their holy book below waist height.

It would be considered offensive. Muslims would never put their holy book on a coffee table and use it to place their coffee cup upon. They would never shove it in a drawer and treat it disrespectfully.

And yet sometimes the way I see Christians treating God's word brings great disrespect to the word of God. Two thoughts and two insights as I conclude.

Here's the first one. If we believe what we ought to believe about the Bible, if we believed in the power of the holy Bible, we would not be able to stay away from it.

[26:12] Do you believe that? Say yes bishop. We would always be saying, give us more. Not necessarily longer sermons, but give us more of the Bible.

I have to say that because when I say these sort of things over the pulpit, the clergy use it against me. And I get calls from people in the congregation that say, bishop, our rector is preaching half an hour sermons because you said we are to have more of the Bible.

So, more of the Bible and great sermons is a good mix. We'll have priority in our personal lives as we feed off God's word. It will have priority in our family worship.

It will have priority in our public worship. We would say if we believe what we ought to believe about the Bible, that being under the authority of God's word is a priority in our lives.

We're coming to public worship on a Sunday morning. We know the word of God is going to be proclaimed. What do we expect? We expect to see people converted, hypocrites exposed, people brought to repentance, to see those who are shattered, comforted by God's word, to see Christians growing and flourishing like the Bible says, like the cedars of Lebanon.

[27:30] We're expecting it. I'm expecting that here at Holy Trinity this morning. We believe in the powerful word of God. Here's the second thing. If we believe what we ought to believe about the Bible, I believe we would be driven to prayer.

Listen to Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians in chapter three. In the first verse he says this, Brothers, pray for us. And what does he ask them to pray for?

A new Mercedes? No. A stronger horse to get across the Roman roads? No. He says, pray for us that the word of God may speed ahead and be honoured.

You can pray that for your clergy, for your bishop, that the word of God would speed ahead in their ministry, and that the word of God would be honoured.

I imagine like me, when you take your breakfast each morning, or your lunch, or your dinner, whether you are at work, or at home, or at school, I would hope that all of us always give thanks to God for the meal that is set before us.

[28 : 40] It's right to do that, and it's proper to do that. And yet how many of us come to a far more important meal, a spiritual meal, being fed through the word of God, without so much as one sentence of supplication, asking for God to attend, with blessing and power, the ministry of the word.

lay up time to pray, over the Bible. Turn off your cell phones during church. I'm now doing this, I give my cell phone to Brenda, I put my iPad into flight mode, because I don't want to be distracted in my worship, in your daily Bible reading.

Turn off your cell phone, don't be distracted by Facebook likes, and traffic reports, and weather updates, for this is the Holy Bible, will. The Holy Spirit will be our teacher.

I truly believe that the reviving of our congregations in our diocese, which is aptly now named, the Anglican Diocese of the Living Word, I truly believe that the reviving of our congregations is connected to the prayers of faith with confidence for God to attend the ministry of the preaching of His Word.

Every significant season of revival in the history of Christendom has been preceded by the outcries of fervent faith-filled!

[30 : 16] praying, asking for God the Holy Spirit to be given in great measure to the preaching of the Word of God. I encourage you to pray that way.

I conclude with a quotation from an English churchman. This is what he said. We should set the Word of God always before us like a rule, and believe nothing but that which it teacheth, love nothing but that which it prescribeth, hate nothing but that which it forbiddeth, and do nothing but that which it commandeth. Amen? Amen. Let us pray. Blessed Lord God, you caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning.

Grant us so to hear them, to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by the patience and comfort of thy Holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

Amen. A postscript sentence. verse, if anything has happened during my sermon today for you, if you've thought about your own Bible reading, if you've thought about areas of your life that you need to bring in repentance before the cross, if you've thought about praying before you read the Bible, it's not because of my sermon, it's because moving amongst us even now is God the Holy Spirit and he's been our teacher and we're praying that he'll bring us comfort, we're praying that he'll heal us, we're praying that he'll strengthen us.

[32 : 18] So if anything has been said to you today in the sermon, it's because God the Holy Spirit has done what we've asked him to do, to be our teacher and to be our guide.

And if you're troubled in any way, ask God the Holy Spirit to come and as we feast upon another beautiful meal, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and ask him to come and bring comfort and healing and grace to you as you receive.