

The Importance of God's Word

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MATTHEW 4:1-11

Also found in Luke 4:1-13 and mentioned in Mark 1:12-13



Reading: MATTHEW 4:1-11

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’ Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”’ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.” *Matthew 4:1-11 NIVUK*

OUTLINE

God's Word, the Bible, is important because reading, listening and understanding it is *all about developing our relationship with Him.*

Good morning, my name is Daniel and I've been a member here at Streatham Baptist for about 12 years. For the last two years I've also been working part-time for the Church as our communications coordinator.

If you were here throughout January, we were looking at Prayer in our Sunday services and today we start a new series for the next 6 weeks on the Word, or God's Word, the Bible. You won't get lost if you miss out on one, but you will see a theme emerging as we go along, and you can also catch up on YouTube if you're not able to be here for whatever reason, life happens!

So.

This morning. I want to ask a question: **why** do we read the Bible? the Scriptures, the Word of God? Or just The Word.

As I looked at Matthew 4, and as I thought about this question, I realised that there are many possible answers, with far too much to dig into in one morning, so we're going to look at just one possible answer to that question today. And that answer is:

→ **We read The Word, because The Word is *all about deepening our relationship with God.***

Matthew 4:1-3 (*The Message Translation*)

Next Jesus was taken into the wild by the (Holy) Spirit for the Test. The Devil was ready to give it. Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting forty days and forty nights. That left him, of course, in a state of extreme hunger, which the Devil took advantage of in the first test: "Since you are God's Son, speak the word that will turn these stones into loaves of bread."

Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy saying: "It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God's mouth."

→ **It takes **more** than bread.**

Now, what's your favourite meal in the whole world? Your favourite dish? If you could have anyone cook you anything, what would it be? Turn to the person next to you, tell them your name, and find out their favourite food... Maybe it's bread?!

Well, the boys in my family have a couple of favourites. And they also like to cook. So here's Toby at work in the kitchen, on the left he's rustling up some home-made KFC hot wings which and on the right, a really fun thing to make yourself is sushi. It's great, chopping up all the different ingredients, rolling it carefully up and trying to slice it without squashing it and getting the rice stuck to everything...

However, we've just read:

→ **Man shall not live on bread (or sushi...) alone.**

→ But it takes a steady stream of words from God's mouth to stay alive.

So, what does this mean?

It means what most of us already know in the back of our minds... And a lot of non-Christians and even atheists have an inkling towards... that just having our material needs met, isn't enough. Many people know that relationships are more important than money. We can have food and shelter but if we don't have other people in our lives, it's all meaningless.

We need love. We need relationships. And not just human, shallow, fallible relationships, but God's perfect, enduring, sacrificial, deeper-than-oceans love. Otherwise, we're not really alive.

So here is something that having kids has taught me about love. I have three children and they are now 8, 10 and almost 12. When Emily was a baby, our relationship was one-way. All the love was given from my side, because she had no knowledge, no understanding, no capability. One of the greatest feelings in the world is when your child is learning to talk, and for the first time they toddle up to you and say "I love you Daddy".

And it's just a simple, beautiful love. But as they grow, that love becomes deeper, more meaningful, because they start to understand the lengths and depth and time and money and energy that you have invested into them. And so the mutual love between you and your child grows, it deepens, it becomes mature and actually more meaningful. And so, when we don't know God or we're just a "baby" Christian, our love for God is beautiful to Him, but in some ways it's quite simple. And that's fine, because that's how it begins. But if we are to develop our love for God, to grow in our relationship with Him, then we have to grow in our understanding

and in our knowledge... And how do we understand His character to begin to love Him more? How do we see the depth of the sacrifice that He made for us when He sent Jesus to die, because he's SO in love with us? Because he cares SO deeply for us?

We grow to understand, by reading His Word.

The Word is *all about our relationship with God.*

That's the importance of God's word.

We can start to grasp the enormity of what He has been orchestrating from the Genesis story until now:- not just the death of Jesus (which is the single most important moment in the history of God restoring us to Him) but also the whole scope of His redemption story through the ages.

So, back to the question: Why do we read the Bible, the Scriptures, the Word of God?

Because we want to deepen our relationship with God.

God's Word is not just "Soul Food".

It's actually much more than "Food". Now, we need to care for our whole being - including our bodies, mind and spirit, and that's why next Sunday we are having our Health MOT clinic after the service - in the atrium - but our #1 priority is our relationship with God - and God's Word is our route to deepening that relationship - because it's no good having a healthy body, if we don't have a relationship with our creator.

We can have a simple and beautiful relationship with God, just like a small child with their parent. But to develop that relationship and to have a deeper love, we can grow in maturity, knowledge and understanding.

And we can't do that effectively by reading just a few chapters or verses, now and then, or by only reading about the life of Jesus, or by skipping the bits where thousands of people are slaughtered (because it makes us uncomfortable).

We've got to fall in love with God's Word. The easy bits, and the difficult bits.

We've got to be thirsty, and we've got to drink it in.

Because we want to deepen our relationship with God.

And this is where it gets difficult:- because in my life, there are a lot of things that I tend to end up prioritising above reading the Word.

So let's look at Jesus' example.

The language of the Message translation has always struck me.

“Jesus prepared for the test, by fasting forty days and forty nights.” That always seemed odd to me. If someone asked me to get ready for a potentially gruelling set of challenges, that might test my mental, physical, emotional strength, I don't think not eating for 40 days would be at the top of my “getting ready” list.

Now, it was in fact God who had brought Jesus to this place of hunger. “Jesus was taken into the wild by the Spirit”

So, this preparation was in fact Jesus learning to trust his father. To trust that he would not, in fact, starve to death, but that his father God was in control. There is a deliberate, divine parallel here, because we know that the passage Jesus quotes to the devil in reply is from Deuteronomy 8. “It takes more than bread”.

Now if you go and read the whole passage, you'll see that Moses is reminding the Israelites about their time in the desert, when God provided Manna for them to eat, so they did not starve. But what happened in the desert? God told the Israelites not to store up the Manna each day, and not to collect it on the Sabbath, and that he would provide.

But what did they do? They didn't listen and they didn't trust God. They kept trying to store it up, and they went out to try and collect it on the Sabbath even when there wasn't any to collect.

So, getting back to Jesus' example. Would he do any better in the desert?

Would Jesus trust God, or take things into his own hands and transfigure the rocks?

What does he do?

He thinks back to the Scriptures that he knows so well, and reminds the devil (and more importantly, he reminds himself) that food is not his number one priority.

Doing God's will is his number one priority. Trusting in God's provision. Not satisfying himself. Listening to every word that comes from God's mouth... He's been reading the scriptures. He knows who loves him. He knows who to trust. And he tells the devil, and he tells himself.

His relationship with his father is his top priority. Not grabbing at the things that will satisfy him. But Listening, listening to a steady stream of words from God's mouth..

Listening to the Scriptures being read aloud in the temple.

Reading the scrolls himself. Discussing with the teachers of the law, like the time his parents thought he was travelling along with the rest of the family and they had to trek all the way back to Jerusalem because he was still there, learning about the scriptures, questioning the learned and the wise, grappling with God's Word. We can see that Jesus was thirsty for God's word. He was in love with the voice of his father.

Of course, Jesus returns to eating once his time in the desert is over. Because many of our natural desires are not sinful if we put them under God's timing and under God's authority.

Note that Jesus did not say to the devil "I don't need to eat".

The devil is not tempting him to **eat**, but actually to stop trusting God, his father.

So if you head to YouTube, or google around for five minutes, then you'll probably find a dozen sermons on this passage talking about how you need to know scripture in order to combat temptation:- and on the surface, that's exactly what this passage teaches us. That's a good truth to hold on to.

But seeing the true importance of the Word, is much more than that.

The importance of God's Word is understanding that the Bible is not just a way to combat temptations, it's not an instruction manual, or a historical work, or an epic narrative, or a collection of songs and poems (although it features all of those things) but it's actually our single most important way of knowing God and developing our relationship with Him.

God's Word, the Bible, is important because reading, listening and understanding it is *all about deepening our relationship with Him.*

Are we living it? - How to love God's Word.

Snatching moments for prayer I find possible, but with Bible reading I find it more difficult. But the Christian walk is not supposed to be easy. It's a challenge.

Jesus was actually quite a challenging character. He managed to put quite a few people off following him, because he seemed to make it sound like hard work at times.

"Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you? The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, 'This is why I told you that no-one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.' From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."

John 6:61, 63-66 NIVUK

But this isn't to discourage you:- this is to challenge you.

Now, for me, I know that if I listen and agree with a sermon, it means very little in my life **unless I make a plan.**

I become like the seed that is scattered on the path, that only has shallow roots. At first, enthusiasm carries me through, but soon my lack of roots or of a real plan for change means that I simply slide back into the status quo of work/children/netflix/dog walk/weekend!

So now I'd like to have a time of reflection, prayer and planning. We're going to play some music and you're welcome to use the time to start to make a plan for getting into the word, or to pray with someone you trust or by yourself.