

# The Power of the Word for Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] I want you guys to open up your Bibles this morning to 1 Peter chapter 1. We're going to finish chapter 1 this morning. We're going to begin in verse 22 and read all the way through the end, which is only four verses later in verse 25.

So I want to ask you guys as you turn there to stand with me as we read from God's Word together. 1 Peter chapter 1 beginning in verse 22. Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth, for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God.

For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord remains forever.

And this Word is the good news that was preached to you. We give you great thanks for this good news that we've received, and pray right now that you would allow us to rejoice over it this morning.

I ask in Christ's name. Amen. You guys take a seat. Oftentimes we are very concerned to figure out and to determine what others deem as right or wrong, and what sorts of things we ought to deem as right and wrong.

[ 1 : 32 ] How do we assign these labels to the activities that we see around us, and to the groups that we see around us? And sometimes our focus remains upon the acts themselves.

Is this right or is this wrong? Is what this group is pushing and proclaiming, is that right? Is it wrong? How do we categorize things?

And we are understandably concerned to categorize things, and we ought to do that. But I think far more important than asking the question, is this right, is this wrong, is taking a step back and asking ourselves, how do we determine whether or not something's right or wrong?

By what standard do we judge whether or not a certain person's activity, or whether or not things that we are involved in, or things that we are thinking or feeling or doing, by what standard do we determine whether or not something is wrong?

It's really, in reality, you have to admit that the standard by which you determine right and wrong is far more important than the labels that you place upon things, because the standard determines the label.

[ 2 : 40 ] So, for instance, if you were talking to someone who was a member of a radical Muslim group, the standard by which they determine whether or not something is right or wrong is that everything must submit to Sharia law, everything must submit to the teachings of Muhammad, and anything done to further that end is understandable and right.

And so you stand back and you watch on the news and you think, why would they strap a bomb onto someone's chest and have them walk into a crowded place to people they don't know, to kill people that they know nothing about them?

Why would they do that? Because in their worldview, what determines right and wrong is a focus that says, that's okay. Because it furthers the cause of subjugating people and trying to corral people into submission to the teachings of Muhammad.

And so anything that serves that end would be acceptable in that worldview. So it matters a great deal what standard you use to determine what's right and wrong.

And so if you look at our culture in America, what's the normal, most common standard that most people use to decide whether or not something is right or whether or not something is morally wrong?

[ 3 : 57 ] Most of the time, the standard held out is, well, so long as you're not harming someone else, so long as you're not causing any kind of emotional or physical harm to another person, then you should be allowed to do and what you want to do should be sanctioned, whatever you want to do.

And it's okay. It's right. It's only wrong if you harm someone else. But that doesn't fit with the biblical worldview. A biblical worldview comes and defines sin not as a slight against another human being, not as harm done against another human.

The Bible defines sin as refusing to give God or failing to give to God the glory and honor that He deserves. So that in all that we do, we measure it by this standard.

Does it honor and glorify God? Does it bring Him glory? Does it please Him? We don't measure things simply by the standard of whether or not we cause harm or don't cause harm to someone else.

There are things that we can do, things that we can think, things that we can feel that are morally objectionable, not because they cause harm to someone else, but because they do not bring honor and glory to God.

[ 5 : 15 ] In fact, the Apostle Paul in Romans 3, verse 23, you know that verse well, I'm sure. He defines sin as a falling short of the glory of God.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, reminding us of what he says over and over in the two chapters previous to that. That the downfall of his humanity is our refusal to give thanks to God, our refusal to acknowledge God in all that we do, so that sin at its essence, wrongdoing at its essence, is a failure or refusal to glorify God as He ought to be glorified.

That's the essence of how we determine right and wrong, not whether or not something harms someone else. But if we leave it there, then I think we've missed a crucial component.

Because those who would argue that, well, to sin is to hurt someone else, they are hitting upon an important biblical theme. They are hitting upon something that is very close and near to the heart of God.

Because we can't divorce the ideas of not glorifying God and harming other people. Because to cause harm to another person is to inflict injury and insult upon the image of God.

[ 6 : 36 ] And so in that way, any harm that we cause to other people, the Bible would say that is sinful, that's wrong, if it's an ultimate harm to someone else.

So, for instance, if you want to hold your place there in 1 Peter, we're going to come back to Peter, but I want to show you this. In Genesis chapter 9, after the flood has subsided, and God once again comes to visit Noah, to visit humanity, and speak to them, and He renews the covenant with creation that He had made with Adam in the garden, now with Noah and Noah's sons, listen to what He says.

He says in Genesis chapter 9, beginning in the middle of verse 5, He says, From His fellow man, I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image. In other words, murder is wrong, because those whom you murder are made in the image of God.

So that you cannot ultimately divorce the ideas of causing harm to people, and failing to glorify God. To do one, is to do the other. If you harm others, if you murder, if you just maliciously hurt other people, then you're doing damage to the image of God, and therefore you're sinning.

[ 8 : 03 ] In fact, it is held out as one of the worst sins that we can do. When you look through the history of Israel, idolatry stands out above all the other sins, as that which brings God's judgment upon the nations.

But what is the worst form of idolatry? What does the Old Testament, what do the prophets hold out as the most wicked, evil, heinous form of adultery that can be committed?

Human sacrifice. Because not only is it a bowing down to other gods, it is a hurting, a murdering, a killing of the image of God in man, in order to bring honor and glory to a false god.

It's the height of sin. It's the worst that can be done. And the prophets over and over condemn it. You cannot ultimately separate these two things.

Yes, we want to begin by defining sin as a failure to glorify God, but we want to recognize that the first, that the most common form of sin among us is the wrong that we do to other people.

[ 9 : 18 ] You can see it in the scriptures. You see it right after the fall. The first recorded sin in the Bible, after the fall, outside of the garden, is murder among Adam and Eve's children.

If you move forward just a few chapters to just before the flood, and you read, what was it that brought God's judgment down upon the people? It was the increasing violence of the people.

They were incredibly violent. They were a wicked, wicked people, which is why, after the flood, God gives this command to Noah and his sons. Because things had gotten out of hand before the flood.

There was just, violence was run amok. And so God gives them two basic commands in the midst of that covenant ceremony. He says, first of all, you're not going to eat meat with blood in it, which doesn't make sense to us.

But if you understand that these people were behaving in an animal-like fashion, it begins to make sense. He's saying, you're not an animal. Don't act like an animal. And then he says, and don't kill other people. Don't murder, because murder is a slight against the image of God in man.

[ 10 : 18 ] Don't do it. And so we see very early on in the pages of Genesis that sin takes root in the human heart and flourishes oftentimes in harm that we do to other people.

You see it especially in the family relationships as they play out throughout the Old Testament. Abraham and Lot at odds with one another. You see it in the midst even of David's own family, rape and murder and incest.

In David's, the king's own family. Over and over we see this. We see sin manifest itself as one man or one woman does harm to another man or another woman.

So it should not surprise us when we come here to 1 Peter. In the midst of Peter's commands and exhortations for us to be holy. He's commanded us to be holy as our Heavenly Father is holy.

He's commanded us to fear God. He has commanded us to walk in such a way that we give honor and recognition to the price paid to set us free.

[ 11 : 30 ] Not just from the penalty of sin but we saw last week also from the power of sin. Christ has redeemed us, we have seen, not only from our guilt, He has redeemed us from the slavery that we once were in to sin.

And in the midst of the Apostle Peter teaching us and showing us what it means to live a holy life, to be a holy person, to measure up to God's standards of holiness, he says this in verse 22.

He says, Now having purified your souls by obedience to the truth, I think that means now that you're saved. Having purified, I think, has a reference to the fact that you have now been, you have been forgiven.

The Spirit has come, He has sanctified you according to verse 2, you sanctified in the Spirit, that is, He has set us apart for the purposes of God. Our sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ.

We've been sprinkled with His blood according to verse 2 as well. So our sins have been wiped away. We're a clean slate. Having purified yourselves by obedience to the truth.

[ 12 : 36 ] We've seen that this phrase obedience in reference to the truth is a way of referring to faith in the Gospel, faith in Christ. We saw it in verse 2 that we have been elect for obedience to Jesus Christ.

So all Peter is saying is, so now that you have been forgiven, now that your sins have been washed away through faith in Christ, through obedience to the truth. That's happened.

But then he says something curious. Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love. That word for is extremely important because it tells us that one of the purposes, one of the goals of your salvation is that you might have produced within you a sincere and authentic, a genuine love for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Think about that. It's not merely a byproduct of being saved. It is one of the primary purposes of being saved. God rescues us. He delivers us.

He sent Christ to shed His blood on the cross to redeem us so that we might love one another. That's immense if you can wrap your minds around it.

[ 13 : 51 ] It is not an add-on. It's not as if, well, be saved and then hopefully you will begin to love other Christians. Hopefully you will have love for other believers in your heart at some point in your walk with Christ.

That's not at all what Peter is saying. Peter is saying, you have been saved for this purpose, for a sincere brotherly love. But that doesn't necessarily mean that it's automatic.

Because if it were automatic, he would not follow it up with a command. He says, having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

So first he says, it is the purpose for which you've been saved. Now we would say, not the ultimate purpose, we know that from the rest of Scripture, but it is one of the purposes for which we've been saved.

That we might love one another. And yet, we are commanded to love one another. So it is not automatic.

[ 14 : 56 ] Yes, there is a fundamental transformation that happens within your heart when the Spirit comes to dwell within you and work within you. And he will, over time, began to produce love for others.

In that sense, it's inevitable. But whether or not it happens quickly, whether or not it happens to a large degree in your life, depends upon whether or not you are obedient to the command.

Love one another. Love one another earnestly from a pure heart. And then he comes back again to give us another reason. You love one another because you've been saved.

It's one of the purposes of being saved. Now he says, love one another since or because you have been born again. And now we begin to see a picture of how this is going to happen, how love is going to begin to work down into our hearts and then be produced in our lives.

It begins with the new birth. Aside from being born again, this is not going to happen for you. This sincere, heartfelt, deep love for other Christians is not going to happen for you if you've never been born again.

[ 16 : 08 ] What I'm not saying, I'm not saying that you cannot love if you've never been born again. Okay? I'm saying that you cannot have the kind of love that Peter is talking about here in this passage if you haven't been born again.

All of us have experienced love. All of us know what it is to love. Parents naturally love their children. Children naturally, most of the time, love their parents.

Okay? Love exists among us because, after all, we are created in the image of God. So even among those who are lost, even among those who don't know Christ, we still love.

But the kind of love that Peter is talking about, a love that is produced for people that you may not even know a love for those who are also in Christ is a love that begins and cannot happen apart from the new birth.

So you must be born again. So Peter says, love one another because you've been born again. Because something has happened inside of you to enable you to love.

[ 17 : 15 ] But how exactly does that happen? How does that work? First of all, how have we been born again? And what power is it that works the new birth within us and gives us that kind of new life?

What power is it that causes the new birth that also has the power to produce and cause love within us? What power is it? Peter tells us, it is the power of the Word of God.

Notice what he says, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God.

How have we been born again? Through the Word of God. The Word of God has power and through it, the Holy Spirit works so that he creates within you a miracle, new life.

Now Jesus says, in John chapter 3, that when it comes to the new birth, there's a very mysterious aspect to it.

[ 18 : 21 ] Because the Spirit, like the wind, blows where he wills. It's mysterious. You can't predict the action of the Spirit. You can't look out on a crowd and say, okay, I think this guy and this girl over here and those four people over there and these two over here looks to me, from everything that's going on, pretty sure the Holy Spirit is going to cause those guys to be born again.

I'm pretty sure that that's what happens. You can do that. You can't trace and track and figure out the work of the Holy Spirit. But that doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit doesn't work according to a normal pattern because he does.

The Spirit works through the Word so that when the Gospel is proclaimed, the Spirit works through the Gospel, through the power of the Gospel to cause the new birth. And those in whom he has caused the new birth, the Word is at work.

And the Word continues to be at work among them. And it is in fact the Word itself that produces and grows our love for one another.

Notice what he says about the power of God's Word. He describes it with two phrases. He says that it is living and it is abiding. That Word abiding is crucial because the Word of God does not work for a little while and then stop.

[ 19 : 46 ] It remains. It continues to work until it accomplishes its purpose. It's not like everything else that we experience. It continues on. It is powerful. It is effective.

It will not end its work at some point in time in your life. The Word will continue to work. And then he moves to the Old Testament in order to prove his point.

Verse 24. He's going to quote from Isaiah chapter 40 verses 4 and 6. He says, The Word is living. The Word is abiding. It remains. It continues to work because all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers. The flower falls. But the Word of the Lord remains forever. Now, I think that Peter quotes this particular verse because it would have had a very direct connection to the people to whom he's writing.

Because the people, as we've seen, to whom Peter's writing are people who are spiritual aliens, spiritual exiles. He says at the very beginning of this letter, he refers to them as the elect exiles of the dispersion.

[ 20 : 55 ] Throughout his letter, he calls them strangers. He calls them aliens. They're foreigners. Because they have a heavenly home now.

They have a spiritual home. And this world, this earth, is not our home if we belong to Christ. We are pilgrims here. We are aliens here. Peter picks up on that thought that he has throughout his letter and he goes to Isaiah chapter 40 because Isaiah chapter 40 is written for Israel when they were in exile.

Israel is in exile in Babylon and Isaiah writes this chapter to comfort them. God speaks to them through the prophet to give them comfort. In fact, I want you to turn over to Isaiah chapter 40 so that you can see this in its entirety.

Isaiah chapter 40. Listen to the words that he speaks to these people in exile. Comfort. Verse 1. Comfort. Comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

[ 22 : 10 ] In other words, your time of exile is over. I'm coming to rescue you. I'm coming to bring you back into the land. And then there's these well-known verses.

A voice cries in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. These are the words that John the Baptist quotes at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

So we already know that in Christ, this prophecy is fulfilled in Him. Make straight in the way of the Lord. Make a desert highway for our God.

And then he describes the power of God in making a way for His Word to go forth, for the Gospel to go forth. Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill be made low, the uneven ground shall become level, the rough places a plain.

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. In other words, God is sending forth His Word.

[ 23 : 14 ] The mouth of the Lord has spoken. The prophet is crying out and as that Word goes forth, it will be as if you were building a highway through the wilderness.

And so powerful is that Word that every mountain falls down before it and it blazes a straight path. So powerful is that Word. It need not dip down into the valleys.

The valleys themselves are lifted up as the Word goes forth. It is a straight and clear path. Nothing can hinder it. Nothing can slow it down. The power of God's Word of comfort is at work and it will not be slowed.

Its progress will not be stopped. It will move forward. And then he continues. Verse 6, A voice says, Cry. The prophet replies back, What shall I cry?

And here it is. All flesh is as grass and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers. The flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it.

[ 24 : 13 ] Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever.

In other words, the prophet is saying, I realize that you are in captivity in a land in which you have no power. Powerful nations have overrun you and taken over.

I am aware of that. But the kings of Babylon, the kings of Persia, the kings of Assyria, all of these conquering nations around you, they are like grass to me.

And every year the grass dies. And their greatest accomplishments are like the flower that blooms in the midst of the grass.

and every fall the flower falls off and dies. This is what these nations are to me, God says. They are nothing to me.

[ 25 : 19 ] They die and they fade. And as surely as the grass dies, as surely as the flower wilts and falls to the ground, so these nations will be accounted as nothing to me and they will fall and I will bring my people out of captivity.

I will bring them out of being foreigners. What God is saying to Israel as they're in exile is do not worry. My word of comfort is powerful and even those great and powerful nations that to you seem unstoppable and unbeatable.

They are nothing to me. And if my word goes forth and says that I'm bringing you back and I'm delivering you from a land of slavery, if I'm delivering you from exile, nothing can stop it.

Do not worry. My word is powerful. The rest of the chapter God continues to herald the power of his redemptive word.

And he does that by highlighting his own power in a broader sense. For instance, he says in verse 12, Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span and closed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?

[ 26 : 34 ] Who has measured the spirit of the Lord and what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult and who made him to understand? Who taught him the path of justice and taught him knowledge and showed him the way of understanding?

Behold, he says, the nations are like a drop in the bucket and are counted as the dust on the scales. He takes up the coastlands like fine dust.

Verse 17, All the nations are nothing before him. They are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness. To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare him?

Answer none. He goes on and he begins to make fun of the fact that these nations have created idols that cannot speak, that can do nothing. They're created by craftsmen and the craftsman bows down and worships them.

They're worthless. And then in verse 21, Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

[ 27 : 36 ] It is he who sits above the circle of the earth and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them like a tent to dwell in, who brings princes to nothing and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

Verse 25, To whom then will you compare me? That I should be like him, says the holy one. Lift up your eyes on high and see who created all these. Who brings out their host by number, calling them by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power, not one of them is missing.

Verse 28, Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not grow faint or weary.

His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might, he increases strength. Even youth shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted, but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not grow weary. They shall walk and not faint. This is the power of God at work.

[ 28 : 52 ] He has made everything that is, and the nations are as nothing to him. And he says, in contrast, my word remains, bides forever.

You cannot really begin to understand the power of God's word unless you understand the power and majesty of God himself. He does not speak his word, and he does not send his word forth without his power.

It comes with omnipotent power. And here's the amazing thing. Peter tells us at the end of verse 25, in this word, this word is the good news that was preached to you.

Wait, I thought this word from Isaiah chapter 40, I thought that was for Israel. I thought that was about the deliverance of Israel from exile in Babylon.

I mean, that's what Isaiah was talking about, is it not? How can that very word be the word that was preached to us in the gospel?

[ 30 : 18 ] Literally, he says, this word was gospelsed to you. How can that be? Because even God's mighty acts of redemption in the Old Testament were all meant to point to his work of redemption through Christ for his people under the new covenant.

All of them. The exodus from Egypt, it's not just a good story about the defeat of Pharaoh and splitting the sea. it's a picture of our redemption and the release of Israel from exile to bring them back into the land.

It's not the end of the story. But can you imagine having been one of the exiles who was released and you went back into the land and you thought that all of these great things were going to happen that Isaiah talked about and the other prophets spoke of.

You thought, this is it. Now the kingdom is going to be set up because we've been set free. All of these prophetic promises are coming true and then you get to the land and you've got to build a wall and you've got to build a temple.

It gets knocked down later on by somebody else and they build another one. You're there for centuries, 400 years, no kingdom.

[ 31 : 43 ] First the Greeks come and they overrun you again. It feels like you're in exile again even though you're still home. The Romans come in and the Romans are ruling and the Romans are doing whatever they want to do in the land.

Would you think to yourself, what did you mean Isaiah? God, what were you trying to tell us? Because you said you're going to bring us back and you have all this mighty power and you're going to do all of these things.

I think what you would have thought is he's not finished yet. he's not done. Because it wasn't until the Messiah came, it wasn't until the Christ came that God began to complete his work of redemption that he promised in Isaiah.

And it is in us and to us and for us that that redemption is being worked out. it's not merely for a small little nation of people in the Middle East.

It's for all those who are in Christ that these great promises are coming to a reality and to their fulfillment. This is the word, this is the good news that was preached to you.

[ 33 : 05 ] The word of God is just as powerful now as it was when it was spoken through Isaiah the prophet. God is no less able to accomplish all that he purposes now than he was able to accomplish then.



And part of the purpose of his great redeeming word is that we might love one another. Consider that.

Infinite power directed not only to cause your heart to come alive and to give you spiritual life in the new birth but infinite omnipotent power aimed to make you loving toward your brothers and sisters in Christ.

And so the question really becomes if the word has this kind of power what shall we do with it? how are we to respond to this word?

What are we to think? What are we to make of it? I'll give you a preview of next week's sermon because he goes on to address that. Chapter 2 verse 1 he says so since this word has been preached to you so put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up into salvation if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

[ 34 : 48 ] this word is preached to you so put away these things and long for these things.

The word of God has come to us in power and it can regardless of your temperament regardless of the things that you've done in the past regardless of what others have done to you and continue to do to you it can transform you and make you into the kind of person who loves other believers without hesitation without reservation we often think but you don't know what this person said you don't know how badly I was wounded in that church you don't know how much this person irritates me just be honest we're not a big church and yet there are probably still at least a couple of people here that irritate you right yes no they are I know it because I hear it from you there are people that irritate you that's alright because the word of

God is powerful enough to overcome your frustration with someone else's personality or the things that they say or the things that they do the word of God is powerful enough to overcome those things and cause you to love those people do not begin to think for one moment that their irritating tendencies or your anger that is still within you or any bitterness from past experiences that you still hang on to do not for one moment begin to think that those things are powerful enough to overcome the infinite power of the word of God aimed not only to redeem you but aimed to make you into a loving person nothing nothing nothing in your life nothing in your heart nothing in your mind can overpower the word of God so open it so read it don't settle for having this word this good news preached to you 40 minutes on Sunday morning open it so that it's powerful might begin to work in your life and your heart and fundamentally transform the way that you see other

Christians let's pray together we know theologically intellectually that the word is powerful we wouldn't come every week to open it up and read it and think about it and pray over it if we didn't believe that father we don't need to be convinced that your word is powerful what we need is for you to demonstrate its power in our lives and I pray father that we would be a people so consumed with your word that the power of your word would be unleashed in every area of our lives so focused on your word love for you that love for one another would well up in us so much so!

that the strangest among us the most irritating among us would be the most prized the most loved among us come and do a work in our hearts through the power of your word we ask in Christ's name amen