

## Sharper than a Two-Edged Sword - Hebrews 4:12-14

***Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living 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. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. 14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.***

Hebrews is a book aimed at Hebrew Christians that for one reason or another were becoming tired and discouraged in their faith and some were starting to wonder "why should I bother". I find that the Bible comes across so fresh today as I come across many tired, pressured Christians who feel like giving up on their faith – and we all know those who once walked well with Christ but no longer spend time with Him or with God's people.

The writer to the Hebrews writes to encourage them not to give up. In fact the first three and a bit chapters focuses on just who Jesus is and what He's done for us. Then he goes through their history as Hebrews to remind them that God sustained their ancestors in the wilderness. The writer to the Hebrews in 3:7-4:11, reminds us that the people of Israel heard the voice of God. They had a living and powerful word from God. That word was dramatically underlined with in fire, cloud, water from the rock, manna and at Mount Sinai in signs, wonders and speech, the ark and tabernacle. Yet, they "hardened their hearts", they nurtured a "sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God". "The message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith." The living word of God had the power to take them into his "rest", into the promised land, into the blessings of God, (eternal life). "Yet, they couldn't enter because of their unbelief."

The writer takes that experience from the wilderness and applies it to their situation: "see to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." "Make every effort to enter that rest" (by grace through faith) – preceding verses in chapter 4. Just as God spoke to the people in the wilderness, He speaks to us today. He speaks through His written word. He gave a written word to the people of Israel in the wilderness. We have it in complete form.

But as we look through our own pilgrimage through the wilderness that is this world, we also know as the Hebrew Christians did, that we see evidence everywhere of the presence and power of God, and we've seen His presence and goodness in our own lives. In the words of the hymn writer we can reflect and count our blessings "name them one by one" and we realise just how God has spoken to us. We've had our Marahs, our manna, our quails, or Sinai's.

But the people of Israel had plenty of experiences of God's activity, but there is a difference in hearing and listening. We might hear something, but do we listen. But when we listen, we find this well-known verse to be true:

***He 4:12 For the word of God is living 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.***

We often interpret these words in just in terms of the Bible, which is true, but the word of God is more than that because God speaks to us in so many ways. But whether it is through the Bible or whatever, it only becomes alive to us when we take notice.

Then God speaks into us. It's the difference between hearing and listening. God's word becomes alive when hearts and minds open to the Spirit of God. God's word speaks into them – and we find that words that were just words come alive. How many times have you had that situation where you've looked at a passage of scripture and what were familiar words sometimes come alive and you know God is speaking to you personally through them?

There is this wonderful picture of the word of God being a double edged sword. It's a sword that can cut two ways. When God speaks into our lives, we can experience two extremes – judgement and blessing. But the other advantage of the Roman two-edged sword was that it was heavy – it could easily chop and enemy in two – not for the faint-hearted. It's the same when God speaks into our lives – He can cut right to the chase – He can get into the deepest part of our beings. If we are prepared, He can get right down to the very things in our lives that are stumbling blocks to us: those secret and hidden things – our thoughts and our attitudes.

If you think that sounds bad; that you don't want to be reminded of all those things in your life that you'd probably like reminding of or thinking too hard about – then remember that it's a two-edged sword. The challenge that God brings as He speaks to us also has blessing attached to it. As God deals with the deep things in our lives, He brings blessing too.

We are also reminded in verse 13 that God can see right into our hearts and we must give an account of our actions. Just as in the desert, the ark reminded people of the presence of God and therefore informed them of their disobedience, we are reminded that it is God that looks into our hearts and sees our discouragement and any deception. On the other hand, in the desert, the people had the priests to go to to deal with their sin and come before God on their behalf. The same is true of our great High Priest.

Are we feeling a bit tired in our faith this afternoon. Do we have issues that we would prefer not to think to hard about. We know that God is speaking but we're not listening because we know His word will cut deep if we allow ourselves to listen. But **13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.** Albert Barnes said this: *"... we cannot escape the notice of God; that all insincerity, unbelief, hypocrisy, will be detected by Him; and that since our hearts are perfectly open before Him, we should be sincere, and should not attempt to deceive Him."*

Maybe you know that you and God need to do some business this afternoon – whether its unforgiveness, or unbelief, whether there is something in your life you know is wrong and can't or won't deal with it; maybe you have a health issue that you struggle with; maybe it's just depression and disillusionment. Then here's that verse again: **14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.**

As I said earlier, the Hebrews in the wilderness had both the challenge of God in the centre of the camp and of their lives and the solution to their sin – the tabernacle with the ark and the high priest – and as God exposes our sin and weakness we have a great High Priest - Jesus – and in Him we find our sins dealt with once for all, and that ability in life by the power of the Holy Spirit to live as the people of God.

As we come around the Lord's table this afternoon, we see how our Great High Priest has Himself achieved this, by having His own body broken and His blood shed for us – we remember this in the bread and the wine. Let's ask Him to speak right into our hearts that He will expose those things that are holding us back from having that peace and joy we should have in Him. In Him we find forgiveness of sin and that freedom to live as the people of God.

Prayer of Confession

**Hebrews 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.**

The Communion

**23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.**

Closing prayer and encouragement.