

The Word of God: Living and Active

Father, You are the Lord of hosts, the God of all glory, and You have spoken. You have made Your name and Your will known. And it has been recorded for us and preserved for us, and we should tremble as we sit underneath the words of our creator. Father, the church today is in a mess, because we have prophets that are talking about dreams and stories and books, but they're not preaching Your Word. They're healing the brokenness of Your people superficially. Who, who will sit under the counsel of the Lord to see and to hear His Word? I pray that we will be those people. As we open up Your Word this morning it says it is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, joint and marrow, discerning the thoughts and the intents of the heart. Oh God may Your Word be like a hammer this morning. May it be a fire that sets us aflame. May Your work this morning, may there be an unmistakable presence of Your Holy Spirit with this. For we pray this for the sake of Jesus Christ and in His name, amen.

If you have your Bibles I would like you to turn to the book of Hebrews, chapter 4. We're going to be looking at what is the most popular verse in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 4 verse 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, discerning the thoughts and the intentions of the heart." Verse 13 goes onto say, "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account."

Before we look at this verse I want to offer just a brief review, because if you're like me, last week seems like years ago already. So I think it's important because context is so important. Context will help us to understand and appreciate the significance of Hebrews 4:12. Sometimes verses are so familiar with us we lose appreciation for them, and I want us to regain that appreciation for this text. And the way I believe we will appreciate this text is putting it back in its context. The context – last week we were talking about rest, about God's rest, about how we are supposed to fear lest any of us should seem to have failed to reach God's rest. That's Hebrews 4 verse 1. "Be careful, be afraid, lest any of you should seem to have failed to enter God's rest."

We spoke last week how God desires that His people enjoy His rest. And that is emphatic in this text, this is God's rest that He wants us to enjoy. And as we looked at the characteristics of God's rest, we noticed several things. Enjoying God's rest is not observing a day, like a Sabbath day. Because the text tells us that God finished His works and He has been resting since the foundation of the world. I noted last week that in the creation account each of the six days are marked off by a morning and an evening, and it was a day, morning and an evening and it was a day, all the way until you get to the 7th day, on the day of rest, it's not marked out and it doesn't end because God is still resting. And we cannot come to this rest of God, as some very wonderful Christian theologians do, and say, "Oh, to enjoy God's rest we must observe a Sabbath day, we must make Sunday our Sabbath rest." That is completely antithetical to the mindset of the author of Hebrews. He's not talking about a day, and he's not talking about a place, and he goes on, we're not talking about the promised land. Because if we were talking about a place, a promised land, after Joshua led the children of Israel into the promised land, then God would not speak about another day of rest. It's not a place.

The rest that we are talking about is a state of being. It is God's rest that God Himself wants us to enjoy, and as such, it is a state of being that we enter into and enjoy now and forever. And it's not a rest that we enjoy on one day or celebrate on one day. It is a rest that we experience every day. To enjoy God's rest is, in the words of verse 9 and 10, "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from His. On that 7th day, everything was created. He saw when it was done He said, "It is good," and His works were finished and He rested.

And as we enter into God's rest it is not resting from works of creation. It is resting from the work of redemption, where Jesus pronounced on the cross, "It is finished." The work's done. There is no more work of redemption to do. And to enter into God's rest is to enter into the faith of Jesus Christ and the completed work of the cross, and the rest. To cease from your labors – there is nothing that you or I could add to the work that Jesus Christ did on the cross – nothing. You can never improve it. There's not one thing you can do where God would smile upon you more than looking to faith in Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross. You can't add to it. You can't improve it. You rest in it. I'm accepted in the Beloved by the work of Jesus Christ alone. It's finished.

Now, this gospel rest – that's what it is, ok. So when we talk about God's rest, it's gospel rest. Jesus said, "Come unto Me all ye who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." So I'm going to talk

about this rest and simply call it, gospel rest. It's coming to Jesus and just resting. Now we come to our text. Verse 11 says, "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest." Let's strive—isn't that paradoxical? Let us strive to enter into gospel rest, "so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience, for the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

I'm going to tell you, this has been one of the hardest messages of my life to have to prepare for. I'm tempted to say I listened to a hundred sermons and read scores of commentaries and articles. I can't tell you how many hours I had to put into this sermon to understand this text, because it did not make any sense to me whatsoever. I would listen to sermons, and I would hear some great sermons, but none of them answered my questions, none of them were very satisfying to me at all. That's very disappointing. I had more trouble understanding this verse, especially verse 12, this well known verse, than other verses that are far less well known. The problem I had was the context. One little word just undid me. One little word just tripped me up; I can't tell you how long. It's the word, "for." Verse 1 - for. "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, *for* the Word of God is living and active..." It is obvious as I read the text the author is connecting verse 11 with verse 12.

For the life of me I couldn't see the connection. Strive to enter the rest for the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. What? And here's the thing, I would hear all kinds of sermons and most of the commentaries take verse 12 in isolation. The Word of God is living...and they go and they wax eloquently about how the Word of God is living, how the Word of God is active, how the Word of God is powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. But none of them addressed, "for." And I kept looking and listening and reading. Somebody address "for!" And it was all in isolation. I got so despairing, because I had a nice sermon about the Word of God being living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, ripping it out of there, and I thought, you know I can't see the connection, so I'm not going to preach the connection because I don't know it. That would be embarrassing to get up here and say, "I don't know the connection, but I've got this great sermon about verse 12. Let me tell you about the Word of God."

And honestly I was becoming so distraught I said, "Well I'm going to have to do that because I don't know anything else. If God doesn't open my eyes and I don't see it, I can't preach it. So I'm just going to preach this nice little sermon on Hebrews 4:12." But I had in the back of my mind a genuine fear where

one of you were going to come up and say, "But Tim, how does that...you were talking about rest and strive to enter rest. How does that fit?" You'd expose me. I'd be laid out. I'm a fraud! I don't know! I'm teaching things I don't know!

I praise God He did open my eyes, and I saw it. And when I saw it, it made Hebrews 4:12 so precious. For - one little word - for. How do you explain "for"? How is "for" connected to verse 11? Be diligent. Strive to enter that rest for, or because, the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, discerning the thoughts and the intentions of the heart. I see it now. Some of you maybe already see it. You may say, "Well of course Tim. Don't you see it? It's right there." Have you ever seen something, and yet you've not seen it? I think guys are famous for that. Honey, where are my keys? I can't find them. I've been looking everywhere. They are on the desk. I've looked in the desk, they are not in the desk. They're on the desk - right there on the desk. Have you ever looked at something and you see it but you don't see it? It's there. I see it. Now I can't believe I never saw it.

Let me illustrate this connection, because I'm going to show you the connection, and it's a bit unfair because it's going to take me less than a minute to connect these two verses for you, and it took me probably 21 hours to say one minute. Isn't that sad? 21 hours to say one minute. But let me illustrate the connection first, before I state the connection. Those of you that have children, or had children, you know they start coming to that age when they can use their own knives. It's always a little bit scary as parents. You start off with the butter knife, then they start taking the steak knife. What do you say to them? "Be careful, that will cut you." Be careful, that will cut you. Here's the connection. Strive, strive to enter into gospel rest. Because the Word of God is living, and it is powerful, and it is sharper than any two-edged sword. It will pierce into the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow. Be careful. Strive to enter into God's rest, because the Word of God is dangerous, and it will shred you. It will tear you up. It will eat you alive. That's why you've got to strive to enter into gospel rest.

Do you see the connection? It's there, it's right there. I just couldn't see it. Be diligent to find rest in Christ. Be diligent to find that gospel rest where you cease from your labors, because I'm telling you, you get around the Word of God—it's sharp, and it's living, and it is powerful and you read it, it will cut you to pieces. Christian wives, husbands, parents, you read it and it will destroy your self-righteousness. It will eat you up. Be diligent, strive to enter gospel rest.

For there is no creature hidden from His sight but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we are to give an account. You cannot trifle with the Word of God. You can't play games with it. It is a hammer that will smash you to pieces. It is a fire that will consume everything before you. The Word of God displays in all of its glory the righteous, holy demands of God. It is an inflexible standard. There is no grading curve. God doesn't wink when He finds sin in your life. It is a dangerous book, it's a dangerous book. You be diligent to enter gospel rest because this book is dangerous. This book will expose you for who you really are. You better make sure you are found in Christ Jesus.

Let's look at some of the things that Hebrews 4:12 says about the Word of God. They really build on each other; I hate to divide them all up. It says about 5 or 6 different things, but each description builds on the other, and it becomes one just piercing sword if you will. They just build on each other and it becomes more—more intent, more intimate, more personal in its application. Notice what it says. For the Word of God is living. The Greek text literally is "living, for the Word of God is." Living is emphatic. That's what wants to be emphasized. The Word of God is living. With that statement I don't know how much time I spent just—the Word of God is "living!" This isn't just black letters on a page. It's living! The Word of God is living.

Heard many sermons try to describe the Bible as an interesting book, that's what living means, it's lively. You read it and it catches your attention. And it does, but there's places that it doesn't. Now I'm reading through the Old Testament again and Numbers does not get my attention. You read through all the genealogies and the numbers of the tribes, that's not lively. I don't think that's what the text is saying, that the Bible is lively. People read it all the time and it doesn't mean anything to them. There is a quality of Scripture, this living quality is repeatedly stressed throughout Scripture. 1 Peter 1 verse 23 says, "You have been born again, not of a perishable seed, but an imperishable, through the living and abiding, or enduring, Word of God." And then he quotes Isaiah chapter 40, "All flesh is like grass and all of its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord remains forever." Isaiah says flesh comes and goes, but God's Word stands forever.

You know I've heard preachers that go to these country churches and you know what the congregations tell them? "We've been here long before you got here and we'll be here long after you leave." The

Word of God has been here long before you were born, and the Word of God will be here long after you die.

It's living, it is enduring, it stands today. When the author of Hebrews says the Word of God is living, he says the Word of God is timely, the Word of God is alive today. It is as relevant and as true today as it was a thousand years ago. That's what it means to be living. How many times does the author of Hebrews say, "Today the Holy Spirit says," ...today the Holy Spirit says. This book is living. It is alive and it is speaking today. In all honesty I'm sick and tired of hearing preachers who think they have to make church relevant today. Because when they say they need to make church relevant, you know what it usually means? It usually means they want to quit preaching from the Bible. The Bible's outdated, the Bible is archaic. We have special needs here in the 21st century. We need to be relevant for people. That's hogwash. There is no more relevant book in all the world than the Bible. It is living. Notice a second thing. It is living and it is active. We get the word from Greek; energetic, at work, effectual, powerful. You can be living, there are things that are living that are not powerful, that are not active. There are trees that are a thousand years old but I wouldn't call them energetic. I wouldn't call them active. They're strong, but the Word of God is living and it is powerful. It is energetic. It is active. It is at work today.

The age of the Word of God has no effect whatsoever on its power. Or on its effectualness. As a preacher I do not have to labor to make God's Word effective. The only thing I have to labor is to make God's Word plain. And when the truth of God's Word is stated plainly, it is alive and it is effective, it is active, it is at work.

Be diligent to enter God's rest because the Word of God is alive. It is active, and notice – it is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joint and marrow. Here's where the lively, energetic Word starts to get personal. It is sharper than any two-edged sword that pierces. This is where the Word of God begins to meddle with your life. Where it begins to pry into things that you don't want it to. That it begins to lay open thoughts and intents that you're trying to hide. The Word of God is living and it is active, and the way it is active and living is that it is like a sword that is so sharp that it pierces and it just cuts a person open.

I can't help but see the imagery of a butcher or probably better yet a surgeon with a scalpel that just slices right through you and goes right to the problem. It goes after us with pinpoint accuracy. It nails us to the wall. It cuts us so deep and so precise; it goes straight to the heart of the matter. When you look at verse 13, it's a difficult word but, "And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed..." That word "exposed" is difficult in the Greek; there are a couple of meanings. One means to be grabbed by the throat. It just nails you. The other meaning is that of a sacrificial victim, you slit the throat. The idea is, the Word of God grabs you, cuts you open and lays you bare before God. That's the ministry of the Word of God.

You know the truth is, when churches say that they want to be more relevant and that usually means (code), "We need to ignore the Bible. We need to have more stories and do more skits and do things that are fun," what they are really saying is, "We don't like what the Bible says, it makes people uncomfortable. They don't like to be uncomfortable, so we're just going to talk about all the things that are good." That's really what they're saying, because the Bible is incredibly relevant. The truth is they don't like how relevant it is, because it does make people feel very uncomfortable.

I was listening to a story of a pastor who was preaching through 1 Peter, chapter 3, the first six verses. Those of you that are familiar with it, it's about the Christian wife's responsibility to her husband and it uses the "s" word...submissive, submission. And he preached on Sunday morning and after that message a lady came up to him in the church and she was irate with him and she said, "I can't believe you preached that stuff on Sunday morning. What are you doing preaching that stuff on Sunday morning?" And he said, "Well, it's in the Bible. Why shouldn't I not preach it? What's the problem?" She said, "I've brought a friend. This was her first time here. And she's an ardent feminist. And you're preaching about this stuff." You talk about the Bible being living and active and powerful, exposing people and their true hearts and their problems and their sin, and the fact is, we don't like it. We don't like it, and so churches all across America don't like the penetrating message of the Word of God so they say, "Oh, let's quote a few verses and then we'll show a skit."

This book is living and active and powerful and it will cut you to pieces. It will shred you. It will expose your sin. It meddles in your affairs. It pokes into areas of your life that you'd rather keep guarded. It exposes us; it lays us out naked to see all your sins and all your flaws. You know, I'm entering my middle years, my middle ages, and I'm thankful for the styles in which guys don't tuck their shirts in anymore,

you know. Why? Because it hides the gut. You can wear these shirts out and it's in style and it doesn't show the belly. It's great. We like that. We feel comfortable. It shields us. Who wants to come to church and have your shirt ripped off? And see your gut. That's the problem. That's the issue. The Word of God does that. And it's not pleasant.

A mother reads it and she sees the heart of a gentle and quiet spirit. It just slices her up. The husband reads it, "You will not provoke your children; you'll love your wife." It just cuts him to shreds. He knows he's not what he should be. It goes on to say, the Bible even is the discerner of our thoughts and intentions of our heart. I mean this is where the Bible even judges our righteous deeds, the things that we would claim to be good and right, and the Bible comes in and it just cuts right through it. "Tim, you went to visit to the hospital, did you. Why did you go to visit the hospital? Was it out of love and concern for this person, or is it just because it's your job?" "Ah, you went out to share Christ, did you Tim? Why? Is it for the glory of God in Christ? Do you love Christ and you want to make His name known, or do you want another notch on your belt, Tim?"

You see how unrelenting the Word of God is? That's what we're memorizing in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people." That's what we're memorizing, aren't we. It judges the thoughts and the intents of the heart. You can't read the Sermon on the Mount; you can't memorize the Sermon on the Mount without being tore up, without being shredded. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. Whoever looks at a woman and lusts after her, has already committed adultery in his heart. I mean it is unrelenting.

If you read or study your Bible to feel good, you will find yourself severely disappointed. The Word of God is living, it is active, and it is sharper than any two-edged sword. And it pierces you, slices you open, and exposes you for who you really are. You see Hebrews chapter 4 verse 12 really explains why the preaching and teaching of the Word of God should be so indispensable to the church of the living God. For the church to abandon the role of preaching and teaching the Word of God is to abandon our very essence of who we are. And even to abandon the essence of why we meet together. Churches that come together and shove aside the Word of God, abandon the priority of the Word of God for messages that the unchurched will like, that will make them feel comfortable. If we use the Bible to preach from as a handbook for self-fulfillment, for success, for healthy marriages and better families, and a means to fix all our problems, we will actually be working against the ministry of Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

And really if we treat the Bible that way, as this is just a book to help me and make me feel good, and let me tell you how to be a good family, and let me tell you how to be successful in this and be fulfilled in this, I'm really making a mockery of the Word of God being living and active and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.

What was the problem of the prophets? They were healing the brokenness of their people superficially saying, ""Peace, peace, when there is no peace." It is through the ministry of the Word of God when it is preached in clarity and it is preached with the power of the Spirit of God, it cuts like a knife and it does so for a purpose, for the balm, for the medicine of the gospel itself. And if the ministry of the Word of God is not exposing us for our sins, the gospel becomes trite. It's just a nice little thing to accept Jesus. But if you've been cut, if you've been destroyed by the Word of God, the gospel is precious indeed. That's why the author of Hebrews tells his people, "Strive to enter that rest," because you get around the Word of God, it will cut you to pieces. It will destroy your self-righteousness, it will fillet you, it will just split you open.

Once you understand that unrelenting, unmerciful ministry of the Word, you'll understand the need to be diligent to enter the gospel. What are you going to do when you read the text and it cuts you like a knife, and it exposes your failures? What are you going to do? I'll tell you what a lot of people do, they say, "I just can't bear to read it. I don't measure up. I'll try harder." That's not the answer. The answer is to be covered in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The answer is to strive to enter into the gospel rest in Jesus Christ. That I'm not received before God on the basis of my own merit. I'm a sinner. But I am made right with God, not on the basis of my good deeds, but on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. And I rest in Christ, as it exposes my sinfulness.

I truly believe that the Word of God prepares us for the presence of God. When you look at that last verse, man alive, that's a terrifying verse. "No creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account." We come to church, we've got our nice suits on, we've got our hair combed, we've got the smelly sauce on; we feel like we're ok. But none of that shields who we are from God. And I really believe that this book prepares us for the day when you will stand before God. Cause you won't have any nice dress or nice suit, no smelly sauce on. You will stand before Him naked and bare as you are. And I'm convinced if you have not learned how to enter gospel rest today under the ministry of His Word, how are you going to enter gospel rest when you

stand before God? Do you think His gaze is any less penetrating, any less destroying? No. We asked the question last week, if you should die and stand before Him and God says, “Why should I let you into heaven?” I don’t think that’s a trite question. To stand before the holiness of God and His holiness and His eyes that are fire pierce you for who you are. What are you going to say? I think you’ll say, “Jesus Christ and His righteousness,” if you’ve learned to enter God’s rest today.

Let me just close. When you consider this book and what it is, it is the living Word of God, and it is active and it is sharper than any two-edged sword, all of you that are in ministry, all of you that are wanting to share the gospel, use this sword. Books are great, study books are great. There are some great books, but do not neglect to use this book, Scripture. Make people read and hear God’s Word. That’s what we’re about. It’s part of our armor, the sword of the Spirit. This is it. I trust that you will understand what the author is saying, and I trust that as you sit under the ministry of God’s Word, you will be diligent to enter into gospel rest, where you cease from your labors, and you trust Jesus Christ. Will you stand with me for prayer?

Lord, I have set under the scalpel of Your Word and I’ve read the demands of Your Law in memorizing the greatest sermon ever preached—the Sermon on the Mount. And I find in that a sword that just lays me over, exposes my soul. That’s why the author of Hebrews tells us, you better be diligent. You better strive to enter God’s rest. That rest where He finished the work of redemption for You, and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross who paid for the penalty of sin, that whoever will believe upon Him will be saved and will cease from his labors and will enter into God’s rest, strive to enter that rest. That is a rest we can enjoy every day of the week. Thank You for Your Word, and Lord I pray that as a church, in all of our ministries, we will take up the sword, the sword of the living God, the Word of the living God, and we will sit under its counsel, and we will listen to it, and we will teach it, and we will hear it, and we will pay attention. Thank You for the ministry of Your Holy Spirit that helps us to understand these words. Bless this message for the edification of Your people that are here this morning. For we pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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