

Authority of scriptures in mission -

God's Word: Sharper than a sword! Hebrews 4:12

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Introduction:

A Son asked his father if he was allowed to drive the car. The father said, "Yeah, if you read more in the Bible, get better in school, and cut your long hair." After a few weeks the son came again and asked the same question. The father answered, "Right, you read more in the Bible and are doing better in school, but your hair is still long!" The son replied, "But dad, I read about people in the Bible who had long hair too." The Father, "Yeah, but they walked and didn't drive. Go!"

What is my relationship to God's word? How does the authority of God's word apply in my life and in mission? This is my topic which was given me to speak on.

Let me start by saying this:

No book in the world is more important than the Bible.

The Bible has now been translated in over 2,200 languages partially or completely.

The Bible is not only the most purchased, most read, most translated, and most quoted book, but with distinction it is the most effective and powerful book.

The conclusion from Hebrews 4:12 is:

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

The Bible is a living and effective book.

This book and the words of this book have changed the world.

The Holy Scriptures impacted the:

- "Bill of Rights" and the laws of many states
- Establishment of the German Clinic Bethel through business people
- Establishment of the Red Cross by Henry Durant
- Establishment of the Volksbank (Bank in Germany) by F.W. Raiffeisen
- Establishment of deaconship, charities, and many aid organizations, universities, hospitals, and orphanages
- UN- Universal Declaration of Human Rights - 1948
- Leipzig's Monday Demonstrations against the DDR Regime - began in 1989 in the St. Nicholas Church with prayer and Bible reading
- Justice Movements: M.L. King Jr., M. Gandhi, D. Tutu, N. Mandela, L. Boff, and many more - quoted the Sermon on the Mount

But the Bible is a library of 66 books of differing genres:

Parables, government histories, speeches, love stories, visions, laws, narratives, words of wisdom, prayers, building reports, songs, etc.

The Bible collects over 1,000 years of literature out of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Greece, and Italy.

- This book describes for us the beginning and the end of the world
- It describes heaven and hell.
- It tells us who God and the devil are.

- The Bible shows us how awful sin and death are.
 - But the Bible also shows us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, can give us eternal life through His death and resurrection!
- The Bible is God's infallible Word!

Martin Luther spoke of the "Viva vox evangelii", the living voice of the Gospel! And that's what will be covered first in this lecture. Not only is God a living God. His Word is also a living word.

1. God's Word lives - viva vox evangelii

1.1 God speaks today through His Word

For many is the Bible an ancient book, that has very little significance for our lives today. And with that I don't mean the people who don't believe in the Bible. There are many Christians who assert that the Bible is God's Word, but they don't believe that God still speaks through it today. It is true that the books of the bible were written 2,000 to 3,000 years ago. At that time God spoke to the people who listened to his word and who wrote it down.

Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:16-17, *"All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

Peter said in 2 Peter 1:20-21, *"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

This book is no "dead letter", but even today there is spirit and life in this book. Already as God gave the law to the people, He spoke through Moses: Deuteronomy 32:45-47 *"When Moses finished reciting all these words to all*

*Israel, he said to them. "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. **They are not just idle words for you - they are your life.** By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."*

John 6:63:

"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you - they are full of the Spirit and life."

But pay attention! This book is no oracle. It contains no mysticism and no secrecy.

Some like to apply it as such, but the Bible is preprogrammed against its misuse.

Example:

A young man wants to know, what he should do for God today.

He opens the Bible and reads from Judas, "Then he went away and hanged himself."

No, that is not what God wants from me today. He opened the Bible again and came to the passage, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Another young man wanted to know which woman he should marry. He wanted to consult the Bible and opened it randomly to the story of Elijah and read, "And there came a long drought." "Thank you, God!" he prayed, "Now I know what my wife should look like!"

Some are of the opinion that we can hear God in the same way today. Given, I have also asked God for such leading. I have also opened the Bible and waited for God to speak to me. Occasionally he does that too, but I cannot expect that God will answer me in that way. God wants us to take His Word seriously and study it. He wants us to read it in its context and understand it. The one who wants to understand God and His Word, and who wants to take the Bible seriously, will read the it in context:

He will research the historical context.

He will question the cultural background.

He will consider the meaning in its biblical context.

A foundational principle from the reformation reads as follows: "The Bible interprets itself!"

We need neither special intelligence nor higher educational qualifications to understand the Bible.

For the study of the Bible we need neither a B.A., nor a M.A., nor a PhD in theology - and I say that as president of a theological seminary. We need the Holy Spirit and the readiness to always newly read the Word of God.

In his introduction to the interpretation of the New Testament, Adolf Schlatter, a famous German theologian, communicates the following idea: We study the Bible by reading and reading and again reading it.

Jesus said to his disciples in John 14: 25-26

"All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

Wilhelm Busch, an evangelistic Pastor in the Lutheran church said strikingly, "The worst enemy of the Bible is not those who attack it. Much more dangerous are those who speak positively of it but yet who haven't truly heard "the **word of God** in the Word".

It isn't enough for us to believe that God spoke to people.

It is not enough for us to believe that the Bible is God's word.

We must listen to God when we read this book.

It is a living book and God speaks through His Word even today.

My concern is that we believe that God did signs and wonders earlier, but not anymore.

My concern is that we believe that God spoke to the people in the past, but can't speak directly to us today.

Exactly the opposite is the case:

God never speaks more clearly as then, when we open this book and read it.

When we read the Bible, we are hearing God speaking directly.

When we want to encounter God today, then we must only open His Word and already then He begins to speak.

If we also thereby understand God, that is another question.

But God bound Himself in this book. Perhaps we should say, "This Word is bound to God and not to the people who wrote it.

Martin Luther drastically formulated the following in opposition to the

"Schwärmer", people who were too charismatic in his view:

"When one lets the Word fall and searches for Christ outside of the Word, one seizes the devil."

With that is the danger highlighted and the deciding point is made.

Everything must be measured and proofed according to this Scripture, the viva vox evangelii.

In Psalm 119:11 we read:

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I may not sin against you."

This book daily holds a mirror in front of me.

It shows me, who I am and how God sees me.

God's Word lives!

This Word is alive and we can take God at His Word.

1.2 God can be taken by His Word

When I say, "God can be taken by His Word," then I mean that God can be taken by His Word.

The whole Bible is God's Word which speaks.

The biggest challenge we have is not to formulate a confession in regards to the Bible.

I take it that we all confess the Bible to be the word of God.

I hope also that we confess that this book is infallible and complete.

But when we speak of the Bible as a double-edged sword, and say that God's Word is alive - *viva vox evangelii* - then we are saying that every page of this book comes from God.

But do we read and know this book well?

- It often begins with the fact that many Christians haven't read the entire Bible.

Example:

A pastor said to me that he hadn't read the entire Bible yet. He is still working on it to read through the whole bible.

A university professor complained that many students hadn't really read the Bible.

- Many Christians have difficulty with the Old Testament.

Example:

I had a small group with new believers. A young woman said to me, "I read the Old Testament for the first and last time. I don't know what to do with these horrible stories!"

A young man called me during the set aside "quite time" of a retreat and said to me, "Look at what I just read..." It was the story of the general Sisera and how he was brought into Jael's tent. When he fell asleep they took a tent peg and pierced him through the temple! The young man asked me mischievously, "What in this story functions to build us up? Should I learn that you can't trust women? What is the application for us today?"

But merely because people don't correctly understand the Old Testament, can we simply ignore it?

Without the Old Testament there is no New Testament! The Bible is a book with two testaments!

Jesus identified Himself according to the Old Testament and fulfilled its law.

The Old Testament is just as important for Christians as the New Testament.

- There are books which are perplexing for some Christians.

Example:

The book of Lamentations is for some Christians a problem. Christians should be thankful people and should sing cheerful songs...

Sometimes I say provocatively that I am happy that there are more psalms of lamentation than there are psalms of praise. Yet it is a challenge to know how to handle these psalms!

Some Christians say, "Christians shouldn't ask why, Christians should only ask for what!" Then I think on the words of Jesus on the cross. What did Jesus cry? Didn't He cry, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"

In the book of Lamentations the prophet Jeremiah writes that God closed His ears to his prayer (Lamentations 3:8). Some wouldn't dare to even think such a thing, let alone to speak of it.

When we give our lamentations to God and are honest with ourselves, then God often comforts us and heals our wounds. Therefore most of the psalms of lament end in praise. With Jeremiah a few verses later in chapter 3 it follows:

21 "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

22 Because of the LORD's great love are we not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

And then there is the Song of Songs. It doesn't come without a little head pain either. Some read it only with a flashlight under the blankets. And who blames them? Even in antiquity the rabbis forbid the boys to read it before they were thirty years old. They were afraid that the young men could be led to unclean thoughts.

Yet it is an honest and open book about love and sexuality, with all their beauties and difficulties.

We are quick to confess to the character of the Bible, but when we are honest how seriously do we take God at His word - more precisely - at every word which He spoke?

I've found several incorrect applications, which I would like to shortly present:

(1) Dismissal

There are people who simply ignore the Bible texts which appear to be unbelievable or errant. Biblical criticism significantly contributed to this end. In church history there was always the attempt to justify not taking the Bible seriously or to throw parts of the Bible out. Already in the second century Marcion (born ca. 85 C.E.) wanted to de-Judaize the Bible and to return to the original gospels. He wanted to recognize only ten Pauline letters and the Gospel of Luke. On November 13, 1933 with the Berlin Sportpalast Proclamation of Christians in Germany, it was declared that freedom was desired from non-Germans in church services as well as from the Old Testament with all its Jewish lawfulness. Liberal theology played its part in the rejection of large parts of the Bible.

Thank God that there are still those who are loyal to the Bible, who take God at His word and don't reject the Scriptures. But there are also those among the evangelicals with a false attitude in regards to handling the Bible.

(2) The Copy-and-Paste Principle

In dealing with the Bible many people have established their own principles for interpretation. Like in a picture-collage, they cut and paste the texts together in the way that fits their preferences. I observe this not only by end times specialists and so-called prophets who refer to the Bible, but also by many Christians as they deal with the Old Testament and some passages in the New Testament. This arbitrary puzzling-together of Bible texts in the way that one pleases is highly dangerous. Through such processes are created not only the greatest misunderstandings, but also heresy.

At a staff conference a pastor greeted the participants with the words from Psalm 81:10, "*Open wide your mouth and I will fill it!*"

I said to my neighbor, "That could be the dentist's phrase too!"

Someone said to me that God has nothing against smoking because in the Bible is says in Isaiah 42:3, "*...and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*"

I would guess that we all know people like that as well as similar sayings, that in their context carry a much different message.

Another example for a statement which Christians often misapply:

1 Corinthians 2:9 "*...What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived - the things God has prepared for those who love him..*"

In the context of the passage, this does not deal with heaven, but it is about the salvation of humanity.

Or that Formula 1 is mentioned in the Bible:

Nahum 2:4 "*The chariots storm through the streets, rushing back and forth through the squares. They look like flaming torches; they dart about like lightening.*"

One can quickly see how dangerous such a handling of the Scriptures is.

(3) The Bones-on-the-Edge-of-the-Plate Principle

Only the verses that are fitting are read. The rest are shoved to the edge of the plate like the chicken bones you don't want to eat. An example is in Psalm 139. These are the wonderful words about god and how He made us. But in the middle are thoughts of revenge, which are often and happily overlooked.

18 Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand - when I awake, I am still with you.

19 If only you, God, would slay the wicked! Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!

20 They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name.

21 Do I not hate those who hate you, LORD, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?

22 I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.

Quickly one skips to verses 23-24:

23 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

This approach begins often in kids' Sunday School, in that we manipulate the biblical stories. There is the story from David and Goliath told, but not to the end. At the latest, the stone hitting Goliath's forehead and the giant's death is the conclusion. But it is not told that David took Goliath's sword and cut off his head. Although one could halfway understand such tactics in the context of children's work, it must also be understood how problematic this is if made into a foundational principle in regards to the handling of the Bible.

We can not shove texts to the edge of the plate like unwanted remains if we loudly proclaim that the Scripture is given by God and useful for all. For me it was a great discovery as I determined how appropriate the words in Psalm 139 in their context are. My wife and I saw the oratory "Jephta" from Handel in the theater in Bonn. On the way to the theater I said to her, "I could never preach over these Bible texts!" She looked at me unbelievably. It penetrated me. As

professor for homiletic, I shouldn't be able to say such things. I decided then to write a sermon about Jephtha. I worked on it for months and shoved the sermon in front of me, until I finally finished it. I worked on it until I discovered in this story a treasure which went far beyond the tragedy of a man of God who offered his daughter on the altar.

(4) The Christological Glasses

Although the Old Testament references in innumerable passages, we cannot simply put on Christological glasses and twist everything which we don't understand into an indication of Christ. Instead of searching for the purpose of Song of Solomon, often it is taught that it speaks of the love between Christ and the church. Even when we can suggest that aspects of Song of Solomon point to Christ, this book is originally not written for that reason. It was written for people who should understand that love can go through highs and lows.

(5) The Verse-of-the-day Principle

Only verses that make you feel good are picked and passed on. Foundationally I have nothing against a "verse of the day". I read them myself. But who depends wholly on single verses can be misled in some instances or miss the overall intention of the statement.

Example:

I learned Psalm 50:15 as the "emergency call" for God in Sunday School: "*Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.*"

But the verse begins with "and". That means a conjunction - a binding word, that connects two statements. We have to read what stands before this statement.

Vs. 14 "*Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.*"

God is not a fireman who I call when I have problems. God is not a talisman who I pull out of my pocket when I need him.

God wants a relationship that is nurtured with thankfulness. Then the one who finds himself in need can be sure that God is there. As in Romans 8:28, "*And we*

know that in all things God works for the good for those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."

We find something similar in Matthew 28:

"surely I am with you always..." begins with "And surely..."

Before this is a command. We only want the promise, but it is connected to a command. We are so quick to take advantage of God's promises for ourselves, but they are often bound to obedience in faith. We can't oversee that fact as we cite single verses.

We should not forget that the devil also quoted the Bible as he tempted Jesus, but he interpreted God's Word as it pleased him. Therefore if we want to take God at his Word, the study of the Bible is mandatory for Christians. It is not just a privilege of certain Bible students or theologians.

God's Word is a double-sided sword. It is alive and one MUST take God by his Word! And God's Word remains in eternity.

1.3 God's Word remains in eternity

There is a third point which must be kept in our consciousness as we speak of this double-sided sword, the Bible. That is the everlasting Word of God.

God's Word is everything but empty words.

God speaks and what he says has worth and continues in eternity.

Isaiah 40:6-8

"A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

Matthew 24:35

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

1 Peter 1:22-25

"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word that was preached to you."

When God speaks it is final, because in the end it is still valid.

People forget what they have said.

People don't want to remember what they have said.

But God not only wants that we hold him to his word, but also that we know that his Word has everlasting value.

This book has been **taken** from Christians, but their faith remains.

This book has been **burned**, but God's Word cannot be removed from the heart!

This book is **criticized** today like no other book in the world and yet it remains as the eternally valid word of God.

An atheist named Ingersoll in Switzerland once proudly said, "In 15 years I will bring this book in the grave." But 15 years later was Ingersoll in the grave, and this book - the Bible - is still alive!

Voltaire, the French philosopher, said that in 100 years the Bible would be an expired model, forgotten and only to be found in museums.

100 years later the house in which Voltaire had lived was sold to the Geneva Bible Society!

Henceforth is this Word not only an everlasting Word. It also brings about everlasting life.

People have found everlasting life by reading the Bible.

People have found comfort in suffering by reading the Bible.

People have found answers to life's questions by reading the Bible.

People have experienced help in times of need by reading the Bible.

Therefore:

To pass this book on is to pass on everlasting life.

No, not the book, but the words in this book have the power of everlasting life.

Peter said in John 6:68,

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

The one who believes this word will live, even when he dies.

That's why one is happy when one studies this book day and night.

That's why Joshua was not to neglect the law but was rather to study it.

The one who busies himself with the Bible busies himself with an unfading word.

The one who pass on God's Word, like the Gideons do, pass on something that is everlasting valid. That can be said of no other book.

Tomorrow we will ask the question, which consequences this word has in my life.

Does God's Word - that double-sided sword - have power to bring change in my life?

It does, because:

- God speaks today through His Word
- We can take God at His Word
- God's Word remains in eternity

God's Word lives - **viva vox evangelii**

2. God's Word works - Efficacia verbi divini

The question that we want to ask now is which consequences God's Word has on us today. How does the authority of the "viva vox evangelii" apply in my life and in my mission? Our greatest problem in the mission, churches and in Christian families is that we know all the stories and there is nothing new. Sunday School teachers and preachers know this problem just as well as regular Bible-readers. I read through the Bible at least once every year. Every day 3-5 chapters. But what impacts me still as I read? Emotionally very little, because I know that Daniel comes out of the lion's den. That Jonah leaves the belly of the fish alive. That Peter didn't drown in the sea. The tension in the stories is gone.

An old monk was talking to a rabbi. They were talking about the Bible. The monk: "Is it the same with you as with me? Evenings I just have to read in the Bible, and then I fell right asleep." The rabbi answered indignantly, "Excuse me? If I read the Bible at night, then I am so excited that I want to read for hours and then I can't sleep!" That is the deciding difference. The one uses the Bible as a calming pillow, and for the other is the Bible the source of power. My greatest worry is not that we don't believe the Bible anymore, but that the Bible has nothing more for us to say. That the Bible doesn't change us anymore and isn't the guide for our paths.

In Psalm 119 we find God's Word in every one of 176 verses (22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and 8 verses start with the same letter: in total we have 176 verses).

Lets look a little more closely at two verses and thereby ask ourselves, if the Bible has these consequences on us.

Vs. 131 "I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands."

Vs. 103 "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

Vs. 162 "I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil."

I am excited in this same way when I read God's Word?

If God's Word is sharper than a double-sided sword, then is the Word of God not only alive according to the perspective of *viva vox evangelii*, but it is also effective.

God's Word works - in terms of: *Efficacia verbi divini* = individual efficacy or effectivity of the divine Word!

God's Word does not languish, but it sets on fire. It changes and it accomplishes its goal.

As we concentrated first principally on the double-sided sword, we want to ask ourselves individually which consequences God's Word has in my life, in my ministry and in my mission?

In conversation with the Pharisees Jesus strikingly demonstrated that one can know God's Word and not understand it:

John 5:

"You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does the word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

The best educated theologians of that time did not understand the Bible because they didn't take God and His Word seriously. But God's Word is effective and powerful.

2.1 God's Word works powerfully

If God speaks, then something happens. God's Word is omnipotent. A good example is creation. God spoke and it was!

Psalm 33:

"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth."

John tells us, that God is the word. God is the personified Word.

John 1:14:

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

For that reason is the Bible a powerful book. It is not the pages or the paper, but the contained Word of God. That which is said to us from God and Jesus in this book must move us. Does it still do that?

The Sadducees came provocatively to Jesus and wanted to argue with him about theological technicalities. They were postmodern, intelligent and historical-critical. They wanted to make fun of the idea of resurrection. And the answer from Jesus was:

Matthew 22:29

"Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."

How blind are we sometimes to the persuasiveness and strength of God's Word. I name that the Emmaus-Effect, when our eyes are at once opened and we are overwhelmed by the power of the Gospel.

What do we read in Luke 24?

25 He said to them "How foolish are you, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together

34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."

When God's Word speaks to us, then a fire starts to burn inside of us.

With that I do not want us to be in the danger of the belief that God has spoken to us only if and when we are moved. God is always speaking but we are not always listening.

Sadly, through the theology of Karl Barth, a dangerous difference has penetrated the understanding of the Bible. Karl Barth taught that the Bible is not God's word, but that it becomes God's word. If something in the Bible speaks to me, then God speaks to me and the passage becomes God's word. That is deceptive. The whole Bible is God's word and God always speaks. It is only that we are sometimes not listening, and we don't always understand. Somewhat like the disciples on the way to Emmaus. Their eyes were first later opened, even though Jesus had already spoken to them previously.

But how often has God impacted peoples' hearts through Bible-reading?

Last year I was able to lead a young Muslim to faith. A few weeks ago I called him and asked him how he was doing. His family is Islamic and he did have to return to Uzbekistan. They have taken away all of his Christian literature including his Bible. He said, "But I read the Bible on the Internet. My family doesn't know that. I need the Bible as the source of strength for my life!" They have threatened that he can't stay in the family if he doesn't return to Islam, because he is a shame for the family. My foothold is Jesus!

That is the power and the force of the Gospel.

What does the Bible do in our lives today?

How much do our hearts burn for God's Word?

How deeply do we long for the Word of God?

Is the Word of God our source of strength?

The Bible is powerful and changes lives.

2.2 God's Word effects change

The Bible is sharper than a sword and wants to change our lives.

In Psalm 119:11 we read:

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

Someone once accurately said, "Either this book will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from this book."

That is the effect of this book!

We find a wonderful example in 2 Kings 22.

The young King Josiah let the temple be restored. In this process the Law was found and read before the king.

8 Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD." He gave it to Shaphan, who read it.

9 Then Shaphan the secretary went to the king and reported to him: "Your officials have paid out the money that was in the temple of the LORD and have entrusted it to the workers and supervisors at the temple."

10 Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

11 When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes.

13 "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us."

God leads us away from sin and towards repentance.

To what God's Word is capable, Paul also knew as he wrote in Colossians 1:28-29,

"He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all energy Christ so powerfully works in me."

Paul writes, "strenuously contend with all the energy". Here in Greek are two words which mean "wring out" and "fight the fight with you the last energy".

Why does he do that? *"So that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ."*

How does he do that? *"With all energy Christ so powerfully works in me."*

1 Corinthians 1:6-9

"God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

What was this for a problem-church? But Paul remained confident, that God's Word would change them.

It seems that Paul untiringly served in the mission.

For that reason, Paul taught the Christians in Ephesus in tears day and night for three years.

Acts 20:31-32

"So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

I say over and over to our students, "It's not about mastering the Bible, the Bible must master us and our lives!"

Paul knew that the Word of God had the power to change people. But he also knew that it required complete dedication.

2.3 God's Word accomplishes its goal

In conclusion I want to shortly point out, that God's effective Word will also reach its goal.

Deuteronomy 32:45-47

When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, he said to them, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."

Isaiah 55:11

so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

A wonderful image is used by the prophet. As rain doesn't return to the clouds but rather waters the earth and brings life, so is God's Word. It does not return unused, unusable, or empty!

We must not speak for the Bible. The Bible speaks for itself No one can ignore the fact that the Bible has changed the world and has impacted people who have adopted the Word of God. God, with His Word, accomplishes the goal!

That is relieving. We are simply bearers of the Word.

We are to testimonies and preachers.

We are heralds. It is not our word. It is His Word.

We do not fight for the Word. The Word of God speaks and is alive and is sharper than a sword.

Example:

At a big festival in England many people were gathered and a famous preacher was asked to recite Psalm 23. Roaring applause accompanied his excellent introduction. A young man saw an old pastor in the rows and said mischievously, "Lets see if the pastor knows the psalm or not!" The old man came slowly to the stage and with calm voice, little beauty, but yet deeply reaching authenticity, he recited the psalm. No applause, but the difference was clearly felt. Then one of the others asked, "How did it happen? Why? It's the same psalm!" The other said, "The difference is: The one knew the psalm and the other know not only the psalm, but also the shepherd!"

As we talked about God's Word yesterday and today - sharper than a sword - then I wish that we all know both the psalm and the shepherd.

It is definitely not about paper and a book. It is about God's Word.

It lives and it works!

1. God's Word lives - **viva vox evangelii**

1.1 God speaks through His Word today

1.2 We can take God at His Word

1.3 God's Word remains in eternity

2. God's Word works - **Efficacia verbi divini**

2.1 God's Word works powerfully

2.2 God's Word bring change

2.3 God's Word accomplishes its goal

It remains yet for me to thank each one of you for the work that you do in our land. To pass on God's Word is one of the most valuable assignments. But it cannot merely stop with passing it on. God's Word must impact and change our lives. And that comes only through working with it and studying it. It comes only

when we are conscious of with whom we are speaking and when we open ourselves to allow the Holy Spirit to work.

Then with the psalmist we can say,

Psalm 1:1-3

"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither - whatever they do prospers."