

BUILD YOUR LIFE ON THE BIBLE

Good morning! This is Palm Sunday! We remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem where he was hailed as savior or king by many. He had told his disciples that he must return to Jerusalem when He ... *took the Twelve aside and told them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled,' Luke 18:31. Jesus was immersed in the Scriptures. They guided His life. All His choices and decisions were to fulfil the mission of the heavenly Father, and Scripture revealed the Heavenly father's will. Still today the Scriptures reveal God's word and guide for our living. St. Paul put it this way: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* 2 Timothy 3:16.*

Friends, we are living in a time when God's word and directions for human life are ignored, negated, or mocked. This is even happening in some churches in America. It is vital that we immerse ourselves in the Bible. The truth and wisdom found in Scripture instills all the virtues we value: truth, compassion, forgiveness, peace, love, joy, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control, and freedom. If we ignore Scripture, we will find ourselves sliding into slavery ... slavery to sin. John Wesley warned: "It is dangerous to depart from Scripture ... most of the controversies which have disturbed the Church have arisen from people's wanting to be wise above what is written, not contented with what God has plainly revealed there."

This last week of Lent our focus is on reading the Bible. I know a number of you do that regularly. Praise God! Today I am encouraging all who hear my voice to make a daily practice of Bible reading. Now, more than ever, we need the wisdom, encouragement, guidance, and truth we find in the Bible. Our Lent Experience challenges us to read about the final week of Jesus' life (on earth) in the Gospel of Luke. I hope you will join me in doing so. (See the reading schedule on page 68 of our Lent Experience booklet. Read what is listed for each day, Monday through Saturday).

Laying A Foundation

Reading the Bible is all about laying a firm foundation for life. Jesus ends his famous Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) by telling a story about two guys who built homes. One guy built his house on solid rock. And the other guy built his house on a foundation of sand. Then winds, and rain, and floods came – the trials and the storms of life. The house that was built on solid rock was able to withstand the storms of life. But the house that was built on the shifting foundation of sand collapsed.

Then Jesus says, *Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like that wise man who built his house on the rock, Mathew 7:24.*

When you build your life on the Bible, you're building on solid rock so that when the storms and trials and difficulties of your life inevitably come, you'll be able to handle them. We don't know what's going to happen in 2021 but I guarantee you this: you will have storms in your life – emotional storms, health storms, financial storms, not to

mention the temptations that come along. There may even be persecution of Christians coming to America. If you are not built on solid rock you're going to crumble. You can't build your life on the opinions of others. You can't build your life on popular opinion. You can't build your life on the shifting sands of culture. You must build it on the unchanging truth of the Bible.

Building Blocks

God has wired us to hear, to see, to hold and touch, to think and consider, and to take action. That's how we encounter life. God has given us these same means to encounter the Bible. Here's how we can do that.

1. Hear: receive the Bible with my ears. The Bible tells us in Romans 10:17, *Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.* Every time you hear the Bible read at church, or on the radio, or a recording, or in a small group, you're hearing the Word and your faith is being built. You're doing this right now. You're listening to the Word of God being taught. That builds your faith.

We read in the letter of James: *Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you,* James 1:19. It is the Word of God that saves us. So be quick to listen to His word before spouting off, stirring strife. "Humbly accept" means to receive the Word as you would a welcome guest. (Greek *prauthti dexasqe* – "welcome with gentleness"). Leave the door wide open for Scripture to speak to you. You must approach the Bible with an attitude of receptivity. Allow the Word to be planted in you.

Jesus told the parable of the sower (Luke 8), who scattered his seed on the ground, some good ground, some not. The seed is the Word of God and the soil is our hearts. He says receiving the Word is actually the seed being planted in your life. We know that the soil makes all the difference. Rushing into Bible reading, with distractions all around, anger and resentment in residence, is not good soil preparation.

Before you can really hear God's word you need to take out some emotional and spiritual garbage, the stuff that stinks in your life. How do I take out the garbage spiritually? The Bible calls it confession.

2. See: read the Bible with my eyes. I receive it with my ears, but I read it with my eyes. You will not grow spiritually without reading the Bible. Again, the letter of James: *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like,* James 1:22-24.

That's what happens a lot of times on Sunday. You hear a message and by the time you get to the parking lot or go back to the kitchen, you've already forgotten it. But the man or woman or child who reads the Bible, takes it to heart and puts it into practice, will be blessed in what he does. I want you to be blessed. I want all of us to be blessed. I want God's blessing on your family, on your work, on your finances, on your health. If you will look into the Bible intently you will be blessed. Intently means to

read it and reflect on it. A glance here and there won't do. You need to gaze into the Bible like you would a mirror. We look into a mirror to evaluate ourselves by looking long and closely. The Bible is God's Word that helps us look into our souls and evaluate ourselves. (Cowboy wisdom: The greatest liar you'll ever meet is looking at you from the mirror). Get a Bible reading plan; it'll help you stay on track.

3. Hold and touch: research the Bible with my hands and my mouth. Researching is Bible study. Reading turns into study when you take notes and talk about it with someone. That's why we believe in small groups. You listen, you write, you read, and you talk. Jesus says, *You search the Scriptures because you believe they will give you eternal life. And the Scriptures point to me!* John 5:39

4. Review and remember with my mind. The Bible says this in James 1:25, *The man who looks intently into the perfect law and continues to do this, not forgetting what he's heard... he will be blessed in what he does.*

Review means you're thinking about it over and over and you're remembering, not forgetting. If you're serious about being spiritually strong and mature, and you don't want to be a spiritual wimp, if you want to be a godly man or woman, then the single greatest habit you can develop is the habit of memorizing some Scripture. When you hide the Word in your heart it's there when you need it. When you're tempted, when you're witnessing, when you're under stress, when you need comfort, when you have a crisis, there's often no Bible around. But if you have some verses in your mind, you can get strength from it right then.

You say, "But I have a terrible memory. I can't remember anything." You always remember what's important to you. Meditation is simply remembering and reviewing the Scripture in your mind. You can do it anywhere. *Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you will be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful,* Joshua 1:8

5. Respond to the Bible with my actions. *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says,* James 1:22 That means turn it into actions. We may hear, read, study, maybe even meditate on something, but if we don't do it, we haven't gotten it. I could talk to you about how to build a balanced budget based on scriptural principles, but if you don't do it, you're still in debt. True belief is doing it. This is hardest but most crucial part of believing: doing what the Word says. I'm not saying it's easy, I'm just saying we are to be doers of the Word.

Get a Grip

Let's go back to that story that Jesus told, about two house builders Matthew 7:24: *Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock... But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't... is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.*

We don't know what storms that are headed our way 2021 or 22 or 23 or beyond. But I do know this. You'll crumble if you don't have a solid foundation for your life. And the solid foundation for your life is not the opinions of others, it's not what's popular on radio, TV, or social media. The prevailing culture is like shifting sands. You must build

your life on the unchanging Word. The truth doesn't change. If it was true a thousand years ago it'll be true a thousand years from today because truth does not change. It's a rock. And you need a rock to build your life on. Otherwise, when stress comes, when great challenges come, when calamities come, you'll fall apart.

You've got five fingers on your hand. Each of those fingers represent one of the ways to get God's Word into your life. 1. Hear it with my ears. 2. Read it with my eyes. 3. Research it with my mouth and my hands. 4. Review and remember it with my mind. 5. Respond to it with my actions.

If all you do is simply hear the Bible when you come to church, your grip is nearly useless. Before you get out to the parking lot Satan has stolen the Word from you. So, get a grip on God's word and be blessed in it.

Colossians 3:16, *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.*