

I Thes. 2:13

Adventure Sunday Five
 Second Baptist Church, Lincoln, NE
 March 21, 2010 Stephen Wisthoff

Hear The Word...Believe....Do

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

We've all heard it! "When all else fails, read the directions." When I get something new that requires assembly, I tend to remove the parts from the box, lay them out, set the instruction manual aside, and begin my best effort at putting it together. It gives me this optimistic and egotistical sense that instruction books are for dummies. I think, "If I don't take time to read the instructions, I should save all kinds of time and I'll be done in no time." After a few moments of observing that my efforts without the instruction book have gone awry and things aren't fitting together so well, I succumb to using the instruction manual. By the time it is complete, it has taken me twice as long to assemble the item than if I had taken time to follow the instruction. My wife says it's a "GUY THING". A few years ago when I put together our gas grill, when I was finished I still had a handful of parts left. My wife, either thinking she was being helpful or being funny asked, "What are all these extra parts for?"

Often times in counseling people over matters of brokenness and trouble in their lives, I discover fairly quickly that they hadn't read the instruction manual for life. In fact, it is pretty clear to me that they have a whole bunch of extra parts lying in a pile that they had not incorporated into the plan. Parts like *LOVE* or *PATIENCE*. A couple pieces of *TRUST* are lying over there unused. Missing are *HONESTY*, *FORGIVENESS* and *HOPE*. That tool they need to put their whole life together called *FAITH* is sitting there unused.

I don't know if you know it or not, but you come complete with an instruction manual. It's called the Bible. The word of God. Holy Scripture. That books that sits on the coffee table with a layer of dust. That book that is the text book for our sparsely attended Bible studies and Sunday School classes. Then when life throws us a wammy, we suddenly find ourselves asking, "What just happened? How do I deal with this? Why is this happening to me? Is there any hope for me at this point?"

Yet in the pages of this book are the instructions, and fairly clear, too. Ever read some of the instructions for assembly? They are not always so clear. As you know, during this adventure of LENT, we are imagining what it would be like if Jesus came to visit us in worship on a Sunday morning. Lets say he sat right back here in the midst of us. How would it change our behavior, our thinking, our whole attitude. In the past weeks we have seen how it changes the way we worship, the way we love one another, the way we put aside sin, and the way we serve Christ. This morning we are moving to week five. “WERE CHRIST TO BE BODILY PRESENT IN OUR CHURCH THIS SUNDAY, WE WOULD SURRENDER TO THE TRUTH OF GOD’S WORD.”

Listen again to verse 13 of I Thessalonians Chapter two: ¹³ **And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”** When we realize that these are the words of God himself speaking to us, then we realize that the Bible is unlike any other book in the world. It gives us cause to surrender to the authority of this great book. It contains the truth by which we can undergird our lives. See, Satan, the evil one is working overtime to convince us that right is wrong and wrong is right. It is no wonder Christians are walking around in a state of confusion. The values we learned in Sunday School and at Bible camp are suddenly viewed as obsolete. We hear in the media and from people around us that there are no absolutes and that what’s good for you is truth as long as you deem it as truth. Young people come home from college with a philosophy that says there are no absolutes. We are prone to fall into this if we set aside the instruction manual and try to put the pieces together ourselves.

I am praying for revival in our country and in our world. There have been times in history when revival broke out in England, Scotland and in frontier America. In more recent years, revival has occurred in Korea, China, Africa and South America. At the very heart of each of these revivals were the same elements: (1.) Prayer. (2.) The breath of the holy spirit. (3.) God’s word and a renewed obedience to it. When God’s word takes on an authoritative position in the hearts and minds of people, then it speaks to them clearly and completely. Whenever God’s spirit is moving, people are attracted to the truth. In the days of D.L. Moody, Charles Spurgeon and Billy Sunday; people hungered for truth. Right now in our country, people are hungering more for a form of self-help and peace than they are for truth. Since truth has taken a backseat to peace of mind, people are wandering all over the place trying to find this illusive peace

while giving little attention to truth. They are perfectly satisfied with a lie because it brings them a momentary pleasure and they've been deceived into thinking that this is what brings happiness.

Today as we envision Christ being here in our presence, several things can begin to take place. First, if we sense his presence, we will be more inclined to let Christ speak through his word. I hope that as each week goes by, there is a transformation taking place in your life. I'm hoping that each week you are less focused on "Going to Church", and more focused on worshiping God in the presence of His son Jesus Christ.

See, occupying a pew benefits us very little, but dwelling in the presence of the risen Christ is everything. It is life-transforming and life giving. Each week as you come here with an open heart, you hopefully have a stronger sense of his presence. It should transform sour faces into happy, joyful expressions.

And as you hear the word of God proclaimed, it should not be, "Nice Sermon, Pastor!" but rather, "Wow! How God spoke to me today from his word!"

I'm hoping that a number of you came to worship today having prepared yourself as I talked about a few weeks ago. You have a prepared heart. You've been spending more time in prayer and in reading God's word. And now you've come to church expecting that God is going to do something within you. There's a hunger. That is the way we need to approach the Bible. We open the pages expecting to receive something that is life transforming. The only way this can happen is if we approach the Bible as divine authority. To do any less is no different than just picking up any old book. It is interesting and it contains some good advice, but it has no real authority over my life.

Russian Matinee Idol Alexander Rostovzef came to Christ years ago while playing the role of Jesus in a sacrilegious play entitle Christ in a Tuxedo. He was supposed to read two verses from the Sermon on the Mount and remove his gown and cry out, "Give me my tuxedo and tophat." During one of the performances, as he read the words, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted,**" he began to tremble. Instead of following the script, he continued reading from Matthew chapter 5 ignoring the coughs, calls and footstomping of his fellow actors. Finally, recalling a verse he had learned in his childhood in the Russian Orthodox church, he spoke the words of the repentant thief on the cross, "**Lord, remember me when though comest into your kingdom.**"

The word of God is a powerful text when the Holy Spirit is applied. It can transform lives. But how about people like you and me who have committed our lives to Christ but still find we have some serious struggles? Remember the message from a couple weeks ago about “reversing destructive habits that have their grip on our lives.” We continue to face temptation and there are days we really struggle. I remember that verse I learned as a child: Psalm 119:11, “**Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.**” Memorizing scripture has kind of gone out of fashion in the church. Yet even if you don’t memorize scripture, it is a powerful exercise to meditate and reflect on select passages. Let it permeate your soul so that when you face crisis, these passages stand as a lifeline, a source of rescue when you need it the most. When we are on the brink of moral failure, scripture can pull us back from the edge, stop us in our tracks, and head us in the right direction.

Scripture can also reverse a wrong philosophy. For example, we learn from our culture that if someone hurts us, we are to become empowered and hurt them before they hurt us. But Jesus teaches us something entirely different – something that involves humility and forgiveness. It involves responding to people in love. It is scripture that reminds us that the ways and the philosophies of the Lord are different than what we find in the world. The world teaches us that we are to chase after happiness and that how we feel in the moment is what is most important. Advertisements on TV tell us to set aside impulse control and live for the moment. The Bible tells us to be people of self-control and temperance, living in moderation rather than excess. The Bible teaches us that joy is more important than happiness. Joy is based on a relationship with Christ that is eternal. Yet we have to read and understand scripture to be able to discern these things. It is the source of wisdom.

If we say we are Christians, but ignore the instruction manual and try to go it alone, there’s going to be some important parts left over. In the end, life will be weak and defective. So read the instruction manual. Let it guide your life. It doesn’t work very well to try and function without it. AMEN.