

Caleb Evans (9)

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Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. Amen.

So my brothers and my sisters, I want to begin today with Thanksgiving. Thank God that he has given us his written word, the Holy Scriptures.

Thank God that every word of God proves true. Thank God that there is power in the word of God. Thank God that the gospel we find in the word of God has the power to save souls and to transform lives.

Thank God that he has revealed himself in his word so that we can know who he is and have a relationship with the God who created us.

Thank God that he has instituted the preaching of the gospel according to his word and promised to work through the preaching of the gospel so that we and others might believe the gospel and be saved.

[1:41] Well, you can probably guess what I'm going to preach about this morning. I'm going to be preaching about the word of God.

Now, this is the second sermon in the series we're doing, Walking with God, about the disciplines and the responsibilities of the Christian life. So this morning I'm going to put the bottom line up front and I'm going to say this.

When we talk about the disciplines and the responsibilities of the Christian life, we need to realize that reading God's word and hearing the biblical gospel preached stands at the very center of the Christian life.

We do not find any Christian disciplines that are more central than that. The word of God is one of the central means of grace.

Those things that God uses to awaken or strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ. And the proclamation, the preaching of the word, the preaching of the biblical gospel is also one of the things that makes an organization that calls itself a church.

[2:54] A true church. It's what we call a mark of the church. What that means is that organizations can call themselves churches, but if they are not teaching the scriptures, if they are not proclaiming the biblical gospel, then they are not genuine Christian churches.

Have you ever encountered that? I have. Sometimes that takes the form of preaching serious error that contradicts the scriptures.

Sometimes it's subtler than that. In America, especially, you find all kinds of things being preached about. Say, hopeful life principles, self-help kind of stuff.

Maybe moral lessons about how to be a good or a nice person. And if that is an organization's central message, then that organization is not a church.

If an organization's central message is something other than Christ and him crucified, if it's something other than the biblical gospel, it is not a real church and we should avoid it like the plague.

[3:58] As we think about the power of the word this morning, as we think about the importance of the scriptures read and proclaimed, we need to start with something that we can't take for granted in our day and age.

We need to start with the authority of the scriptures.

Now, if all scripture is breathed out by God, what do you think that tells us about it? It tells us that it's true and it's trustworthy, doesn't it? If it's breathed out by God.

We use technical terms like infallible and inerrant to describe the Bible. What we basically mean by that is that the Bible tells the truth in everything that it says.

Someone didn't make it up. It was revealed by God, all of it. Surprisingly, that is a controversial statement these days.

[5:22] Some people will think that you are incredibly unsophisticated for believing such a thing. You know what I say to that? I say, let people think that I am unsophisticated.

Because the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. It's not up to me or to you to pick and choose what we like and what we want to believe out of what God has revealed to us in the scriptures.

He is the one who is the source of all truth, not us. And if we say we believe in God, but the God we believe in isn't the God who is revealed in scripture, that should tell us that we do not believe in the living God.

We believe in an idol of our own making. As St. Augustine once put it, if you believe what you like in the gospel and reject what you don't like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself.

Or, as Charles Spurgeon once put it, if we do not love the Bible, we certainly do not love the God who gave it to us. Since I know most of you quite well, I know that you believe in the authority of the word of God.

[6:47] But I do think that we always need to be on guard against the importance and authority of the scriptures being downplayed in practice in the way that we live. So this morning, I want to talk about how we make use of the word of God in our Christian lives.

I particularly want to focus in on two primary ways. That of hearing the biblical gospel preached and studying the scriptures.

I want to point out as well that it is all too easy to neglect to do both of those things. So I want to talk about why hearing the gospel preached and studying the scriptures is so important.

Well, let's start with preaching of the gospel, the preaching of the word of God, the preaching of the Bible. For that, I want us to turn our attention to our epistle reading from Romans 10.

We read there in verses 9 and 10, Now here's where the importance of hearing the gospel preached is made clear.

[8:07] Paul says, How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news! But they have not all obeyed the gospel.

For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us? So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. How are we saved? By grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and God gives us faith through hearing the preaching of the gospel.

The biblical gospel message, the message that stands at the very center of the Bible, is quite simple. It is the perfect life, the atoning death, and the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[9:23] It's that Christ came as our substitute, living for us the perfect life we failed to live, dying the death that we deserved on the cross, so that all who put their trust in him, and repent of their sins, are freely forgiven, and are given the gift of eternal life.

That is the message that I preach. Because it is the message that faith comes through. It is the message that brings salvation in Christ. Martin Luther was asked once by his people why he preached that message, the gospel, week after week.

He said, every week you preach the gospel, why are you doing that? He said, well, because you forget it every week. The truth is, we all forget it every week, which is why we all need to hear it every week.

It's not just the message by which we come to faith, although the gospel is that. It is also the message by which we grow in faith, and grow in spiritual maturity.

We all need it to hear God's word preached every week, because we tend to forget it every week. So here's the challenge for us.

[10:48] Showing up to a church that proclaims the biblical gospel, and showing up every Sunday. Now it can be easy to neglect that. I've been there myself.

It can be easy to neglect that, because life is busy and stressful. I get that. But coming to church to hear the gospel, and coming every week is too important to neglect.

Now, my mother is here this morning. She set that example in my life, and I thank God that she did. As a single mom, she still dragged me to church three times a week when I was a kid.

Sometimes kicking and screaming. And she did it because showing up to worship God and to hear the scriptures preached is that important. I have no doubt that she was often tired, often stressed, often busy, but we still went out the door to church three times every week.

It was three times because those Baptists don't play around. Now, I'm almost certain that I am embarrassing her, but if she could do that as a single mom with two boys, we can make it our practice to come to church, to hear the gospel preached every Sunday, assuming, of course, that we have no emergency or serious illness.

[12 : 22] And I need to be here even as the preacher every Sunday to hear the gospel preached. I need to preach the gospel to myself. It is that important. It's striking that it's important, the proclamation of the word of God, because it's not something that looks particularly flashy or impressive.

The proclamation of the word of God of the biblical gospel always looks like imperfect people imperfectly trying to proclaim the perfect truth of the gospel.

But what we don't see with our eyes is the way the Holy Spirit works when the biblical gospel is proclaimed. What we don't see with our eyes is that the power of the Holy Spirit is at work when the Bible is preached at work in a certain and amazing way.

Look at what we read about the power in God's word in our Isaiah reading. For if the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. Here is what we don't see with our eyes.

[13 : 56] When we gather to hear the scriptures read and to hear the gospel proclaimed, the Holy Spirit is working in power. The spiritually dead are being raised to life.

Those in bondage are having their chains broken and they are being set free. Those who know Christ already are encountering the Holy Spirit and growing into deeper spiritual maturity.

And unsurprisingly, none of that has anything to do with me being an awesome or compelling speaker. It depends on the biblical promise that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It depends on the power of God's word, God's spirit, and God's promises. And God's promises are always true.

When we gather to read the scriptures and to hear the true biblical gospel, we are witnessing something miraculous taking place and it is something that we cannot help but show up for again and again.

[15 : 06] So gathering to read the scriptures and to hear the scriptures preached and doing it often is essential in the Christian life.

But it's also important for us to be studying the scriptures for a number of reasons. We'll pause for adorable cuteness here.

It's important for us to be studying the scriptures for a number of reasons.

And I'll start with this reason since it's closely related to the preaching of the gospel. If you don't know the scriptures, you have no real way of knowing that I am telling you the truth when I preach. One really important responsibility of every Christian lay or ordained is to be able to identify false teaching. Whole denominations, as some of you have witnessed and experienced firsthand, have fallen into error because people didn't know the Bible well enough to know that they were being lied to.

[16 : 38] It is good for the church when every member takes a responsibility to study the scriptures seriously. And it's not only good, it is necessary.

And the study of scripture is also necessary for us personally. We grow in godliness through the study of scripture where we learn what is pleasing in God's sight and we reflect on that.

We grow in our relationship with Jesus when we study the scriptures because the scriptures are what tell us about him and it is impossible to develop a close relationship with someone you don't know much about.

The study of the scriptures equips us for the Christian life and it is absolutely essential. Look at what we find in our psalm that we read this morning.

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. And again we see in our psalm I have stored up your word in my heart.

[17 : 46] I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Now if you are a Christian you will want to live a pure life.

You will want to avoid sinning against God. What does the psalmist tell us equips us to do that? God's word right?

And let's think about our gospel passage for this morning where Jesus is tempted by the devil. He is the son of God and how does he respond to temptation?

By drawing on the scriptures. What does he say again and again? It is written it is written it is written Satan tempts Jesus and Jesus sets the example for us.

Jesus appeals to the Bible. He sets that example for us because if we are going to be equipped for the Christian life if we are going to follow Jesus as his disciples we have to know the scriptures and we have to come back to the scriptures again and again and again.

[18 : 58] And when we are tempted or we are suffering or going through some kind of difficulty especially then we need to know the Bible well enough to find strength and guidance and encouragement there.

So let's each take a moment to examine our hearts and our lives and to ask ourselves am I studying the scriptures? scriptures. Do I know the scriptures well enough to be fully equipped to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Now here is an important question. How do we go about studying the scriptures? I would suggest that we think about personal study of the scriptures and study in the scriptures with other believers. scriptures. We have multiple Bible studies in this parish. We have Sunday school for people of every age. We have opportunities to study the Bible with other Christians and I would urge every one of us to take advantage of it.

And are we doing personal Bible reading? And if not, why not? lest you think I am preaching at you from a high horse, I have to admit that I think at some point in our Christian lives, most of us, myself included, have gotten undisciplined about reading the Bible.

[20 : 28] We've all been there. And it happens usually just simply out of laziness. There's no good excuse. And if that's where we are this morning, now is the perfect opportunity to renew our commitment to studying the Holy Scriptures.

Now on the other hand, maybe you would like to study the Scriptures and you don't know where to start. A former rector of mine once pointed out that the church often tells people to read the Bible but doesn't teach people how to read the Bible.

Now forgive me, I'm about to go into extreme detail here, but this is important. If that is you, if you would like to read the Bible and you don't know where to start, I would suggest using a Bible reading plan.

A number of plans will take you through Scripture in a systematic way. I like a Bible reading plan called the McShane plan, which is designed to take you through the Bible in a year.

For those who are tech savvy, I'm glad to report that I have a free app for it on my phone. Or you might just Google one year Bible reading plan and find something that way.

[21 : 40] If you don't know how to Google and you're looking for a one-year Bible reading plan, let's talk. As Anglicans, we also have a daily office lectionary.

Readings appointed to accompany our daily morning and evening prayers. You can find the lectionary on the website for the Anglican Church in North America. If you want to go that route and you need help trying to figure out how to find it or use it, just let me know.

I would be happy to help. I'll also try to remember to include this information in our newsletter as well, by the way. Maybe you would like to use a Bible reading plan, but you're having a hard time understanding what you're reading.

A good study Bible might be helpful to you. In particular, I might recommend the ESV study Bible or the Reformation study Bible. They're both good. By all means, if you are reading the Bible and you have questions or trouble understanding what you're reading, you have brothers and sisters who are here in church with you to help, and I definitely want you to know that I am always glad to help as well.

I'll be honest with you, there are some things that pastor dreads getting phone calls or emails about. Questions about your Bible reading is not one of those things. All of that is to say that none of us

have a good reason to avoid starting to study the Scriptures now if we aren't doing it already, or to keep doing it if we're already doing it.

[23:16] It is so important. So being grounded in the Word, studying the Bible, hearing the Bible preached, is absolutely central when we think about the disciplines of the Christian life.

I'll be straightforward here. If we have neglected these things, we have stunted our spiritual growth. But we have the opportunity, with God's help, to recommit this morning to being grounded in the Word, or maybe for some of us to commit for the first time.

time. In conclusion, I want to be abundantly clear. There is power in the Word of God.

Power to set the prisoners free. Power to save the lost. Power to make believers mature in Christ and holy. Thank God for the incredible gift of His Word.

Thank God. God. Let's make use of this great gift that God has given us. Because when we read the Scriptures, when we listen to the preaching of the biblical gospel, we see Jesus.

[24:38] And that is what it is all about. Glory to His holy name. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.