

Wisdom in Words

Amos 5: 6-7, 10-15, Hebrews 4: 12-16 Pastor Lentz
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While both passages are inspiring, the words that touch me the most in these verses are from Hebrews. ¹² Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

When I began studying this passage years ago the first line that says “the word of God is living and active” powerfully touched me. It meant to me then and now that the Bible is just that, “living and active.” It isn’t just words from long ago, but they are written in such a way that truly mystically invites us to understand the multiple meanings so that it can speak to each of us each time that we are willing to receive the living word.

This passage gave me the courage to allow the Bible to speak to me each day. When I worked in prison I carried the Bible with me in my jacket pocket. For years it has been on my phone, but it isn’t really the same. The book in my pocket reminded me to read it. It also contained the notes I had put there on note cards that stimulated my thinking every time I read it. And almost any reason to have to wait meant the Bible came out and I was whisked away for a few moments. I can’t tell you the number of times that a passage that I just read, would then become the very thing that helped in a situation. Of course there was always a calm and a sense of peace that came from reading the scriptures, but it was more than that.

Some of the time the passage would be something that when I would tell it to the person I was talking with later it would be the very thing

that touched them deeply, because it was as if it was written for them, in their circumstance that particular day. It happened so often that I just began to wonder how a passage would help in some way.

Sometimes it wasn't the words so much as the meaning that was more important. Sometimes it was probably that as I read the passage with my focus upon letting the living word speak to me that it did, and then when I was willing to speak it to others they too became touched by what they heard. It was as if the passage contained the answer to problems that I didn't yet at the time of reading them even know that the person I was going to talk with next needed.

For a while I wondered about how that could possibly occur. Was it really just my imagination? Was I just wanting it to happen? Today, I can easily explain how that sort of thing occurs, and it makes me even more appreciative of the text. Actually, it is something that happens when you allow yourself to let a passage come alive for you by how it speaks to you right now, you will discover how it also is useful for others at the same time, or soon after.

In this very passage that says it is living and active able to discern the thoughts and motives of everyone, is of course right. When you read the Bible it causes you to become more aware of how your thoughts and motives are either in line with God's intention or not. It also causes you to realize that your thoughts influence what you see and can see. You can feel the difference, you know it. When you read the Bible it is going to cause you to either become more aware of what you are doing well and right, or what you are doing that isn't.

When we read the prophets messages like in Amos, it is difficult to not feel criticized, and affirmed almost at the same time. To be chastised, and encouraged, at the same time seems what the Minor Prophets are all about. The especial wisdom that comes from that comes from how the Bible is living and active. We bring us into the passage when we read it, and we almost always are bringing a mixed bag.

What began occurring to me is that how we approach a passage has almost as much to do with how we will understand it as the words on

the page. Perhaps even more than that is the fact that there are different ways to read the Bible. It isn't just a one size fits all. You read poetry differently than you read a math problem. You read a novel differently than you read instructions to put something together. You read a recipe differently than you read the paper. How you read the different books of the Bible is no different. How we read what we read and what we bring to it is going to mean that we get something different from the scriptures.

How many times have you felt very aware of wanting to be close to God and also knowing both that you are loved and that you have fallen short? If you are aware of both then welcome to the club. It is likely that the Prophets felt that as well. It tends to be what people bring to God because we often think in black and white, or right and wrong. That isn't in our best interest. It is much better for us to be focused upon how we can become better, and to be aware of how much we are already loved.

The 13th verse says, ¹³ And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. It is treating the words of the Bible as living and active. It is implying that God is living in and through the scriptures.

When you think in that way it can mean that you want to treat the physical book of the Bible in a respectful way. Emotionally it means for me that when there is a Bible around I feel comforted. I know that I can read the Bible and feel God's presence, as well as his direction. The following story is a way of communicating a lot in a little.

A minister who was teaching this very idea to his congregation got several real world examples of the passage. He talked about how the Bible was living and active and how that you can read it and know what God wants you to do. A young woman who he was counseling came to him and wanted to know what she should do about her boyfriend. He told her to read the Bible and to let God help her know what she should do. She came back to him in a week, and wasn't any closer to knowing. So he told her to open the Bible and begin reading where ever her eyes

fell. She did, and it said, 1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: 2 "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. She looked up at the minister and said, how is that supposed to help? The minister said, it either means that you are supposed to move on because that relationship is dead, or that you are to go with him to start a new life. The young woman said, well that must mean I am to break up with him because my life is here in this community. So she broke up with him and later found the love of her life. The minister was encouraged. So when a young man came to him and asked what he should do with his life he then knew what to do. The minister gave him the same advice. He said, open your Bible and begin reading where ever your eyes fall and you will know what you are supposed to do. The young man did, and he turned to Proverbs chapter one verse one. The beginning of knowledge. The proverbs of Solomon the Son of David, King of Israel. To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment and equity; The young man was over joyed, because it meant to him that he should go to law school and become a judge. He really valued the idea of being a judge and he was encouraged. He applied to Law school and was accepted. The minister was again very encouraged. Then a business man came to him and asked him what he should do and the minister being emboldened by his experiences with the two young people said, Go to the beach and sit down on a chair, holding your Bible in your lap. When the wind blows and turns the pages you will have your answer when you glance down. What God's message to you will be in whatever you read first. So the business man went to the beach and did exactly as the minister had told him. Later when he came back he was smiling and thanked the Minister for his insightful advice. Being curious the minister asked what it was that he had read. The

business man said, what I first read was Chapter 11 so I came home and filed for bankruptcy and I am sure everything will now be all right. It was.

Now the minister was perplexed he wasn't as sure that what he had told the people was the right thing. Clearly now with the three he was seeing a pattern. Each person was seeing what they wanted to see in the scriptures and then justifying what they wanted to see. So he was questioning the wisdom of what he was telling people. He decided to do the same thing himself. He opened the Bible letting it fall open on its own and looked down. He read, Obadiah, Chapter 1 second and third verse. "Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you shall be greatly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, "The minister knew that he had been chastised by the Lord and so he was both happy and sad that he had gotten so enthusiastic about giving advice that he forgot that it was God giving the advice he was just offering to each person the steps to take to read the Bible.

I offer this because it is our attitude that makes the difference. If we are willing to honor the scriptures and allow them to be for us the word of God we will understand them in ways that help us greatly. It isn't a way of taking charge of the Bible but a way to allow the deepest faith filled perspective inside of us to come forward about the passage. That is only one of the ways we can allow the words of the Bible to become living and active. If this silly way of explaining the passage makes you think then Hallelujah Amen.