

Renewal in the Word

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[0 : 00] I did a wedding once it was a really, it was a great wedding and the couple we were getting married, the way they spoke together, the way they looked at each other, the vows that they took, the words that they said just was really great and encouraging to see.

And then the next day after the wedding one of them said, well, I'm heading off to my own house now, it's been great, see you at Christmas. I'll see you at the next family gathering or wherever it would be. This marriage thing's great. I'll just see you a couple of times a year.

They never really spoke much after their wedding. They had no kids, there was no relationship ultimately. It was really weird, really weird. But also I went to another family's home when one of their daughters was leaving for America and she spoke to her parents and said how much she loved them and how indebted she was to them that she would always keep in touch.

And she arrived in the States bearing their name and she settled down. Our parents wrote her every day, every week saying how much they loved her, saying what she should watch out for and be aware of in the States and about their own boring life at home.

But the letters did speak a great deal about their love but she never read them. She never opened them, she was too busy, she never even replied. That's weird, it's a bit weird.

[1 : 40] Now, obviously these are not real stories. They didn't really happen. You see some of you thinking who's that wedding he did? Who was that? No, they're not real stories. But they're an attempt at provocative illustrations which sometimes might relate to our relationship as Christians with God's word, with the Bible.

You know that this is His living word to us. But sometimes it's like there's no relationship there with them at all. The Bible's closed for most of our lives. It's insignificant. It's unimportant.

We've got too much to do, too many things in our lives to consider the priority of listening to, relating to and building a relationship with God through Jesus Christ in His word.

And yet what I want to do today is stress for myself and for you also that the Bible is God's revelation of Himself so that we can know Him, so that we can understand Him. And Jesus is at the very core of that.

I know there's great and deep theology in John chapter 1 about Jesus who's given this word, this nomenclature here, as the word, He is called the word, the word became flesh and dwelt among us. And I know there's great depth and great mystery and great teaching in this.

[3 : 10] And even some debate about it. But at least at some levels we recognize as highlighting the importance of communication of God as communicating to us primarily through Jesus Christ.

But because not only in the person of Jesus Christ but in the Word, the Bible, which is all about Jesus Christ. Everything in Scripture, everything in the Word of God, in the Bible points towards Jesus Christ so much so that He Himself is called the word, the communication, the revelation of God.

And so we know that there's lots of things you could ask about the Bible and about what the Bible is like and how it's trustworthy and how it came to become the Bible and all these things.

And some of these things we'll deal with in our Wednesday evening series in the prayer meeting in the engine room which is called Doctrine Matters. We'll be looking at the Scripture itself and looking a little bit more at these questions. I'm not going to look at these issues today primarily. I'm just going to encourage a bit more of an understanding and a reading of God's Word for us.

So what is the Bible? Well, there are a couple of classic definitions of what the Bible is in the Bible that is self-declared in the Bible. And 2 Timothy 3 verse 16 reminds us that all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training and righteousness.

[4 : 50] It's breathed out. So there's a uniqueness in it. It's what God has breathed out to us. He has breathed and inspired the writers with what He wants them to share with us. It's infallible. It's without error.

It is what God wants us to know. So it's God breathed. But Hebrews 4 verse 12, and these are good verses to know and to memorize, that the Word of God is living, okay? The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword piercing to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

So it's a living Word, because it comes from the God who is still a living God, and it is His Word to us. It is how He communicates with us.

But in the third place we see, it is also, as we mentioned at the beginning, it's the revelation of God in Christ, and the Word that is Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we see Him as the one who is from the beginning, the one who is the Creator God, and the one who became flesh.

[6 : 06] And so if we love Jesus Christ as Christians, if we've come to accept Him as Savior and believe in Him as Lord, then we will love His Word, because His Word is a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is central to the Word. So that means that the Bible for us is not like any other book. It's never to be for us just a textbook. That's miserable, isn't it? Those of you who are at university or college doing exams, if you just compare the Bible to a textbook, then you're going to have probably, unless you're a really keen student, a negative...

That's sorry, that's maybe just a reflection in my own past. But it's more than just a textbook, okay? It's more than just... We sometimes think of it as a history book. And it is historical, and it does speak into certain areas and certain parts of the world and certain times in history, but it's much more than that.

Sometimes we think of it as a collection of moral stories or a book of wisdom that we can go to for reference and find out some moral guidance for our lives. And it's much more than that, and it must be much more than that for us, because there are lots of different books we could use that may give us the same information.

It is God's living voice through Jesus Christ, who is our God, our Lord, and our Savior, and I'm speaking to us as Christians. That is the place where we've come to, where we recognize that this is how God ordinarily tells us about Himself and reveals Himself to us so that we know more about Him.

[7 : 51] He's chosen this means to communicate to us through the Word. So why does it matter to us? Why does it matter that we read the Bible as Christians? And I'm going to encourage you later on to be reading the Bible every day as Christians in our lives.

Why does it matter? Well, it's that reality in the first place that God is with us, and the Word became flesh and dwell among us. You know, when you're a little child or you're a parent and you hear a little child shouting, Mom or Dad, where are you? Where are you? Or if you as a, remember as a child going into the house and not seeing anyone saying, Mom or Dad, where are you? And to hear that voice saying, I'm here, it's okay. Don't be afraid, I'm here.

That's exactly what the Bible is, as far as it's God saying He's not silent. It's God saying, yes, I am here. Christ, through the Word, is God's divine megaphone where He's communicated and revealed Himself to us.

And He says, I'm here, I'm with you. How often have we said that He also adds to that, don't be afraid. And so He speaks to us, and as we understand the Word, we will understand better Jesus with us.

The Word made flesh, that God comes into our sinful, broken and guilty lives to rescue us. And when we accept that and accept what Jesus has done for us and entrust our lives to Him, that's the first time the Bible will make any sense to you.

[9 : 31] It's the first time that it will become precious to you. When we have responded to the call of God to come to be rescued, to entrust our lives to Him, to come in repentance and faith, then it becomes that living Word.

And until then, it will be dusty and dry. Until we have seen our need and seen His beauty, we will never understand it as the love letter, par excellence.

And we will never look for this God speaking into our lives, because it will all be distant and far away and boring and historical and moralistic at best.

It will not be that personal Word that comes from knowing God and Christ personally. So it's God with you, and therefore a relationship with Jesus is core, as is a dependence on the Spirit of God and prayer, as we read.

So often we read the Bible in a superstitious way, don't we? Well, I better read a couple of verses, because then my day will go well. And we're not really reading it as if God wants to speak into our lives.

[10:49] We're not prayerfully expecting that, and we're not dependent on the Spirit to enable us. So God with you. But also, secondly, we see it's God guiding you. The Word is God's guidance for us.

Psalms 119 verse 105 says, Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. And I guess that links in with the passage in John chapter 1 where Jesus is called the true light, which gives light to everyone who's coming into the world.

So there is in Christ as disciples of Jesus, as followers of Jesus. Well, I've said it, we follow Him. Therefore He guides us.

He guides us in His ways of wisdom and His principles for living. His laws of love. I sometimes do a course with informal courses, people are getting married, and one of the chapters, very, not my idea, but it's just called from different books, called love languages.

The love languages, the way that love expresses itself in different ways. And that's where the Ten Commandments are. They are God's love language to us, how we love Him and how we love one another.

[12:04] And He guides us into that. Our tendency as people, our tendency, our sinful tendency is to say, I know better.

I know better than God. I'm wiser than God. God doesn't know my situation really, and I really wish He would do things differently and will have made His moral structure just a bit more in accordance with what I like.

I know best. But as believers, we've come to that place where humbly we accept and in love we accept that He knows best. And He reveals His will to us because He is God.

If He's not God, we can't worship Him, and we can't believe Him, and we can't entrust our lives to Him. More fool us if we worship someone who isn't God. He gives us this, as believers, this great manual for living, and it's radical, and it's counter-cultural, and it's not safe.

And it's very different to sometimes what we know best. And it needs us to give time and commitment to know the God who is guiding us in it.

[13:18] You know, when we're learning to drive, you have a driving instructor beside us, and they've got their own pedals, which is very comforting for other drivers as well as the learner driver.

And then when we pass our test, more often than now, we have a sat-nav, which guides and helps you to drive and not to get lost.

And in many ways, as we are in a relationship with Jesus Christ, the Bible is God's instructor, God's sat-nav, all kind of rolled into one in that personal relationship with us.

And He gives us these to be blessed for a life that is blessed. He doesn't do it to say, well, you know, you're going to have lots of laws and you're going to obey them because I'm God, whether you like it or not.

He does it out of love. These are the ways that we are created to live. We ignore Him, we go our own way, we're broken and we're deceived. And He says, no, I love you.

[14:23] I want you to love me because you are made to love me, and I want you to love one another. And these are the simple rules that through Christ and through the Spirit of God, you can enjoy living my way.

So God's guiding you, but within that God is also convicting you and convicting me. And we saw that the God's Word is living and it's sharp and it's useful for lots of different things, and it will convict us.

So, you know, even the great poets talk about love hurting. And that's no different in our relationship with God because God is truth. And we have often strayed from that and we go our own way so He wants to guide us back into truth.

Not our truth, not society's truth, but His truth. It's authoritative and therefore sometimes it's tough because He's moulding us and He's transforming us and renewing us into His image and into living His way.

And that's a wrestle for us. So I'm not pretending that reading the Bible is easy for us and understanding what He says to us. It's easy because we wrestle with the idea of being dethroned from the place of significance and importance and priority in our hearts.

[15 : 47] We wrestle with that. And it's easier for us to listen to the noise of the world around us and listen to our own hearts all the time. But our hearts can easily be deceived.

It's not enough simply to say, oh, I really feel God speaking to me in this. I really feel my heart is telling me, heart might be just telling us rubbish. Because sometimes it does.

It tells us simply what we want it to, as to do ourselves without reference to God or anyone else. Sometimes I just had to do that. I just felt in my heart.

But it's often our heart that is deceived. Our heart, my heart. And the way of love, the way of following God, He says, Jesus says, gentle Jesus, meek and mild, He says, if you love me, you will obey my commands.

Because they're the way of life and they're the way of hope and they're the way of blessing for us. But how will we know His commands? Is it intuitive? Is it instinctive to us? Is it simply what comes out of our... No.

[16 : 54] It is through His living Word. That's why He is given us it. And that's why we often keep it closed, isn't it? That's why we choose not to open the Word.

It's why we choose not to be students and disciples of the Word. Because it's a bright light and it's exposing to us and it's sometimes convicting. As we open it, the front page scandal is about me. It's about you, it's about what's in our heart. We open the Word and we say, oh, how does God know that? Of course He knows it and He shares that with us.

It's like going to the doctor and getting that dreadful diagnosis sometimes, except that there's healing, guaranteed healing. And He exposes not to simply expose but in order to heal, in order to love, in order to make us whole.

Now that makes His Word costly, greatly costly to us.

[18 : 00] But healing, healing pain, it's the good news of forgiveness as we come to Him honestly and trusting Him, cleansing, confessing our need of the Holy Spirit to speak to us into our need.

Not so much into everyone else's failings and faults, but into our own, and allow Him to heal us. Now I started at the beginning of that sermon talking about relationships, human relationships, a marriage and a family.

And the Bible does that at different places. It speaks about relating human relationships to God. But there's also a sense we can do that too much, because there's nothing.

There's no relationship compared with this relationship with God who knows our hearts, and who is willing and able to expose our hearts in order to heal us. There's nothing like it.

There's no other, at one level, no other relationship like it. He's not just my best buddy. He's not my friend. At that level, just my friend. He's more than that. He's God. And it's the Creator to the created.

[19 : 13] It's the sinner to the Savior. It's the mortal to the immortal. Now that's uncomfortable sometimes. But it's the Word that reveals that.

It's the Word that reveals who He is, and we wrestle with that. And that can be difficult in our lives to recognize and see. But God, so God is convicting us.

He's with us. He's guiding us. He's convicting us. But He's also renewing us. Romans chapter 12 and 1 to 2 says, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, wholly and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

And God be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that by testing you may discern what the will of God is, what is good and accept to Him perfect. And that comes from, we find His will in the Word.

We find His pleasure in the Word and the Word renewing our minds. It is a heart religion, but not only a heart religion, it is a head religion.

[20 : 26] It is a renewal of our hearts and our minds. And as our minds are renewed, it feeds into the renewing of our hearts. It's all together. You know, if someone needs a physical heart transplant, then they are very ill.

And when they receive that heart transplant, their health changes, their color changes, their demeanor changes, everything changes, their appetites will change.

And so that's what God is working in us as Christians. Through His Word, He is transforming our hearts and making us healthy and making us seek nourishment and have an appetite in His Word so our souls will be fed.

He's changing us towards Himself. It's a process. You know what it's like when you lose your appetite? Many of you probably will have over this last period when there was bugs and flus and everything, and you lose your appetite.

And even the nicest food looks wrong, doesn't it? Steak pie with new potatoes and then followed by apple or rhubarb crumble, your favorite. And yet when you're not well and you lose your appetite, you simply don't want it.

[21 : 43] It's not attractive to you. And then you know you're well again when you see the steak pie and the juices get going, speaking, sorry, to the vegans here.

I shouldn't have used a steak pie illustration. I should have said pesto pasta or something like that. So whatever is your particular appetite and whatever you enjoy, and you're hungry again, then you look forward to it.

And you know when you eat it, you get energy and you get zeal and you get zest once again, and you would never think about losing or leaving or ignoring or leaving out any of your three meals a day.

You wouldn't think about it. Almost without thinking when we're healthy, we eat. We have an appetite. We get hungry and we want food. And so spiritually, God is through His Word, seeking to renew our minds and renew our hearts, so that we understand God's will, giving us discernment and a love for worship and a love for Him.

Is our worship, our lives, our spiritual lives, are they dull? And is our worship together dull? I think that sometimes we'll reflect His place in our lives, or His place not in our lives.

[23 : 05] Knowing Him and knowing more of Him and being renewed in our minds and being transformed in our hearts is what will change our appetites and our desires for Him.

And how else will we know Him unless we know Him through the Bible and through His Word? That inspires us. That is where we find His promises.

That is where we learn more about Him, and that is why we desire Him. So that when we come together, for example, the preaching and the teaching, it's not a TED talk. Certainly isn't a TED talk. But it's not just a talk. There's a uniqueness about the Word preached, as we understand it from the Bible, because you're involved. Because you're seeking to learn from God's Word, as I need to be, that we're dependent on the Holy Spirit, at least ought to be, and looking for God to mold us or transform us or change us, convict us, comfort us, whatever it might be. And we need the Holy Spirit to do that.

You know, so as our preaching, and I tend to think our preaching is dull, ineffective and powerless, why would that be the case? That would be the case when we cease to recognize it as unique in the history of communication, as God's chosen means.

[24 : 33] Now, I have to say that may be the case that I feel personally about my preaching, but as a preacher in Saintsies, I think, since he's a great place to preach, I think there's a hunger for the Word. People generally don't sleep when we have the Bible.

They seem to be engaged and are listening. There's a love for the Word. People come to the city groups. They want to learn more about the Bible, and there's a hunger and thirst, and that's great. But I think that could always be improved and needs to be encouraged. I think we live in a day and a generation where there's deep ignorance about the Bible and reticence and negativity, even among Christians. It's very much less central in the lives of Christians than I think it ought to be. So we look for it to be significant. We look for this time together to be significant. It's only a tiny fraction of your week, a tiny, tiny fraction. But we do encourage you to make the Lord's Day a day that's different and special that you're committed to it, that you can relax under the Word and in worship and prepare for it and encourage you both morning and evening if you can.

We'll put tables out at night for the kids. They can come along and draw and things. There'll even be maybe one or two questions after the evening service if you want to discuss more about these things.

[25 : 56] So the Word of God is significant and important and vital to us. So I'm going to close just with one little thing about the daily reading plan. So we've got the daily reading plan. There's some

copies of it at the back of the church.

And oh, here it is. So that's the daily reading plan there. I would encourage you to take part and read part of God's Word every day.

Some of it is difficult. Some of it will be tough. Some of it we need to learn more about. But if you're a Christian here, you will know that there's been times in your life when God has directly spoken to you through His Word.

It may be a long time ago. It may be from your early days as a Christian, but you know that God transformed your life. He guided the choices you made.

He convicted you. He comforted you. He helped you. And that should be our ongoing experience, not something that is consigned to the past, to some strange religious experience.

[27 : 04] It's how He chooses so often, primarily, to communicate with us. So I would encourage you to read the Bible every day. Use this program or use any other means, or however you choose to do it, that's entirely up to you. These things are just there to help.

But as I close, can I just maybe throw out one or two objections you might have? I don't have time. It's far too much. I don't have time to read the Bible like that in my daily life.

Can I just ask you—all I do is simply ask you to consider the breakdown of your day, how much time you spend on social media or Netflix or socializing or reading other books.

We usually, in our lives, find time for the things that are important or the things that we love. So there's probably quite a reflection that only I can know about myself, only you can know about yourself, about what you regard as significant and important by how much time you spend in it.

And so time, maybe not an issue, is boring. Time may be an issue, but even if I do have time, it's so boring. You really want me to read through numbers? Really? I don't understand it.

[28 : 25] It's so culturally weird so much of the Bible. That's true. There are boring bits in the Bible. There's different genres of Scripture, the different purpose of Scripture, and you will need to do some work.

And some of them you can skim through, but there's a central message. Others are much more detailed and much more important. Go to the Gospels, work at it, pray through it. It may be that it's boring because your desires are not for Christ.

It may be, but you'll need the Holy Spirit and you'll need the help of God as you battle through that. And related to that, it may not just be boring, it may be just too challenging.

You pick up the word and it's demanding. It induces guilt, so you'd rather close it. You'd rather not read it because it exposes things about your heart and my heart that we know about.

That's good. That's real. That's a great place to be. That's a lot better than boring. It does expose our need because it's a living word of God and He is concerned. It is counter-cultural.

[29 : 37] It will have you in many ways swimming against the tide, but anything that's worth it is going to be costly, isn't it? If you've started a new year resolution, going to the gym to get fit, it's not going to just go into the gym and get changed and having a look around and flexing your soft, flabby muscles in the mirror.

We need to do something, don't we, if we go there? We need to actually feel pain in many ways if we're going to overcome our unfitness and become fit again.

The challenge is there to be overcome. It has to do with our Christianity. It's the same with God's Word. We can't give up the moment it becomes demanding or the moment God says, no, you need to do things differently.

You need to forgive that person. You need to stop being bitter. You need to stop being self-centered and proud and greedy and overly ambitious at the cost of other people.

That's what He speaks into. He speaks into our daily lives and He makes demands because He's God and because He's died for us and because we come to church and we praise Him and say, He's a great Savior.

[30 : 47] And He wants us to know Him as Lord because it's healing and renewing and making us more like Him.

Or you may say, it's a meaningless ritual. Don't ask me to read the Bible. I read it. It just becomes a meaningless ritual. I just want to read it when I feel that I need to read it. Well, yes, you're right. It can become a meaningless ritual.

But routine in and of itself is amoral. It doesn't have any value positively or negatively. It's the motive that you have that is important, that matters. You know, routine, we know routine can be

very good. Do you question routine when it comes to meal times?

Or I'm not going to eat just now. I do that every day. That's just become a routine. I'm not going to shower. I'm not going to shower every morning. It's ridiculous. It's just, I'll get in a routine that will be meaningless. We don't say that about things that are good and significant.

And routine can be good. It can be very good in our lives because routine in God and in His Word can refresh us and renew us and make us radical and unpredictable in the best possible way.

[32 : 02] Or the last objection might be, and there may be many more. I'm a bad reader. And that will be true for many people. Sometimes maybe we intellectualize things too much and make it out to be something that you need to be intelligent to do or you need to love reading.

If you're a bad reader, that's fine. Just read a tiny little bit of time. It's much more about hearing than about reading. So if you prefer to walk to work with an audio of the Bible, great. Just listen to it in your ear. You don't need to read it then, but you still listen and you hear what God is saying.

You know you can get the audio Bible in the New Testament read by Johnny Cash. What could be a better way of starting your day than reading Matthew 6, read by Johnny Cash?

Now come on, there are lots of things that God gives us to make it easier. And if we love Him, we can overcome the hurdles.

We can overcome being bad readers and the ritual thing and the challenging thing and the boring thing and the time thing. So I guarantee we will find reasons to do the things we love. And God's Word is God's Word. It is what He's given us. And He's given us it because it's living and because it will transform us.

[33 : 26] And I want to let the Bible of the last word, and Jesus said, when He was tempted not to think about God's Word, Jesus answered, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

And that is where we find the words from the mouth of God in the Bible. So I would encourage you to read God's Word. And next Sunday morning, Cori will look at prayer as the vital partner to our Christian lives and to reading the Bible. Let's pray.

Lord God, we pray that you would bless us as we seek to understand why you've given us the Bible, help us to wrestle with it, not just in a kind of glib and thoughtless way cast aside because we heard in a podcast once that the Bible is no longer relevant.

May we be better than that. May we understand that it is this great gift to us as it is Christ-centered and reveals Christ to us and is self-authenticating.

And we pray that you would help us to read your Word, to love it, to grow to love it, to work at it as we work at our careers, our fitness, our health, our families, our human relationships. May we work at our spiritual, heavenly relationship with you as we come in faith, in repentance and faith and salvation.

[35 : 06] Accept that free gift, but may we use that gift in our lives. So help us we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.