

## LAYING HOLD OF THE WORD

Josiah was twenty-six years old. He'd been king since the age of eight when his father had been assassinated, but now he had come into his reign proper and was engaged in purifying and repairing the Temple. He'd sent the secretary Shaphan to Hilkiah the high priest with instructions concerning some administrative details, when Hilkiah told Shaphan he had found the Book of the Law (probably Deuteronomy) in the temple. We pick up the story in 2 Kings 22 and verse 8:

*<sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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." <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. <sup>12</sup>He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: <sup>13</sup>"Go and enquire 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 our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us." 2 Kings 22:8-13*

Comparing this with the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 34, we see three responses to the Book. Hilkiah knew what it was, but didn't read it. Shaphan read it, but didn't know what it was. The significance escaped him. Josiah read it, realised what it was and made a radical response.

We can see the same responses to the "Book" (the Bible) today. Some know what it is but don't read it; some read it but somehow don't connect; some read it, realise the significance and make a radical response of obedience.

We have tremendous resources today. The Word comes in sermons, it comes in books, it comes in tapes and CDs. It's broadcast on radio and television. We have resources like never before. Yet for all of that, this has been described as the most Biblically illiterate generation in 2000 years of Christianity. You may say, "That's not true of *my* group", and that may well be so. But we all tend to some extent to reflect the spirit of the age in which we find ourselves. And even if we *know* the Word, do we *do* it?

The Word comes to us like a wrapped chocolate sweet. We have to take it, unwrap it, eat it, and make it part of us. We have to *lay hold of the Word*.

Why put in all the effort? Why lay hold of the Word? Here are four reasons:

### **The Word gives spiritual nourishment**

We read in Matthew 4:

*<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

Without bread, man does not live at all—it's a physical necessity. But there is also spiritual food—*every word that comes from the mouth of God*—on which we live. In the wilderness, the dew would settle every day as manna, bread from heaven—and it could only be eaten

that day. It was a wonderful provision, but once they were used to it, they were tired of it. The diet was a bit restrictive—fried manna for breakfast, boiled manna for lunch, grilled manna for dinner. For forty years!

They were on an adventure with God in the wilderness where they couldn't feed themselves, and God sustained them with daily manna. We're on an adventure with God in a spiritual wilderness where we can't feed ourselves, and God sustains us with daily spiritual manna!

So we say, "What's on the menu today?" The answer may come back, "*Matthew's gospel.*" "Oh, I've had Matthew's gospel before. I'm tired of Matthew's gospel. I've had *fried* Matthew, *baked* Matthew, *boiled* Matthew ...." But we need Matthew's gospel. The Word gives spiritual nourishment. Jesus said to pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*"

### **The Word gives us life and health**

We often value the opinions of others in making up our minds. Having asked, "What does so-and-so say?" a number of times, we may even ask, "What does *God* say?" This last question *must* carry more weight! God doesn't have an *opinion*—His Word is *truth*.

Proverbs says: "*My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body.*" (Prov 4:20-22). Jesus said: "*The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.*" (Jn 6:63).

God's Word can bring healing, and *faith* for healing. Conversely people can be sick because of disobedience to the Word. Jesus has the words of eternal life (see Jn 6:68; Jn 10:10; and Prov 4:22).

### **The Word gives fruitfulness in life**

The Parable of the Sower is clear and graphic (see Mark 4:3-20, and parallels). Some hearts are trampled and compacted like the soil of the path, so that the seed of the Word can't penetrate and is stolen by the birds. We need to "rotavate" our heart, breaking up and softening the soil.

In some hearts the seed of the Word grows quickly, but when the heat is on, when trouble and persecution come, they wither. The problem is a relative rootlessness, and we need to break up our soil at a deeper level and get some stones out of the depths of our heart. Other hearts are already full of weeds and the seed of the Word is choked. We have a *need* to *weed* in our hearts.

There's always hope for the soil! But whatever the condition of the soil, there will be no crop without the *seed*. It's the *Word* that produces the crop. It's the *Word* that leads to fruitfulness in life.

### **The Word gives true freedom**

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching [continue in my Word], you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (Jn 8:31,32). Some may hear that as good news. Some know they have an area of bondage or addiction, and *want* to be free. Others insist, "I *am* free. I have self-determination. I can do whatever I want." That's exactly the reaction of the original hearers (see Jn 8:33). But that's not freedom!

Freedom is not the opportunity to select between options. Choosing one option precludes the rest, so that freedom exercised is freedom lost! Such "freedom" is illusory. **True freedom is not the right to do what you like, but the power to do what you ought.** The *truth* empowers us to do what we ought at every decision point. Making the application, "*If you*

*continue in my Word, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will empower you to do as you ought in every circumstance and decision."*

So why lay hold of the Word? Lay hold of it because the Word gives spiritual nourishment, because the Word gives life and health, because the Word gives fruitfulness in life, because the Word gives true freedom.

Read it, hear it, speak it, study it, meditate on it, apply it, *do* it, live in the good of it—lay hold of the Word of God!

George Alexander  
October 2004

Note: All Bible quotations are NIV unless otherwise stated.