

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (3-12-2002 Framsdén Baptist Church)

Psalm 119:105 (part ii)
Additional reading: Psalm 119:33-40, 65-72

Your Word – a Lamp and a Light

Introduction

In the last session we considered that the Bible has unique origin, and in this session we consider the wonderful effects God's Word has had on mankind, on individuals, on God's servants and on the dying.

The effect of God's Word on a heathen world

With the exception of Luke, the Bible was penned by a succession of Jews, in an obscure corner of the civilized world, with few literary gifts between them. Yet this book has depths and power which have turned the world upside down wherever it has gone. It has emptied heathen temples of idols, raised the tone of morality, ennobled the position of women, banished heathen superstition, ended cruel practices, transformed standards of purity and decency, and ended ignorance and darkness. The motive behind Bible translators, e.g. Wycliffe and Tyndale, was to rid the church of ignorance and darkness. All the victories of generals and achievements of statesmen are nothing compared with those of the Bible, in extent and permanence. It has effected moral, mental and spiritual revolution. Long before the modern welfare state, it inspired men to found the best institutions, taught men to care for the sick, poor, orphan, lunatic, unwanted, outcast and blind, who used to be thrown out before the influence of the Bible was felt.

Many who sneer at the Bible and write it off as worthless, irrelevant and rubbish, little realize how great is the debt to the Bible. Little does the agnostic lying on the hospital bed realize that he owes his comforts to the very book he despises – he would have died in misery, uncared for and unnoticed and alone, but for the influence of that book. Modern politicians, though they often do not realize it, are merely building on the work of men whose lives and work were profoundly influenced many years ago by the Bible. We owe the origins of the best institutions to the Bible.

In proportion as the Bible is honoured in a country, light or darkness, morality or immorality, purity or corruption, good laws or bad laws abound. There is a direct link between ignorance and rejection of the Bible in present society and lawlessness, break up of families and society, instability, corruption, immorality and savagery in the country and the world.

A bundle of rags was left on the steps of St Thomas hospital in 1842. Inside was an abandoned baby boy, and one of the nurses took him into the hospital. He was given the name Thomas, after the hospital, and Bridges, because the hospital was between two bridges on the River Thames. When Thomas Bridges grew up, he became a believer, and he loved the Bible. He heard Charles Darwin say of the people living in Tierra del Fuego that they were the most evil, degraded and hopeless savages ever seen, on a level with animals. It was easier to civilize dogs in the street.

Bridges eventually became a missionary to this land, and gave the people the Bible. Twelve years later, Darwin returned, and was amazed at the transformation. The people were going to church, wearing clothes, had nice clean homes, were happy, treated one another in a civilized manner. The reason was the advent of the Bible. Darwin, as a result, became a subscriber to the missionary society. He lent a hall in his own village to a preacher called Mr Fegan. The preaching of the Gospel and the influence of the Bible was such that later Darwin wrote, "Your services have done more for the village in a few months than all our efforts for many years. We have never been able to reclaim a drunkard, but through your services I do not know that there is a drunkard left in the village."

The morally uplifting and spiritually purifying influence of the Bible is incalculable, wherever it is known, read and obeyed. The Bible always means life, light and liberty.

No other book can do so much for the person who reads it

Here is the secret of Christian salvation and character, power in life and peace in heart. This is where people can derive true comfort, guidance and encouragement. Firstly, it shows men their true and real selves.

Mark Twain wrote, "Most people are bothered by passages in the Bible they cannot understand. As for me, I have always noticed that passages in the Bible which trouble me most are those I do understand." "Every time I read this book it kicks me", said a Chinaman. Men won't let the Bible alone, because it won't let them alone. Here is a mirror faithfully reflecting the human heart and its needs.

This book explains the state of things around us. We look out on a world with its turmoil and strife, lawlessness and distress. Older people who remember a more stable law-abiding society sometimes ask in bewilderment, "Where have we gone wrong?" The Bible can tell them. **For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart** (Hebrews 4:12).

Our fundamental problems are not economic or political, but moral and spiritual. Things are wrong with men because they are first and foremost wrong with God. **For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside** (Mark 7:21-23). An old divine once said, "Give me a candle and a Bible, shut me up in a dark dungeon, and I will tell you what the world is doing."

Here also is the only book which has the remedy, the only book that tells us how the heart can be changed and cleansed. Here we read of the atoning work of the Son of God. Here is new life through the Holy Spirit, and full and free salvation for all who will believe. The Bible has taught worldly people to seek the kingdom of God; it had taught lovers of pleasure to be lovers of God; drunkards to become sober; immoral to become pure; thieves to become honest; old things to become new. It has imparted new life, raised the fallen, directed the lost, made men wise unto salvation.

A colporteur travelling in Sicily with a bag full of Bibles was caught by a brigand in the forest. He felt sure all his books would be burnt. The colporteur asked permission to read from Psalm 23. "That's a good book, give it to me", demanded the brigand. Then the colporteur read the parable of the Good Samaritan from the next Bible. "Give it to me". Then from the Sermon on the Mount. Then 1 Corinthians 13. The brigand made the same response after every reading. In the end, no Bibles were burnt; they were all carried off by the brigand. Later that brigand became a Christian minister.

Once a man has become a believer, the Bible then builds him up in his faith, teaches him how to behave in public and private, in family and at work. There is no emergency or condition for which it does not have a word in season. "This book will keep you from sin, and sin will keep you from this book" (D.L.Moody). It has enabled men to bear affliction, persecution, pain and bereavement. It speaks of the glorious hope for all who die in Christ – promised life beyond the grave, the glorious return of Christ, new resurrection body, acquitted at judgement, reunion with the Lord's people, and everlasting reward.

No other book can do so much for the one who reads it. Do you wonder that the church of God is so weak when it is reckoned that less than 20% of Christians in this country regularly read it?

God's servants live on this book

O how I love your law.. It is my meditation all the day (Psalm 119:97). Jesus read His scriptures, quoted from them, told His enemies to search them, used them against the devil, trusted and obeyed them, and died with the words of Scripture on His lips. He lived, died and rose again to fulfil scripture.

Christ's apostles dwelt in it and were mighty in it. In every country and century, men of God have been men of the Book. Martin Luther said, "My conscience is taken captive by God's Word", and his explanation of the Protestant Reformation was, "I did nothing – the Word did it all", meaning the Bible translation into English enabling the reading of God's Word to be wide-spread. Wesley wrote, "I build on no other authority but Scripture. I want to know one thing – the way to heaven. He has written it down in a book. O give me that book. At any price, give me that book of God."

Love of the Bible and obedience to it are the mark of all converted men – unless they are in a back-sliden state. Whatever church or denomination, all unite in honouring the Bible, making it their food and delight. Man is satisfied only when it is taught from and is the basis of all preaching. Our spiritual state can be assessed by our attitude to this book. If we think little of the Bible and Bible preaching, then we are not born again, or are at a very low ebb spiritually. This is the pulse we should take and the barometer we should consult if we want to know the state of the heart. If the Spirit of God is at work in us, His Word will be precious to us.

This book brings great comfort in the last hours of life

Death is a solemn event for all. All will be acquainted with it. How shall we meet it? Good things of the world are no comfort. We may have lived comfortably without the

Bible, but that is no guarantee we shall die comfortably. Money may buy the best medical help, but it will not buy peace of soul and comfort. Relatives may minister to our bodily needs, but cannot give assurance of salvation. Pleasures gave us some happiness in the world, but are no use to us on our deathbeds. Books and papers are of some interest, but are no comfort in death. There is but one foundation for comfort as we draw near to the end of life.

When Sir Walter Scott was dying, he asked his servant Lockhart to read to him. He had a library of 20,000 books, and the servant asked which book. "Need you ask? There is but one." So the servant read him John 14.

When Bishop Henry Moule died, even though he was a great classical scholar, and a poet well versed in English literature and theology, his sister-in-law said they only read to him from the psalms, the gospels and the epistles. When they asked if he would like to be read some hymns, he replied, "No, the Bible only". So they read Romans 8 and John 16.

King and pauper, learned and unlearned, all are on the same level when death comes. There is no consolation for any man except in the Bible. Passages of the Bible believed, and its promises rested on, are the only comfort and security.

J.C.Ryle said he had seen many men die, sullen and comfortless. Some claimed to be in Christ but has no assurance. But he never saw a man with real solid calm peace on his deathbed who did not draw it from the Bible. Without Bible comfort, men have nothing in their last hour.

Conclusion

There is no other book with such unique origin, that has had such wonderful effects on mankind, done so much for everyone who read it, so loved by God's people, and able to give real comfort in death. What are we doing with it? It is one thing to have a copy. It is another thing to read, believe and obey.

The man who never reads it and has no interest in it reveals his spiritual state. This indicates he is spiritually dead. He needs to ask the Holy Spirit to speak through the Word and lead him to Christ. Likewise, the man who claims he has no time to read it – yet has time for eating, working, TV, newspaper, garden, and football. We all have time for what we want to do.

The believer who reads it little will have but little comfort in need. He will never be established in the truth, and risk being carried away by error. He will make many mistakes in life.

The man who knows it, and longs to know it more, says with child-like faith and obedience, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Need to read it daily, gather manna every day. Yesterday's bread is no use for today. Honour the Bible in your family with family worship. Live by it more closely. Meditate on it more. So build your life on rock, and not on sand.

At Webb Paploe's funeral in 1923, a wreath of flowers was formed in the shape of an open Bible, and it bore cards with the words, "He loved it, he learnt it, he lived it."