

God's Valentine Card To You

A Sermon by Pr. David Johnson

A couple days ago, I, like thousands of other men, exchanged Valentine's Day cards with my wife. I bought a nice card (*okay, I had to get three*), and got the appropriate bouquet of flowers. We had a nice meal at home, prepared by our loving daughter, Esther. And then we sat around a warm fire in the fireplace after supper. It was a wonderful evening. But that experience could only last one day.

However, there is an expression of love that endures much longer.

"It's God's love letter to you." That's how I once heard a teacher describe the Bible. He said that *"if you could summarize all of Scripture and the principles contained within its pages, it would scream out the message, 'I Love You.'"*

Some might think that his summary was simplistic, and I can understand why. But I have never forgotten that teacher's challenge; to see all of Scripture from the vantage-point of the overwhelming love and mercy of God. From the intricate care of creation, through the death and resurrection of Christ, to the overflowing abundance at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, the loving grace of God is the overarching theme of the Bible.

Our Old Testament Lesson is just one example of that basic truth:

Isaiah 55:10-13 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; ¹¹ So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. ¹² "For you will go out with joy And be led forth with peace; The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, And all the trees of the field will clap their hands. ¹³ "Instead of the thorn bush the cypress will come up, And instead of the nettle the myrtle will come up, And it will be a memorial to the Lord, For an everlasting sign which will not be cut off."

Over 500 years ago, a man named Martin had a beef with his church and posted several of his gripes on the church door. The list consisted of 95 objections, or Theses to be exact.

Now, that wasn't exactly an unusual thing to do; bringing his grievances to the church for broadcast. The church door was *the* place to get announcements posted, and he especially wanted to discuss these theological concerns openly. And since these particular criticisms concerned the church and church leadership, how appropriate to nail them to its door.

But what made this situation even more intriguing was that this man was himself a priest and theological instructor of the very church he seemed to be attacking. Ironically, Martin Luther had been born and raised in this Church (*denomination*) all his life. He had even passed

through its hallowed halls of instruction to the level of leadership. But yet, he remained conflicted with many of her teachings and practices. So now, on October 31, 1517, he had decided to address these grievances in an attempt to cleanse the church he loved, using the Word he loved.

Yes, it was the Bible, God's Word that brought this otherwise obedient young scholar to a point of personal and public crisis? It was one book that motivated Luther; a single volume text which most in his society had never seen, much less read. Martin Luther's whole life, his world, his future - had been turned upside down by one book; God's love-letter to the world.

But in Luther's day, it had been determined that the Bible was so deep, so sacred, that the average person couldn't be trusted to handle it properly. This view had even impacted many of the rank-in-file priests of Luther's era. Oh, the church fathers and papal edicts were fair game...but the Bible was off limits. It remained, therefore, an elusive text, banished from public view, chained (*both figuratively and literally*) securely for only the elite to handle. It was like an undelivered valentine card, full of love and hope, but unable to reach the very hearts of those it was sent to transform.

But as Luther devoured the contents of this precious book, preparing his lectures and sermons for others, his own heart was enlivened by God's powerful Word. Luther's mind and soul were set "on fire" as it were by the love and grace of Jesus Christ. He would later describe his realization of "justification by faith" as the "gate of Paradise," which was wonderfully "flung open to him."

Rom 1:17 For in it {the} righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS {man} SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God...

Psalms 71:1-3 In You, O Lord, I have taken refuge; Let me never be ashamed. ² In Your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; Incline Your ear to me and save me. ³ Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come; You have given commandment to save me, For You are my rock and my fortress. (Guess where *A Mighty Fortress* may have come from.)

The rest, as they say, is history. It's also a fascinating study of God's Word transforming the ordinary to bring about the extraordinary.

We, much like Luther, live in a society of intelligencia. The elite and academics in our culture have laid claim to "truth," and have blocked any alternate claims. In fact, some are literally trying to silence entire organizations, groups, and news agencies from speaking any view contradicting the accepted and "established" PC truth.

And at the top of this list of offensive challengers to the established "truth" of our day is the Bible. "God's Love Letter" they say, is offensive. But not because some consider it too complicated, while others accuse it of mythology. Neither are the efforts to banish the Bible because it's considered to be outdated and fanciful. No, the

effort to rid our culture of this precious Scripture is because it is deemed “dangerous” or “divisive.” You see, the words of the Bible dare teach a different Gospel than the one promoted by our culture.

And if it can't be stripped from our society, it will be re-written to soften or mislead its readers. Rather than *God's Love Letter*, they call it a book of “hatred.” And sadly, most in our communities are so biblically illiterate, they don't know the difference. So if the bible can't be removed, the opponents will settle for redirection.

But we who know and love God's Word, know that it will not be banished, burned, or buried. The will of God, as revealed through the Scriptures, will not be diluted, dispelled, or destroyed. Because in the end, it remains exactly what it declares itself to be, living and active, subtle and powerful, immediate and enduring. It can humble the exalted, exalt the humble, and soften a heart of granite with its gentle, loving persistence.

Jeremiah 23:29 “Is not My word like fire?” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer which shatters a rock?”

Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

1 Peter 1:23-25 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

So when the final adversary falls, God's Word will stand victorious. This is why Martin Luther was so doggedly determined to free the Scriptures from the bondage of disuse, misuse, and abuse. This is why he worked so hard to translate the Bible into the language of his German culture, as did Wycliffe and Tyndale in England. Luther believed that “any plowboy armed with the Scripture, was greater than any Pope without it.” And in the end, this was one of his greatest achievements.

Martin Luther believed what the Scriptures said about itself. He was convinced that it wasn't just a story about God, but it was a very means by which God would work. It was powerful, because the very power, grace, and love of God was at work in and through it. It wasn't the words of the preacher or teacher that brought about transformation; it was the Word of God itself. In reality, we preachers do more harm than good when we elaborate or “touch up” the text of this great Love Letter of Scripture.

In light of this fact, here are just a few of the Bible's claims about itself:

Perfect and restorative –

Ps 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. (also 2 Tim 3:14-15)

Pure and enlightening –

Ps 19:8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

Permanent –

1 Peter 1:24-25 For, “All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, ²⁵ But the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word which was preached to you.

Matt 5:18 “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Productive –

Is 55:10 “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; ¹¹ So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding {in the matter} for which I sent it.

Penetrating and perceptive –

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Prophetic (speaking for God) –

2 Pet 1:20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is {a matter} of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Profitable –

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

As Isaiah and Peter both proclaim:

Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.

And that is a Valentine Card that will never get old!