

Original Sermon Transcript Oct 11, 1987 PM Service

- Dan Owen

This evening, we're going to ask ourselves a question and try to give it a Bible answer.

(...)

We have some plans together for some great work here in this congregation, in this community. We have some goals together that we want to meet. We have some dreams that we want to dream together in working in this place in the future for the glory of God.

(...)

But let me ask you and me too a question.(...) Is it just us that we ought to consider in that picture?

(...)

Is it just us or what? Is there someone else, something else, some other power besides just us working? I want to assure us tonight that God is working in us. God is working with us and that we're not alone. In Philippians chapter 2 and verse 13, the Bible says for it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. God works in his people in this world. And I believe that there are two primary ways, any way, that God works among his people today. And these are not to be disparaged, they're not to be taken lightly. They're not to be looked at as though they're of no account.(...) God works mightily through his people, through his word. And we're going to talk about that at some length.(...) And God also works mightily in his people through providence. And we're also going to talk about that at some length and hope that we'll trust greatly in both of those things. First of all, the Bible teaches us that God works in us through his word.

(...)

You know, many of us look at the Bible as a rather dead, boring piece of literature.(...) It has lots of these and thou's in its English translation, which many use. It has lots of dusty sayings in it that seem rather boring to some of our young people. And we say it's a fine book, it's from God, but it really has very little to do with the way I live every day. But God's word is not just a book like any other book. The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even under the dividing asunder of both soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It's very important to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. The word of God is living, Hebrews 4.12. No other word is that way. My word is not that way, your word is not that way. There is a living nature to the word of God, which no human word has. The word of God is active. That means it does something. It's not like some of the words that we speak. You know, Jesus said every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment. Idle words, a lot of words that people speak just fall to the ground. The word of God is active. It's powerful. When it is spoken, it unleashes a power and it accomplishes things, and that's different than any word of man. In John 6.63, Jesus said, "The Spirit gives life. The flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak are spirit and are life." They're not like the words of this world. They are spirit. They are of the spiritual realm. They're from above,(...) and they give life to man like no other word here does.(...) The word of God does several things in relationship to mankind today. The first thing that the word of God does in the lives of men and women, the word of God seeks to make conquest of the human mind. In 2 Corinthians 10, verses 3 and 4, the Apostle Paul says, "For though we walk in the flesh,(...) we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not after the flesh, but are mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds." Now listen, "Casting down reasonings and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity under the obedience of Christ, the walls of man's mind are all around, built up like a fortress. And the word of God, as it were, with its battering ram, is trying to beat down the walls of our mind and get inside so that it can do its work." The word of God must be in us. It must be in our minds before it's plugged into the power, before it can do its work. In 1 Thessalonians 2, 13, Paul says, "I thank God without ceasing, that when you receive from us the word of the message, even the word of God, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God which also worketh in you," that believe. Where does it work? It works in you, that believe. It doesn't do anything while it's sitting here on this table. I used to have a little King James Bible about three inches square. I used to put it in the back of my jeans pocket and take it with me to school as I went to high school. And that thing didn't do anything but get sweated on as long as it was in the back of that pocket. I played a little football, sweated on it, faded the ink that was written around the pages. But when we take it out and we read it, and especially when it goes into our heart and our mind, then it does something. In order to be in us, in order to be in the mind of man, the word of God has got to be received, which we talked about this morning. Man's got to let it in. In James 1, 21, the Bible says, "Wherefore, putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls." And of course, in Acts 2,

41, they that gladly received his word were baptized. But I believe that the receiving of God's word is not just something we do at conversion.

(...)

It's not just something that happens in the initial act of man to turn his life over to God, but this is something that has to go on constantly. Every time a sermon is preached, every time you read your own Bible at home, God is trying to make conquest of your mind. He is trying to capture your thoughts and mind. He is trying to bring our minds into subjection to his will. Now some people hear the word of God, and they do not receive it. The parable of the sower, Luke 8 and 12, "Those by the wayside, these are they that have heard, and then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their heart, that they might not believe and be saved." It is the desire of Satan to do everything he can to keep these walls strong and to make sure that the word of God never makes it into man's mind and find a home there. Like the birds that pick up the seed by the wayside, so Satan would keep the word of God from coming in contact with our minds. Second Corinthians 4, 4, "In whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ is the image of God, should not dawn upon them." Satan uses all kinds of things today to blind our minds and to keep the word of God out of it. Atheism and humanism propagated in the school systems of our country, the doctrines of evolution and all of this sort of thing are a barrier against people receiving the word of God. As long as the word of God can be looked at as foolishness or so much old hat superstition, it is not going to get in there where it can do its powerful work. Hedonism, that 25 cent word which means the pursuit of pleasure is another thing that Satan uses to try to keep the word of God out of our minds. If he can keep us so busy thinking about the football game and about the lake and about the fishing and about the hunting and about the next thing we are going to do that is fun and the pleasure that we want to give to our own selves, and there is not much danger of his word having a great impact on our minds as long as he can keep it busy with other things.(...) Jesus said to the Jews in John 8.37, "My word has not free course in you."(...) I wonder tonight as we all examine our own lives,(...) has his word free course in us?(...) Have we opened the door of our mind and said, "Come on in, Lord. Come on in, word. Let me meditate upon you. Let me seek with all my heart to do your will." Has his word free course in our mind or do we say to God, "I'll go so far and I'll go no further." And yet there are some people who truly open their hearts and receive the word into their mind. In Luke 8 and 15 in the same parable of the soils he says, "That which fell on the good ground, these are such as in an honest and good heart. Having heard the word, hold it fast and bring forth fruit with patience."(...) When God's word is received in the mind of a human being, the way I'm talking about tonight, that word of God causes a marvelous change in the thinking of that individual. This change in thinking is something that the New Testament spends an extremely great amount of time talking about. It is spoken of in some passages in terms of rebirth.

(...)

John 1 verse 12, the Bible says, "As many as received him," that is Jesus, "to them gave he the right to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name, who were born not of blood, nor the will of flesh, nor the will of man, but of God." Born of God.(...) You know, we in the churches of Christ have an inversion sometimes to talk about being born again. The denomination lists have sort of taken over that terminology, but let's explore it just a little bit. John 3, 5, and 6, Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of God." Verse 6, "For that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Before we undergo this radical change of thinking that we're talking about tonight, we are flesh. We are fleshly. We are worldly. We are people of carnal mind.(...) But when we are reborn by the seed of the Spirit, the word of God, we are no longer flesh, but we are spirit.(...) We are spiritual, in other words. Our thinking is no longer carnal. Our thinking is spiritual, and our minds have changed. We have been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, the word of God, which liveth and abideth. First Peter 1 and verse 23, "As human seed, when it contacts human seed,(...) produces a human, fleshly child. So the Spirit seed, the seed of the Holy Spirit. When it contacts the mind of man and is welcomed in, conceives a spiritual child of a spiritual nature, of a heavenly nature, and it contracts a change in the mind of man, which makes him not the same anymore as he was before." In 1 John 3 and verse 9, "Whosoever is born of God does not continue in sin," how come, John? "Because his seed abideth in him, and he cannot continue in sin, because he is born of God. The seed is the word of God. If it abides in our minds, if our hearts are meditating upon it," we can't live lives of sin. That text doesn't teach you, you can't sin one time. We know that we can sin, and we do sin. But it teaches that as long as the word of God is abiding in our hearts and mind, we cannot live a life of sin. We have to either put the word of God out of our mind, or live a life of sin. We can't do both at the same time, you see. And people who are born of God are people who are letting the word of God do its work on their brain, they're letting it do its work on their hearts and on their minds. This change is also spoken of as death to sin in Romans chapter 6. "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid, how can we who died to sin live any longer therein?" Now, I realize that both rebirth and death to sin have somewhat to do with baptism. You can't be born again unless you're baptized. You can't die to sin completely and complete that process unless you're baptized. But brothers and sisters, if we think that all there is to rebirth and all there is to death to sin is getting up here in the water, then we've missed the entire teaching of the New Testament. Unless the word of God has been received into the mind and the Holy Spirit through that word has been allowed to work his changes in the thinking of that person, there hadn't been any rebirth taking place. That person has just gotten off of wet and is the same kind of a person he was before he went down into the water. Death to sin, Romans 6 and 6, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away. What's changed? The old man, what is that talking about? It's not just the sins that are gone. It's the way we used to think that's gone. In Ephesians 4, verse 22, Paul tells us how you get rid of that old man.(...) He says that you put off as concerning your former manner of life, the old man that is corrupted after deceitful lusts and be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new man which after God has been created in holiness and righteousness of truth.

(...)

That old man is not crucified without a change of mind. That change of mind is affected by the word of God as it's received into the heart and in the thinking and in the life of an individual. After this death to sin has taken place, Paul says in Romans 6 and verse 10, the death that Jesus died, he died to sin once. The life that he lives, he lives unto God. Listen, even so, you also consider yourselves to be dead unto sin and alive unto God in Christ Jesus. That's a way of thinking to consider ourselves to be dead to sin. Sin is no longer an option for us. We're people who have dedicated our hearts and lives to live for God. Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive unto God in Christ Jesus. This change of thinking, as we alluded to a moment ago, is spoken of in terms of putting off and putting on. I know a lot of people who have tried to put off the old man and what they've tried to do in that regard is get rid of some habits. They've tried to quit smoking, drinking, cussing, and chasing the women and doing all this sort of thing. Well, that's good.(...) But, friend, you cannot put off the old man until you change the mind.

(...)

You can't get rid of the habits without changing the thinking.

(...)

It's the Word of God changing the thinking that helps us get rid of the habits, get rid of the bad stuff in our life. James put it this way, "Resist the devil and he'll flee from you, drawing near unto God and he'll draw near unto you." You cannot possibly do one effectively without doing the other. Ephesians 4, 22 to 24, "You put off the former manner of life, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God has been created in holiness and right righteousness of truth." 2 Corinthians 5, 17 is a worn out text, but it's fresh and new to me. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things have become new. Let me ask you a question. Why is he a new creature?

(...)

You say, "Well, because his sins have been washed away." I'll grant you that. I'll grant you that his relationship with God has changed, but, friend, principally, he's a new creature because he himself has changed.

(...)

God's Word, the seed of the Spirit, has impacted his mind and made it different. It's changed his thinking. It's changed who he is, and he's a new creature. He's not the same guy he was before. He doesn't think the way he used to think. He doesn't plan the way he used to plan. He doesn't make decisions the way he used to make decisions because God's Word has done its work in his heart. "Be not conformed to this world," said Paul, "but be transformed." Paul, "by the renewing of your minds that you might prove what the will of God is," that which is good and acceptable and perfect. A change of thinking is what the Word of God is able to do, and that is powerful. If you change the way a man thinks,(...) if you change the way a woman thinks, you have changed the life of that individual, and that is the power of the Word of God. It can make us new, and it is supposed to do that if we let it do its work.(...) In Matthew 15 and 19, Jesus said, "Out of the heart cometh forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, railings." These are the things which defile a man.

(...)

If all that stuff comes from the heart or mind of man, what do you think has to change before all that stuff can change? This change in thinking is called repentance in the Bible.

(...)

Repentance is precisely a change of mind. The Greek word itself, metanoia, means to change the mind. That's what repentance is, and that's what the Word of God does when a person lets it in. It causes repentance, and as a person continues to look into the Word of God over the long haul of a Christian life, he continues to change his thinking to become ever more and more like the Lord wants him to be. In 2 Corinthians 3, 18, "We all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror

God's Word, the glory of the Lord, we are transformed into that same image from glory unto glory even as from the Lord, the Spirit."

(...)

The fruit of the Spirit is produced in the life of people who let the Word of God do its work. Fruit of the Spirit like love and joy and peace and long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control, against such there is no law. Let me ask us a question together.

(...)

How loving do we want to be?

(...)

Or do we even think in those terms? Are we just happy with the way we are right now? We could care less about planning anything different. How loving do we want to be?(...) How much joy in Christ do we want to have?

(...)

How much peace of soul do we really want to shoot for in this life?(...) How much long suffering would we like to have in our character? How kind would we like to have ourselves be?(...) How much self-control do we really want to put up with in our life? God can take us further than we can possibly imagine. He can make us. He can make us new. He can make us people whose light shines so brightly that we can lead others to Him by the magnetism of who we are if we will let Him write this new existence in our heart. I will put my laws in their inward parts, foretold Jeremiah, and I will write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. Jeremiah 31 and verse 33, "The Word of God is one of the greatest ways in which

God can work in the lives of Christians." Remember Philippians 2.13, "It is God who works in you, both the will and to work for His good pleasure." He works in us through His Word.

(...)

But secondly, and this is the second and last point here, "The Word of God works in us through His providence."(...) The word "providence" is not even in the Bible. It's not a scriptural word. You can't find it from cover to cover the Bible. It's a preacher term.

(...)

The reason preachers say it is they're trying to escape saying what they're really saying.

(...)

Providence is God working in human affairs. That's what providence is.

(...)

God does work in human affairs if you read the Bible. In Romans 8 and 28, "He works all things together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose." Romans 8 and 32,(...) "Since God is for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son but freely delivered Him up for us all? Shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

(...)

The New Testament Christians believed that God had not gone on a long vacation,(...) that God had not left the country and left them all alone to do their thing by themselves, but that God was very much involved in their lives and in their work. And God is with His people as they do His work. In the book of Haggai, God had given His people a work to do, the building of the temple of God.(...) He said in Haggai 1 and verse 8, "Go up to the mountain and bring wood and build the house and I will take pleasure in it and I will be glorified," says the Lord of Hosts. In Haggai 2 and verse 4, God talked to the leaders of the people. He says, "Yet now be strong those rubbables," says the Lord, "and be strong, O Joshua, Son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and be strong, all you people of the land," says the Lord, "and work for I am with you," says the Lord.

(...)

Now how often have we used the terms?(...) Well, God be with you, or the Lord is with us. Well, look folks, is He or isn't He? Is it just us or is He with us?(...) Matthew 28, 19, "Lo, I am with you always," how long, "God, even unto the end of the world."

(...)

God is with us. Now what does that mean? How does that translate down to where you and I live? How is God with us? Well, I don't know all the ways. I don't know all of what He does, but I do know what He promises. One of the passages that I'd like to understand more is Hebrews 1, 14, talking about the angels.(...) Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to do service for them that shall inherit salvation? That's us, folks.(...) There are angels out there working for us somehow. Hebrews 13, 1, "Don't forget to show love unto strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."(...) I don't know what they're doing or how they're doing it, but I know that they are doing it according to God's Word. God both hears and answers the prayers of His people as they seek to accomplish His work. Are we a praying people when it comes to the work of the Lord in this place? We ought to be, but we oughtn't to pray unless we think somebody's listening,(...) unless we think somebody's going to get involved with our prayers. Nehemiah had heard that Jerusalem was broken down in the terrible state it was in. In Nehemiah 1, 4, he said, "When I heard these words, I wept and fell on my face, and I mourned certain days, and I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." Verse 11, he says, "O Lord, I beseech thee, let thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant and of thy servants,(...) and prosper thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." He was about to go in to see the King of Persia, and he begged his God to help him and give him favor in the sight of that man, and sure enough, the King of Persia just up and granted Nehemiah everything he asked and sent him back to Jerusalem to build the temple. Now, was that just a coincidence, or did his prayer and God working in human affairs have something to do with that? Well, I think God had

something to do with that.(...) In Nehemiah 2, 20,(...) to a bunch of the enemies of his in the land,(...) he said, "The hand of our God will prosper us, and therefore we his servants will arise and build." Now, you know about those "therefores" in the Bible. They're "therefore" something.(...) The hand of our God will prosper us, and therefore,(...) since God is with us, therefore we will arise and build. He didn't think he could build the walls of the city of Jerusalem all by his lonesome. He didn't think he and those people could do that without some divine help. And I want to tell you tonight,(...) if we think that we can do the work of the Lord in this community and be effective in it all by our lonesome, then we're badly mistaken. We can't do that. We need the help and the working of Almighty God to do what God has set us out here to do. And I'm sure that God is ready and willing and waiting to give us his help, as we'll trust in him and pray to that end. God gives his people strength to do the work. Have you ever prayed for strength? I have. How does he give it? I don't know, but I believe that he does. In Nehemiah 6 and verse 9, "The people of God were weak-kneed. The people of the land had scared them and threatened them, and they were hoping that their hands would be weakened so that the work would not be done." Nehemiah prayed one of the greatest prayers in all the Bible. He said, "O Lord,(...) strengthen thou my hands."

(...)

Can we pray that prayer?(...) If not, tell me why not after I get through here. Yes, ma'am, and yes, sir. We can pray that prayer. "Strengthen thou my hands." Does God do something? Yes, he does.(...) He strengthens our hands. How does he do it? I don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. It tells us he will give us the strength. That's divine help. That's outside help. Ezra 8 and verse 22, "The hand of our God is upon all them that seek Him for good, but His face is against all them that reject Him." So you see, the hand of our God is upon all them that seek Him for good. What does that mean? His providence is working with them as they try to do His great will in this world. God gives His people wisdom to do His work. One of the scariest things you can pray for is wisdom.(...) If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men liberally and upbraith not. "We let him ask in faith, nothing doubting, for he that doubtth is like a surge of the sea driven to the wind and tossed." Let not that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord, a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. What a powerful passage of Scripture.

(...)

God gives us wisdom in the school of hard knocks.(...) He gives us wisdom a lot of ways, and I hope through the experiences of our life He gives us wisdom. But the Bible says, "Let him ask in faith, nothing doubting, for he that doubts let not that man think that he'll receive anything from the Lord." I want to challenge this, brethren,(...) to pray and to pray and to pray and to pray in

faith, believing that the Lord can bless us, that the Lord can work with us, that the Lord can help us to accomplish the things that we need to accomplish together in this place. The Bible tells us to ask in faith, and I hope that we'll do that in a sincere way. God opens doors of opportunity for His people as they try to do His work. How does He do it? I don't know, but look at Acts 14 and verse 27.(...) "When they were come and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all the things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith among the Gentiles." You know, Paul looked at things differently than we do. We talk about all the things we've done.

(...)

You know what Paul talked about? He talked about all the things that God had done with them.

(...)

Isn't that a different way of looking at things?

(...)

Or in Colossians 4 and verse 3, Paul said, "With all praying for us that God will open a door for the Word to speak the mystery of Christ, for which also I'm in bonds." Brethren, earnestly, I plead with all of us, pray for us together, all of us, that God will open unto us a door for the Word to speak the mystery of Christ. God gives us opportunities. He reaches down in circumstances and people and things and creates opportunities for His people, doors for His people to walk through. Let's have the wisdom to recognize those doors and walk through them as He opens them to do great things for Him, but let's pray for those doors. Let's pray for those opportunities that God can help us to achieve. Second Thessalonians 3 and verse 1, "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the Word of the Lord may run and be glorified, even as it also is with you." That is a tremendous prayer, and it's a prayer that God will answer.(...) He will allow us to preach His Word and to have opportunities to speak it to various people and places for our lives collectively, to touch other lives, and for the Word of the Lord to run and be glorified if we are thinking and praying and trusting Him to that end.(...) What have we said tonight?

(...)

We've said it ain't just us.

(...)

We have said God's power is working in us. It's 1 Thessalonians 2, 13, "For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." If it's God's will,(...) God will help us to accomplish it. He has never asked us to do anything that we cannot with His great power accomplish. He works, in my view, in two primary ways. He works mightily in the lives of people through His Word. Will we open our hearts to it? Will we open our souls to it in a way that we never have before and let His Word change us and remake us and make us beautiful in the sight of the Lord and of man? God works through His providence. Let's pray for the hand of God to be with us as we seek to do His will. As a fitting close to this lesson, the words of Paul in Ephesians 3, verse 20, "Now unto Him who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh within us.(...) Unto Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen."

(...)

I hope tonight that this lesson will be a challenge to all of us as we seek in this week to live for Him and to work together with all of our hearts to do His will in this place. If you're not a Christian tonight, if you've studied the gospel of Jesus and you know what it teaches you to do, if you know that you need to repent of your sins and confess Jesus' Lord and be baptized into Him, then we hope that you'll make a decision to do that tonight. If we can help you respond in any other way in praying for you or whatever we might do, we encourage you to come while we stand together and sing the song.