

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Lord and His Word are my refuge in times of trouble and temptation
Pastor Dave Scherrer - February 17, 2013

I have good news for us this morning. I have an answer for those dark hours at night when it is so lonely and the thoughts of hopelessness and fear are so overwhelming that you can scarcely breathe. Does that happen to you on occasion? Somehow the mole-hills of the day become un-scalable mountains in the dark of the night. It happens to me. Sometimes I think that there is a really good reason we sleep at night during the dark. Under the cover of darkness, evil things have cover. Better to sleep than to be seeing things at night.

SEEIN' THINGS by E Field

I AIN'T AFEARD UV SNAKES, OR TOADS, OR BUGS, OR WORMS, OR MICE,
AN' THINGS'AT GIRLS ARE SKEERED UV I THINK ARE AWFUL NICE!
I'M PRETTY BRAVE, I GUESS; AN' YET I HATE TO GO TO BED,
FOR, WHEN I'M TUCKED UP WARM AN' SNUG AN' WHEN MY PRAYERS ARE SAID,
MOTHER TELLS ME "HAPPY DREAMS!" AN' TAKES AWAY THE LIGHT
AN' LEAVES ME LYIN' ALL ALONE AN' SEEING' THINGS AT NIGHT!

I remember that there was a favorite restaurant in Salem, Oregon that Susan and I liked to go to. They have these nice private booths and great prime rib. It was dimly lit and romantic. It was so dim in fact that you had to pay close attention to your step. I remember how elegant and romantic it seemed. Then one time I went there in the light of day when the restaurant wasn't open for business. What a different story. Dusty pictures on the walls, carpets that had not been deep cleaned for months, greasy handrails, spider webs. The hardwood floors were beat up and the tiffany lights fake. The light of day was exposing the sins of the establishment and what was thought to be an upper class establishment turned out to be mostly deception covered by darkness.

Darkness is a cover for things that are evil. I remember telling my kids that nothing good happens after midnight. Philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard, said: "Almost all evil deeds and intents are begun with the thought that they can be hidden by deceit. The kingdom of evil is built on lies, secrets, and darkness. It requires the absence of light to survive. Thus, for all its fearsome appearance, the kingdom of evil is structurally very weak. Turn on the light, and the cockroaches scramble to go under the refrigerator."

The Bible agrees:

John 3:19-21

¹⁹ . . . the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

And the Prophet Isaiah says much the same thing;

Isaiah 29:15-16

Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the Lord, who do their work in darkness and think, "Who sees us? Who will know?" You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay!

Have you noticed how often in the light of day all the temptations and accusations of the Devil seem to fade? Not that the whispered accusations weren't in some part true - perhaps in large part - but the hopelessness seems to ease when you finally see the light of dawn. Nothing has changed, only that the sun has come. And for some reason that changes everything.

It is the season of Lent, and this is the first Sunday of Lent as recorded in the Common Revised Lectionary of the Church Year calendar. Lent is a time of self-inspection and repentance and ultimately celebration as we anticipate the atoning death and the resurrection power of Easter Sunday. During this season we remember that God has always been true to His Word and made a way for his people. He has been our shelter in times of trouble and temptation. This morning we are going to be reminded that His Word saves us and centers us - especially in the dark times of temptation and despair. The Liar, the Prince of the Power of the Air has free reign now, but we can withstand his lies and temptations by knowing the truth and hiding the Truth, which is His Word, in our hearts for ready usage – for the evil one will tempt us! And our God has promised to deliver us!

The lectionary first leads us to a passage in the Old Testament. The worship team referred to it earlier. Let's look at it again:

Deuteronomy 26:1-4

“When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there. ³ And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, ‘I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the **LORD swore to our fathers to give us.**’⁴ Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God.

God swore to the fathers of the nation of Israel that He would give them a promised land. The next verses in the account remind us both of Abram's faith and God's faithfulness. It is an account of a promise delivered. God swore – “I give you my word” – and was good for it.

“I give you My Word”

That is a strong statement. I'm not sure it has the same meaning as it once did. There was once a phrase that had deep meaning in our country. Let me try a little test:

18 under - 60 and over - “My word is my __ (bond) __.”

Booker T. Washington describes meeting an ex-slave from Virginia in his book Up From Slavery:

“I found that this man had made a contract with his master, two or three years previous to the Emancipation Proclamation, to the effect that the slave was to be permitted to buy himself, by paying so much per year for his body; and while he was paying for himself, he was to be permitted to labor where and for whom he pleased.” Finding that he could secure better wages in Ohio, he went there. When freedom came, he was still in debt to his master some three hundred dollars. Notwithstanding that the Emancipation Proclamation freed him from any obligation to his master, this black man walked the greater portion of the almost 400 miles back to where his old master lived in Virginia, and placed the last dollar, with interest, in his hands.

The man told me that he knew that he did not have to pay his debt, but that he had given his word to his master, and his word he had never broken. He felt that he could not enjoy his freedom till he had fulfilled his promise.”

When we speak of the Word of God, lots of images may come to mind. The **Bible is the Word of God** – a collection of promises delivered. The **Word of God is Jesus Himself**. The Gospel of John tells us that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The **Word of God is Truth** for there is no lie in God. Psalm 119 tells us **“The sum of your word is truth, And every one of your righteous ordinances are everlasting.** (Ps 119:160). But it is more than that. Our reading in the Psalms this morning reminds us that the Word of God is our refuge and our fortress:

The Word of God: My Refuge and My Fortress

Psalm 91:1-2

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

² I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

When I think of a fortress or a place of refuge I think of a fort or castle that the troops are staged in and then they go out to do war and if the war goes badly, you run back to the fortress for protection. This fortress of God is not just something we run back to when we are getting the tar beat out of us. It is something that goes with us night and day, because God is with us night and day. Even those dark nights where our very soul seems to be at risk because the prince of darkness is accusing us and tempting us and lying to us we need not fear – because the shadow of the Almighty covers us.

The word of God is our refuge but it is also the assurance of our faith:

The Word of God: the Assurance of your Faith

Romans 10:8-13

⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Let me just say, you do not have to be unsure one more day. Do you sometimes wonder? Did you come here this morning not sure if you would make it to heaven? I can tell you straight up that if you have placed your faith on good works - on being good enough - and the hope that God 'grades on a curve' you will deeply disappointed. I promise you, you are not good enough to darken the perfection of heavens gates.

But if instead, in your heart of hearts you believe that Jesus' life and death and life again is enough to cover your sins then all you need to do is to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. Say it with me now "Jesus is Lord," Say it with me again, "Jesus is Lord." Those are not magic words they simply reflect your heart and God can see into your heart. Check your heart this morning, if you believe with your whole heart the Spirit will testify to you of your faith. Then confess with your mouth and be assured – you are saved!

The word of God is our refuge and the word of God is our assurance of our faith and the Word of God is our protection from temptation.

The Word of God: Our Protection from Temptation

Will you stand with me for the reading of the Gospel?

Luke 4:1-13

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

⁴ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" ⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to him, "To you I will give all

this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.”
⁹ And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,” ¹¹ and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”
¹² And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of the Gospel.

What we find here is a promise made good. Jesus said, “In the world you have tribulation but take heart I have overcome the world.”

The beloved disciple John said it well when he proclaimed, “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” Jesus faced His hour of temptation, more than once I suspect. But in this narrative we see the secret of defeating the liar. It is the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Do you see how the liar used half-truths and passages of Scripture out of context to try to deceive our Lord? Those should sound familiar. Those are the same lies and temptations and accusations you hear at night. Some small part Scripture, some small part fear and pride and a bold face lie sandwiched in between. You remember the first lie? “You will not certainly die,” “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Pride, fear and a bold faced lie. And down they fell because they did not take God at His Word.

Knowing the Word of God and hiding it in your heart gives you power because you know that Jesus said He would be with you and God’s word is His bond. You are not alone even in the lonely moments of darkness and gripping fear. The protection of the Lord - His refuge and fortress - goes with you. The assurance of your faith gives you courage to face this liar and Jesus has shown us that the Word of God spoken to the liar will eventually make him flee. Not for good. He will always be upon you looking for another opportunity, just as he did with Jesus. But each time you resist and he flees, you get stronger. Each time you choose to obey God, the tempter loses sway in your life. You have to make the choice to know the truth, to hide the word in your heart and then to have the discipline of mind to call upon that truth when the liar lies and the courage to obey against all odds:

Let’s try it:

If the liar says “You are a sinner. God hates sin and right now God hates you. You might as well give up the journey now.”

John 1:12	I am God's child.
John 15:15	As a disciple, he calls me friend.
Romans 5:1	I have been justified and while I was a sinner Christ died for me.
1 Corinthians 6:19-20, and 1 Peter	I have been bought with a price (not just silver but the precious blood of Christ and I belong to God.
1 Corinthians 12:27	I am a member of Christ's body.
Ephesians 1:3-8	I have been chosen by God and adopted as His child.
Colossians 1:13-14	I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.

Let's try it again:

If the Devil says, "You are a loser, you don't measure up and you will never amount to a hill of beans. You are an insignificant person and God has lost sight of you."

John 15:5	I am a branch of Jesus Christ, the true vine, and a channel of His life.
John 15:16	I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit.
1 Corinthians 3:16	I am God's temple.
2 Corinthians 5:17-21	Title, task and testimony. I am God's Ambassador and I am a minister of reconciliation for God and I know that God made him who knew no sin to be made sin on my behalf that I might become the righteousness of God in Him.
Ephesians 2:6	I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm.
Ephesians 2:10	I am God's workmanship.
Ephesians 3:12	I may approach God with freedom and confidence.
Philippians 4:13	I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

And if for some reason your mind fails you, pick up the Bible and read it aloud. Read from the Psalms and speak to the voice and remind him that you are God's and He is greater. Grab a hymnal and sing the great songs of our faith, songs that testify of the faith of our fathers and of the mighty fortress that is our God.

You will find words like this:

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

Prayer