

Hebrews 4-12-13  
The power of God's word.

**Introduction:**

Who is the all-time greatest selling author?

William Shakespeare has sold an estimated 2-4 billion copies of his books. (42 books) The real numbers are impossible to determine.

Agatha Christie has sold an estimated 2 billion copies of her books. (85 books)

Danielle Steele (500-800 million)

JK Rowling the author of the Harry Potter books has sold close to 500 million books in 80 languages.

She sold over 9 million in 24 hours a world record.

Next question!

What is the all-time greatest selling book (single volume)?

The Quran has sold close to one billion copies coming in a number 3 for all time.

Mao's little red book ("Quotations from Chairman Mao") has sold a little more than 1 billion copies, coming in at number two of all time.

BTW... Sales of the Quran and Mao's book are vigorously debated...

But, everyone agrees that the Bible is by far the greatest selling book of all time. In the last 200 years over 6.7 (some sources say 7.5) billion bibles have been printed. The Bible has outsold the Harry Potter books every year since the Potter books were published.

The bible is an amazing book.

Even though, the Bible is the greatest selling book of all time, it is often neglected.

This brings us to this morning's text. This morning's text is the conclusion to a long section starting in Hebrews 3:1. This section looks at the history of Israel to make one simple point. We must strive to enter God's rest. Israel did not enter God's rest because they ignored God's word again and again and again.

In a similar sense if we ignore God's word, we will not enter God's rest. Said positively, the key to entering God's rest is immersing ourselves in God's word.

It is very easy to ignore God's word, isn't it? Especially if you have been a Christian for a while. Maybe you think, I know the stories of the Bible, why do I need to keep reading it? Or, I don't have time to read the Bible. Or, the Bible just does not speak to me.

I get it, but *if we want to enter God's rest, we must stay focused on the bible.* What is so special about the bible?

*Hebrews 4:12-13 tells us two things about the Bible? We are going to look at those two things this morning-*

*The nature of the bible.*

*The power of the bible.*

**First, the nature of the bible**

*What is the bible?*

**The bible is the word of God.**

**Hebrews 4:11 (ESV) — 11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.**

How do we enter the rest described in chapter 3-4? By paying attention to the word of God, which he describes in verse 12...

**Hebrews 4:12 (ESV) — 12 For the word of God is living and active,**

In the immediate context the word of God is the 'voice' of God in Psalm 95, which is cited extensively in Hebrews 3-4. In other words, the word of God is the Bible.

The phrase, “word of God” is an astonishing phrase. Many of us are so used to calling the Bible the word of God that we forget what we are claiming. The Bible is the very word of God.

The author of Hebrews knows this...

**Hebrews 1:1 (ESV) — 1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,**

Five times in Hebrews chapter one the author of Hebrews writes, “God says... and then he quotes directly from the OT” implying that when the Bible speaks God speaks.

The bible does not merely contain the words of God, the bible is the word of God. Theologians called this verbal and plenary inspiration. Every word of the bible is God breathed and every part of the Bible is God breathed.

(2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Explain organic inspiration (real human authors controlled by a sovereign God).

*The bible is the word of God!*

### **Application:**

This explains why the Bible contains no errors, hundreds of fulfilled prophecies, and no contradictions even though it was written by over 40 authors, three languages, different cultures...

This means that when the Bible speaks, the maker of the universe speaks.

This means that the Bible comes to us with absolute authority.

This is why the Bible must be read and obeyed.

The culture expects the church of Jesus Christ to join them in the LGBTQ revolution, not realizing that we never will because the Bible, (i.e. God) has spoken very clearly on these issues.

We must not ignore or neglect the bible because the Bible is the word of God.

*The bible is the word of God. That is what the bible is. But what does the bible do? This brings us to the second main point...*

*First the nature of the Bible.*

### **Second, the power of the bible.**

*We must not ignore the bible, since the bible has tremendous power. Power to do what? Power to do several things...*

**The bible has power to effect change!**

**Hebrews 4:12 (ESV) — 12 For the word of God is living and active,...**

**Hebrews 4:12 (KJV 1900) — 12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful,...**

The word “active” comes from the Greek word *energes* (active, effective or powerful, GK 1921). We see this power in psalm 29:4-5.

**Psalm 29:4–5 (ESV) — 4** The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. **5** The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

The bible is not just a bunch of interesting stuff about God, the bible is a book designed to do something. It is designed to bring about God’s purposes. In other words, it is efficacious.

God has always accomplished his plans by his word.

God spoke the universe into existence, out of nothing, by his word (Genesis 1:1, John 1:1-4, Ps. 33:6)

God raises the dead by his word (John 11:17,39,43- Lazarus has been dead for four days)

God brings about regeneration by his word. (1 Peter 1:23-25)

God grows Christians by his word. (1 Peter 2:2)

God’s word always accomplished what it intends.

**Isaiah 55:10–11 (ESV) — 10** “For as 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, **11** 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.

*The bible has power to effect change!*

### **Illustration:**

Charles Spurgeon was the greatest preacher in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He walked into a church building that he was going to preach in later that night. Looking around he saw that he was alone in the building. Wanting to test the acoustics he proclaimed in a loud voice, “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Then he moved on. A few days later he found out that he was not alone in the building. There was a custodian sweeping up some dust in the balcony of the sanctuary. When he heard Spurgeon’s words, straight from the Bible, he was cut to the heart on the spot, he repented of his sins and he trusted Christ.

Why did this happen? Was it because Spurgeon was an amazing orator? No!!! he only spoke 13 words. This man was converted because there is great power in the word to effect change.

The Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was an incredible time of revival that had massive implications on world history. The key leaders were John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Knox, Thomas Cranmer, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and others. All of these men were incredibly gifted. God used them to convert and sanctify thousands and thousands of people. Universities were erected, books were written, music was written, and art was commissioned. But when all was said and done, the reformation was not caused by these men. It was caused by the power of the word of God.

*Looking back on his life as an older man, Martin Luther said,*

“I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word: otherwise I did nothing. And when, while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip and my Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a Prince or Emperor inflicted such damage upon it, I did nothing. The Word did it all.””

God’s word has power to effect change...

## Application:

God's word has power to effect change in your life!  
God's word has the power to strengthen your marriage.  
God's word has the power to destroy anxiety and lust.  
God's word has the power to help you get a grip on anger.  
God's word has power to bring comfort to your anguished and suffering soul (Romans 8).

Dads, if what I'm saying is true, you need to expose your children to God's words. The word of God is the seed of regeneration. Persist in this, this is not the job of your youth pastor or private Christian school. This is your job!

What do we do most nights???

All of us, we need a plan to expose ourselves to the word of God. What is your plan? There are many good plans, but you need to pick one. If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time.

If we don't expose ourselves to the word of God, it will not change us...

*The Bible has power to effect change. What else does the Bible have the power to do?*

## The Bible has power to penetrate.

**Hebrews 4:12 (ESV) — 12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword,

The bible is described a sword in other places (Eph. 6:17, Rev. 1:16).

According to Hebrews 4:12, the bible is sharper than any two-edged sword. A two-edged sword was used by Roman soldiers to stab or penetrate, not to slash or slice. What is the point? The word of God penetrates deep into our soul.

**Hebrews 4:12 (ESV) — 12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

While some have used this as a text to prove that human beings have three parts (body, soul, and spirit) not two parts (body and soul) this misses the point.

When the author says that the word of God "pierces to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow," he is using poetic language to prove that the Bible penetrates into the deepest parts of our inner being.

**Hebrews 4:12 (ESV) — 12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The word of God penetrates so deep that it is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

In other words, the word of God has power to convict us of our deepest and darkest thoughts, and the motives behind those thoughts.

## Illustration:

"George Whitefield, the great eighteenth-century evangelist, was hounded by a group of detractors who called themselves the "**Hell-fire Club**," derided his work, and mocked him. On one occasion one of them, a man named **Thorpe**, was mimicking Whitefield to his cronies, delivering his sermon with brilliant accuracy, perfectly imitating his tone and facial expressions, when he himself was so pierced that he sat down and was converted on the spot! Mr. Thorpe went on to become a prominent Christian leader in the city of Bristol." (Hughes)

John Newton wrote the famous hymn Amazing Grace. But he was not always a Christian. Before his conversion he lived a very wicked lifestyle.

As a young man, he deserted the British Navy to flee to Africa so that he could pursue the lusts of his flesh with reckless abandon.

He was a drunk.  
He was a thief.  
He was a jerk.  
He pursued sexual immorality.  
Eventually he became a slave trader.

At one point he was stuck in a ship that had been blown way off course. They got stuck in a violent storm. He was told to go below deck to pump water out of the ship. This went on for days. He thought for sure he was going to die. In this state, he remembered the bible verses his mother taught him as a child. As he recalled them, he was cut to the heart, turned from his wicked ways, and trusted Jesus. This is the power of God's word.

*The Bible has power to penetrate!*

Application:

We should want the bible to penetrate deep into our hearts. Why?

When we experience conviction of sin, we are forced to run to Christ. This is a very good thing.

Furthermore, when we experience conviction of sin it leads to repentance and change.

If we never experience conviction of sin, we will drift off into unbelief, and never find rest.

I have known many people over the years who have drifted away from the faith. None of them drifted away by reading their bibles. In fact, they all stopped reading their bibles.

Here is the good news- God's word can penetrate any heart!!!

Rich movie stars  
Muslim imams  
Gangsters  
Etc...

*The bible has power to effect change.*

*The bible has power to penetrate.*

**The bible has power to expose.**

**Hebrews 4:12–13 (ESV) — 12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **13** And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed...

A very subtle shift takes place in verse 13. There is a shift from talking about the word of God to talking about God himself. "An no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed..."

Whose sight? I thought you were talking about the Bible? Is the Bible a him? No, but the Bible is so closely associated with God himself, it is personified.

The point of 13a is that the Bible has the power to expose our deepest darkest secrets. It has the power to convict us of every sin, even the sins we think no one knows about.

As a result, we are naked and exposed before god.

The word exposed in Hebrews 4:13 is an interesting word.

The word exposed literally means to twist the neck or take by the throat.

**One commentator writes,**

“It was sometimes used to describe a wrestler's hold on the opponent's throat, rendering him helpless. And sometimes it was used to describe how a man being led to execution had a knife placed beneath his chin so that he could not bow his head in shame away from the gaze of the people.” (Hughes)

We are not just exposed by the word of God, but we are held down by the word of God, like a wrestler holds down his opponent. Our only way of escape is Christ...

*The bible has power to expose.*

**Illustration:**

The famous atheist and scholar Jean-Paul Sartre writes about his Roman Catholic childhood in a book called “The Words.” Describing his childhood, he writes,

“I had been playing with matches and burned a small rug. I was in the process of covering up my crime when suddenly God saw me. I felt his gaze inside my head and on my hands. I whirled about in the bathroom, horribly visible, a live target. Indignation saved me. I flew into a rage against so crude an indiscretion, I blasphemed, I muttered like my grandfather: ‘G- damn it, G- dam it, G- dam it.’ He never looked at me again.” (Boice, 243)

In reality God never stopped looking at Sartre, God sees everything, every action, motive, thought and deed. By turning his back on God, he turned away from the one being in the universe who could save him from a life of guilt, shame, and brokenness.

Sarte tried to escape from the all-seeing gaze of God by becoming an atheist. This is one of the main reasons people become atheists. It is not because of philosophy or science, it is because they despise accountability.

**Application:**

We can hide things from our parents, our spouses, our friends, the police, and even the NSA. But we can't hide anything from God. If we are exposed to his word, his word will expose us, even our deepest darkest secrets. Nothing is hidden from the power of God's word.

This brings us to the last idea...

*The bible has power to effect change.*

*The bible has power to penetrate.*

*The bible has power to expose.*

**The bible has power to judge.**

**Hebrews 4:12–13 (ESV)** — **12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **13** And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

This discussion changes slightly in 13b. The author of Hebrews goes from talking about God's word to talking about God's judgments.

This makes sense in light of the context. The author of Hebrews is talking about God's power to uncover our sin. When our sin is uncovered it will be judged. Furthermore, this makes sense when we remember that we will be judged by the standard contained in God's word. What is that standard?

God's word tells us that God requires us to love him with our all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. And to love our neighbor as our self.

This means that we must love God all the time, with perfect motives, which none of us can do.

This means that we are in deep trouble until God intervenes. Thankfully god has intervened.

How do we know? We keep reading in Hebrews...

**Hebrews 4:14–16 (ESV)** — **14** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

We can approach our great high priest, Jesus Christ, with boldness asking him to forgive us. The word of God is meant to drive us to the incarnate word, Jesus Christ, who has the power to forgive.

Through his life, death, and resurrection we can be forgiven for neglecting and disobeying God's holy word.

### **Conclusion:**

We have looked at two things-

*The nature of the word.*

*The power of the word.*

What is going to keep us from drifting?

What is going to help us enter our eternal rest?

Refusing to neglect the word of God. The Bible has power to bring us safely home to our eternal rest. Let's pray...

### **Communion:**

**1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (ESV)** — **23** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

What are we proclaiming???

That the word became flesh and dwelled among us... why? To suffer and die for people like you and me who neglect or ignore his holy word.

Because Jesus broke his body and shed his blood, and rose from the dead, we have resurrection power residing in us to do what he commands, that is to love his word...

A few details...

Fence the table...

please don't pause at the communion station...

eat and drink on the way back or at your chair...

please throw away the cups in the garbage cans on the way out...

please allow the musicians and elders and their wives to get in line first so that they can serve us through prayer and music...

if you would like prayer...

lets pray together...