

Hong Kong Youth Conference (February 1997)

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Theme: Christian Living--The Life of Reading the Word

Note: All Scripture quoted is from the American Standard Version

Introduction

This morning, the theme “Christian Living” leads me to share on “The Life of Reading the Word.” Let us read a few passages from the Bible:

- *Psalm 43*

v1: Vindicate me, O God, and plead my case against an ungodly nation; O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man!

v2: For Thou art the God of my strength; why hast Thou rejected me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

v3: O send out Thy light and Thy truth, let them lead me; Let them bring me to Thy holy hill, And to Thy dwelling place.

v4: Then I will go to the altar of God, To God my exceeding joy; And upon the lyre I shall praise Thee, O God, my God.

v5: Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, The help of my countenance, and my God.

- *2 Timothy 3: 16-17*

v16: All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

v17: that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

- *Revelation 3: 8, 10*

v8: “I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

v10: 'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.'

Brothers and sisters, you may surmise, "We've been reading the Bible since we've been saved. Now we're fellowshipping on the Life of Reading the Word. Isn't it a little bit late?" The messages of the first two days, Consecration and Prayer, are topics we all know well, but we must experience them through time and in deed, not just in knowledge.

Do you have a life of reading the Word?

As we look at the life of reading the Word this morning, I want to pose one question, "Do you have a life of reading the Word?" Almost naturally and automatically, we all respond, "Oh, we've read the Word for a long time. Of course we do!" But notice the question: I did not ask whether or not you read the Bible, but whether or not you have a life of reading the Word.

We have all read the Word, but merely reading the Word does not mean we have a life of reading the Word. When we do read the Word daily, for what do we read? Some may reply, "Because others say that believers must read the Word; because I'm a Christian and I should read the Word." Still others might say, "Do we have a devotional life? Reading the Word is an important aspect of my devotional life; that's why I read-- because I'm a Christian." True, this is correct, but, brothers and sisters, we must ask for vision from the Lord. The life of reading the Word is not merely reading the Bible. Simply put, the life of reading the Word is whether or not we have read into the depths of the Word and whether or not the Word has penetrated us.

What is the Word of God?

Let us look at this lesson of why we must read the Bible from God's perspective now. When we examine the reason why we must read the Bible, we must first ask, "What is the Bible?" Naturally, we respond, "We know that all Scripture is inspired by God; it is God's Word." All this is true; however, brothers and sisters, I implore you to

realize what the Word truly is. True, the Word is the inspiration of God. But *what* did He inspire? This is crucial. If this is only a matter of content, then we have not gotten to the heart of the content. You have not touched the greater, more significant picture. You only know this is God's inspiration, but not what He inspired. If we do not grab ahold of this point correctly, then our reading the Word will be like reading other religious texts.

But thank the Lord! He gives God's Word to us; His Word has content, and not only content relative to man, but closely related to God. Therefore, we who read the Word a little more understand what the Bible is. Simply, the Bible is God using His Son as the Center to reveal His eternal purpose. The Bible is the revelation and manifestation of God's heart desire; it is the manifestation of His eternal purpose, and the center of His eternal purpose is His Son. This is the Bible and the foremost content revealed in the Bible, the central content.

That is why, brothers and sisters, we must know what the Bible is and what the Bible reveals when we read it. We know that God speaks to us through the Bible--it speaks His heart and what He wants us to understand of His heart. When we read the Word with this understanding, we have a direction, the goal.. Otherwise, our reading is superficial and comparable to reading other religious texts.

Praise the Lord! He gave the Bible to us to reveal Himself and His eternal purpose, the record of His works, and the ways of His works.

What is the ground on which we stand when we read the Bible?

Now that we know the content of the Bible, we can begin to read the Word for the sake of understanding God's eternal purpose, God's principles. But, perhaps we have not yet comprehended God's eternal purpose and principles; here, I would like to supplement some reality and facts, that being--what position are we in when we read the Word? More specifically, what is the relationship between God and us? If we can clearly see the relationship between God and us, then on this matter of reading the Word, we can stand correctly on a firm ground.

Let's use some time and explore this issue through a question. We are called by God. Brother Stephen Kaung, especially, shared on how we are a called people--what's the purpose for God's calling us? Is it for us to receive His grace? This is but a part of

His purpose in calling us. What is the whole, then? When we see the whole of why God called us, (as Brother Stephen already mentioned which I will reiterate), we see that God calls us not only to be vessels to receive His blessing and grace. Rather, we are called to accomplish His eternal purpose.

We have never thought that we are called to receive His eternal purpose. Certainly, we will not speak at length on this, but I want brothers and sister to note this reality: the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose is most definitely His own work, and He chooses a people who will co-work with Him. These people, if gained by God, become a channel through which He will work; if He cannot gain such a people, then His work is delayed, and the fulfillment of His work is hindered.

The fulfillment of God's eternal purpose

Brothers and sisters, when we read Ephesians, we read of such recordings. When I say "recordings," I mean the revelation of God recorded. We see talk about the fulfillment of His plan. Until that one day, all in heaven and earth are joined as one. This reality's fulfillment . . . where does it begin?

We read in Ephesians 1:12 that, "to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory." God has gained a people and they know Him--in Christ, they have hope; moreover, they are the first to hope in Christ. In these who first have hope in Christ, God's glory is revealed, and His praise flows forth. Then, because of this, step-by-step, all who have been made in Christ are as one. Now, I want to clarify this reality.

In Romans 8:20, all of "creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope." All of creation is under futility, but they have a hope. For what do they hope? They hope for the revelation of the sons of God. Who are the sons of God? Simply, God's church, and in detail, the sum of all the individuals who are saved by God.

In futility is not only man, but all creation. All wait for one thing--to escape this subjection. What will the waiting reveal? The sons of God--isn't that what is in Ephesians--those who were the first to hope in Christ? These people, gained by God, are used to be revealed as sons of God. Clearly, this refers to the Lord's return. Brothers

and sisters, notice the result--all under futility will rejoice because when the sons are revealed in glory, they shall be set free in glory.

Romans 8 tells us to enter into the glorious freedom of God's children. I have a personal view. According to the context, if we can flip these two terms around, we see that to attain the glorious freedom God's children, all that's subjected in futility will attain glorious freedom when the sons of God are revealed. Brothers and sisters, see the working plan of God. God desires a people who are the first to hope in Christ and entrusts His testimony and plan to them. He then uses these people to bring in the kingdom.

This is in Romans 8, a reality. But His plan does not stop at this point; God's plan extends to the new heaven and new earth. The fulfillment of God's plan, from the trajectory of fulfillment, is not about the work to be done, but about the development of fulfillment. Who are these who were the first to hope in Christ? Me, you, us, those who are saved by grace.

Brothers and sisters, when we read the Word today, we must stand on this ground. Why do we say this? Because God entrusts His testimony to us, the eternal purpose is also entrusted to us. If we do not know His eternal purpose, the recording of His past works and principles of His works, how can we manifest Him and how can we enter into God's eternal purpose?

Thus, brothers and sisters, we talk about a life of reading the Word. We want brothers and sisters to see a gracious matter. It is not merely a matter of reading or reading everyday. Brothers and sisters, take note, do we read into the Word, and through reading, do we let the Word penetrate us? This is the first issue we must deal with in our life of reading the Word.

To be fervent in the truth

God's Word speaks "He is," His works, recordings of His works, and His principles. Through our life of reading the Word, we are lead into a deeper understanding of Him. to enter and accomplish His eternal purpose, one who desires to be gained by God as a vessel cannot not understand God's eternal purpose. He cannot not know what God desires. If he does not know God's will, he will fervently work to a

point [?], but one day before the Lord, he might hear such words, especially in the last days, “Those fervent are many, but fervent in truth and the correct direction are few.”

So we see many fervent, but only a few fervent in truth. Brothers and sisters, remember the Lord saying, “One day, some people came before the Lord. They said, ‘Lord, did not we, in Your name, preach, pray and exorcise demons? How is it that You do not permit us to sit with You?’” Brothers and sisters, take stock how the Lord answered, “I do not know you. You evil ones, depart from Me.” Here is the problem-- they did much in the Lord’s name and even performed miracles--how could the Lord not know them? The Lord knows them, but not their deeds. There is no record of what they did, but they felt that they had done all this for the Lord in His name. Pity! the Lord has no record.

Brothers and sisters, if we are called by the Lord to be His testimony and to fulfill His eternal purpose, and we have not lived out all according to His heart’s desires, then the Lord will say to us one day, “I do not know what you have done; I have no record.” Oh, brothers and sisters, we must know what He works and how He works. And how do we know and understand? We must return to the Word of God.

A God Who speaks

We thank and praise our God. In the Old Testament, God spoke to our forefathers and prophets in many ways and much. Until one day, He let His Son speak. Today, God desires to speak to us. Hence, we know that our God is a God Who speaks. But here again arises a problem--many have a misinterpretation due to those who do not believe. Their thinking is, “The Bible is thousands of years old; is it not outdated? We can only accept the Bible as a basis.” Brothers and sisters, realize that this is wrong. Who speaks? God Himself.

What kind of a God is our God? He is a God from everlasting to everlasting. Time is irrelevant because He is not confined by time. Even though they are words from a thousand years ago, they are fresh today. Even if the words were from 3000 - 4000 years ago, they are fresh today because He is a God of eternity. More importantly, He does not change, and His Word is immutable. Brothers and sisters, when we read God’s words, we must not be affected by man; we cannot accept God’s Word with any

conditions. Such would be erroneous. God is from eternity to eternity; His Word recorded expresses His heart to us.

When we read the Word, we must see one thing: the way in which He speaks. Spoken long ago, recorded, He speaks now. How is this possible? He uses words spoken and speaks it to us now; may we listen. So although He spoke long ago, He is from eternity to eternity; therefore, what God has spoken, He speaks today. His Word remains until today. We must holdfast to this principle. Now, we can begin to read the Word.

How to enter the Word of God

This next thing we will discuss is complex, complex because man is so, but the Word is ever-abundant. How do we enter the Word of God? Before, we stated a problem, that being whether or not we have a life of reading the Word. Reading the Word is not equivalent to having a devotional life. Why? Because you have not entered God's Word and have not allowed His Word to penetrate you. The action of reading is there, but there is no life.

Take note--how do we read the Bible? There are many methods and ways, but we often hear many people say, "Use the five W's: Who, What, Where, When, and Why." Again, many have the Bible reading action, but not necessarily a life of reading the Word. What do the five W's bring out? They bring out application. Brothers and sisters, be careful; this is religious living. There is no life, only a movement--like a ritual. So how do we use this? This has nothing to do with God's eternal purpose and/ or desire.

Read the Bible and over again

How do we read? Regardless of how many methods and what many people say, I would like to share with you my personal practices. Read much. "What kind of a way is this?" you may counter. Not only read much, but read often. This is a way? Brothers and sisters, if we establish a life of reading the Word, this is not enough. We must confess that we want to pay little and gain much. We often want to swallow the whole Bible in a couple of days. How do we accomplish that? Commentaries! I do not oppose using commentaries, but you must have some basis in order to use commentaries. What

is the basis? The basis is a firm grasp of the facts of the Bible. Without the basis of the Bible, you will believe whatever people say, tragically.

Many years ago, a group of brothers and sisters loved commentaries, but did not understand the Word itself. They could quote many people, but what the Bible says, they had no assurance and could not confidently know. Brothers and sisters, this is a pitfall--when we enter the life of reading the Word, we must not be rushed. We must take it slow in order to take in each point and grasp the content of the words. We must read the content and grasp the content, at least for a general view. One may say this way of reading is not with much understanding, but it is needed.

Detailed reading of the Word

Just reading is not enough, however; we must be detailed in our reading. And this requires more time, obviously. So we must allocate time according to our schedule. Use the time to read much, use time to read detailedly. If we don't, it will be difficult to enter the purpose of God's word.

For example, earlier, Brother Christian Chen alluded to the Israelites and how they read the Bible for thousands of years, over and over, but they cannot see God's promise to Abraham--one seed--in Genesis 22:17 which reads, "indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies." Why? In *Galatians*, Paul saw this: not many seeds, but one seed. How did Paul see it? God gave him revelation--how? The Bible never says, but Paul saw.

An aside: The use of different translations of the Bible

Allow me to tell you my point of view as shown by example. Remember Brother Stephen's story of Isaac as a sacrifice in Genesis. We must not only have one Bible because different translations may have lack. If we read the Bible, we should have different versions, if possible, albeit not arbitrarily chosen; the versions need to be good. Brother Stephen mentioned the Darby translation--it is a very good one. Another is the Amplified Bible because its strength lies in the listing of many possible and multiple

meanings of certain words or phrases. Yet another is the New American Standard. Some are considered famous, but we must consider the wording.

Combination of detailed reading and use of different translations

Some examples of faulty translations require our discretion in detailed reading. For example, in one translation, it records, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent on the head” as compared to “The nourished one of the woman shall bruise the serpent on the head.” The seed of the woman and the nourished one of the woman are totally different. In Isaiah 7:14, “A virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name, ‘Immanuel.’” There is a great difference! A virgin denotes that Word became flesh and totally about how the Lord became man. A woman bearing a child is ordinary.

Of course, if we could understand the original language, that would be best, but we do not. Comparing English texts for Genesis 22:17 (as stated above)-- “and your seed” not “your seeds.” Paul had revelation from the Word of God. The Holy Spirit enlightened him.

Another example, this one from Brother Christian. Matthew 1:1 will show us how to read closely. In Chinese, the meaning is, “The genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the descendant of Abraham.” Notice the little parenthetical word, “son.” How is this possible? David and Abraham are not from the same time period; how is that one man is two people’s son in different times? Those unbelieving say that the Bible is not true and even chaotic. But we who know see God’s wonderful and glorious work in Romans 9 and Galatians 4. Son by promise. Oh! When Jesus Christ was in the flesh, He became the son of both David and Abraham by promise. The promise God gave to Abraham and David was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, Bible reading must be detailed, not arbitrary. You have read the Bible; what has God spoken to you? You do not know? Brothers and sisters, this attitude is only a movement, not life.

Reading the whole: reading verses in context

Also, when we read the Bible, we cannot just read one verse, but we must read for a complete thought. For this, we need practice. Now, the trend of studying the Bible is to study an individual word. I dare not say this is incorrect, but even a message is at least a sentence. And often, a sentence cannot express a message. We need more sentences, we need a paragraph. God speaks to us to deliver His message. When we read His Word, we must read into it in order to understand and get the message. We must see the whole. God gives us His message, and to comprehend it all, we cannot just read a little. We must read it all.

For example, memorizing particular verses can be good and bad. It is good because by having it memorized, we can capture some key points. On the other hand, it is bad as well. Let me show you an example: “All things are lawful for me” is mentioned twice in the Bible. We are happy because the Bible says we can do anything we want! If this is our understanding, then this is tragic. But Brother Wong said that if I read the Bible, then it is okay, and this is what the Bible says! But what is the whole meaning? You’ve left out the latter part, so of course you’re happy! Read the rest, “but not all things are profitable for me . . . but I will not be consumed by all things.”

Do you see, brothers and sisters? We must understand it all. If we do not, we are led astray, and that is too easy to do. We must read the Bible with prudence, taking heed of the context and other related passages. We cannot read it unscrupulously. Thus, in our Bible reading times, the secret is to take note of the context. Otherwise, we will not touch His heart desires. Instead, we will have only touched the fringes due to a partial, individualized fact. We must take note of the whole, then will we be able to see God’s heart and why He spoke. Often, we do not take note of the context, so we cannot understand God’s desire completely.

Where we are brought when God speaks and we read?

Where are we led when we see why He spoke? When we first started with Psalm 43, the psalmist was very despondent and sad. He was in struggle, in the midst of much difficulty, and in darkness because he could not foresee the future. But he prayed to God to send His light and His truth, bringing him to “the holy hill and to His dwelling place.

Then will I go to the altar of God, To God, my exceeding joy; and upon the lyre, I shall praise Thee.”

After we read the Bible, what happens? In Psalm 43, clearly, after God’s light shines, the psalmist is elevated to the holy hill before God’s throne, to behold His face, to meet God. His heart is enlightened, the darkness is subsumed, and he sees the Way. Praise and thank God! We read everyday, but we must see the truth.

Remember, brothers and sisters, the Lord said to the Jews, “You read and scrutinize daily because you think that you have eternal life and yet you do not come to Me for eternal life.” Brothers and sisters, the movement is there, but we have not been led to God’s face--why? You, likewise, think, “I read and have eternal life,” but God says, “No.” The Bible leads us before Him to gain life from Him because the Bible bears witness of Him (John 5:39-41).

Brothers and sisters, do you see? When we open the Word, we see the Lord and experience His ways, leading us into Him. We must have the life of reading the Word, not only habitual movements!

The Bible cannot be separated, but we must be separated

From this small perspective, we must take note of the content as a whole. All of the Bible is connected and cannot be broken. For example, in this life of faith, we must be separated. Is this just the word spoken? No. This is a principle of God’s way and God’s work. Since the beginning, there was light; light separated the darkness. In Genesis 1:6-7, God commanded for “there [to] be an expanse in the midst of the water and let it separate the waters from the waters. And God made the expanse and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse.” Following, God separated the animals after their own kind. Again, with Abraham--who separated him? The Israelites were separated to be a royal priesthood. The law says that they could not use two different material for garments. Praise and thank the Lord. He leads His people to be separated.

We must be separated. In salvation, we are separated. But from what/ The world. In judgment, there is another separation, the separation of the sheep from the

goats. At the time of the new heaven and earth, there is separation as well. When we enter the Word, we see the way He works and His principles.

Brothers and sister, take note of the content because the Word is complete and cannot be separated, as it is whole. If we separate it, difficulties will arise. In the Bible, we are told that believers and unbelievers are not to be yoked together. Some say the problem is on the word “yoke.” Their understanding is that on some specifics, we cannot be together, but on most matters, we can. But if we read the context, we still see a greater truth. We must take note of the content in our Bible reading so that we may understand and return to God’ purpose and live it out! A whole life of reading the Word not only reads and understands, but holds fast that we may use what He says to become our daily reality.

The church in Philadelphia was remembered by God. They lived in the truth of brotherly love. They heeded God’s word and did not deny it in the difficult times. They lived out the truth as God showed them. When we talk of separation, we must have this separation in life. But this separation is not about being different. It is not in physical realms, like when others eat, we do not eat. But the difference is in our heart and mind. Be separated unto holiness, unto the Lord. He is our direction, our standard, our Head, for God put Him above all things. He is the Head of the church and our Lord. All separation should lead us into this reality.

Conclusion

That He would bring us to this place where we are thus. If the Lord blesses with grace, we will have a correct attitude of reading the Word. We may penetrate into His Word. That we would be in the Word and the Word in us, so that it may guide, comfort, teach, and sustain us. Then, we are blessed.

The Lord said, “Blessed is he who meditates on the Word day and night.”

Let us pray:

Lord, through the spirit of wisdom and understand, help us to have a correct life of reading the Word. We confess that we are foolish, ignorant people. If You do not help us, we will not see the way. We will be lost in the trends

of the world; we will be lost out of Your eternal purpose.
But Lord, by Your mercy, keep us for You, that our paths
would not stray, that we would be led before Your throne,
that we would be led into the Holy of Holies, to live there.
May You gain this people to fulfill Your eternal purpose.
We worship You because You are gracious. In the Lord's
name we pray,
Amen.