

Word

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] Okay, thanks Beno. Folks, lovely to see you this morning, particularly if this is your first Sunday. Great to see some new faces this morning. You're so welcome here. We do this every Sunday and they express purpose as a church family is that we would help one another fix our eyes on Jesus.

And so we're in this little series that we've called DNA, Prayer, Word and Fellowship. Those being the three things that we want to commit ourselves to as a church family. We thought about prayer last week. We're going to think about fellowship next week. And this morning we're going to think about God's Word. So if you have that passage in Ephesians 4, we're going to, we'll get into it in about 15 minutes time, but really helpful for you if you've got it open.

So you know the story of the three little pigs, right? I'm going to huff, I'm going to puff and I'm going to blow your house down. Here's the question I want you, us, to carry with us through this sermon.

Is what are the things that we're building our lives on? And when push comes to shove, when the wind blows, are they going to stand or are they going to fall? Let me give you an example of that. Monday the 15th of September 2008 is forever etched in my mind as a date. And it's etched in my mind for two reasons. First of all, it was my first day post university in a, what I call a big boy's job. I worked for a law firm down in Charlotte Square.

It was my first day, turned up, suited and booted, didn't really know what I was doing, but I was there. I go into the lobby, to reception, they get me to sit and I'm watching the news that's on in the plasma screen just in front of me. And all I can see on this screen is people in Manhattan taking boxes out of buildings. And that's the second reason that the 15th of September 2008 is significant for me and for many others around the world. It's the day when, and some of you, this will be old news, but I remember exactly where I was when this happened. It's when Lehman Brothers, that massive bank in New York, they went bank dropped. And it was the day that was generally considered around the world by most people to be the start of the financial crash that happened between 2008 and 2010. So I'm watching this happen on my first day of work over in Manhattan, thinking that is a million miles away. But it didn't take long for the ripple effect of what happened there to make its way to the UK, to make its way to the shores of Edinburgh. In fact, I remember going on holiday for a week, it was kind of use it or lose it with your holidays back in that day and having to take a week's leave not so long after I started going away for a week.

[2 : 4 8] And when I left, there was three people in the room that I worked in coming back a week later. And there was only me and this other guy in the room that I worked in and saying, what's happened to Kirsty? And he told me that Kirsty, well, she really sadly, like many others in the company, she lost her job. And many of you might remember what that was like. Maybe some of us were caught up in that. A really scary time of life when what you thought was certain, the thing that you were building your life upon, all of a sudden vanishes overnight.

And here's what I learned as the tune goes in the School of Hard Knocks, that it is a hard knock life. How fleeting and unstable are the things on which we as human beings so often think are the certainty in our days. Here's American actor, one of my favorite, Jim Carrey says, I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so that they can see that it's not the answer. And what do we long for in our world that seems to change all the time?

We're pining, aren't we, for some sort of solid foundation on which we can base and build our lives. It's why we talk about our forever homes. It's why we talk about the security that comes with a permanent job. It's why even when you go to Morrison's and do the big shop, they try and sell you a bag for life, which I think is always a massive claim for a recycled plastic bag, isn't it?

But we long for that certainty in our lives. And that's why whoever you are here today, whatever you think of the God of the Bible, whatever you've brought in here this morning, God invites you to listen to what he's got to say to you today. Because what we're going to be thinking about is the only solid place going in our lives. You see, when the Bible talks about human beings, and hear this, it doesn't talk about us like we are evergreen trees, right? The Bible says, actually, we are like, and here's the simile, we are like the grass of the field, right? Which means we are here today and we are gone tomorrow. Our lifespan in the context of humanity is very, very small. We are here today, we are gone tomorrow. And it's really sobering, isn't it, to think that. But in contrast to us is the word of the everlasting God. And his words, in contrast to us, it endures forever.

Now, Jesus tells a story a bit like that, doesn't he? We get it at the end of what is called the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel, and a little bit of timeless architectural advice.

[5 : 38] He says to whoever would listen in that moment and down the generations, if you hear my words and you listen and you heed what I'm saying, you are like a wise man who is building his house on the rock.

But if you listen to what I'm saying and you disregard it, you are like a foolish man who is building his house on the sand. And again, I think that's a little bit of first century humour.

Subtext, my words, which are God's words, are a stable place for you to build everything on.

And that's why for generations, this church has been and is a Bible-loving church. And it's why the Bible continues to be the best-selling book of all time, printing 80 million copies per year, even in the 21st century.

This church loves the Bible, but more than that, this church believes that the Bible is more than a book. Or to echo the words of C.S. Lewis, I've quoted this guy a few times in my time, I've been reading poems, romances, vision, literature, legends and myths all of my life.

[6 : 55] I know what they are like. I know none of them are like this. The Bible is more than a book. Now, let me just give you two words that capture what Christians the world over believe and love about the Bible.

You ready for these? Here's the first one. Number one, it is inspired. Open the Bible at your contents page and you'll see that in there are actually 66 books.

If you want to turn to your contents page, you can do that. 66 books written by 40 different authors who throughout history are addressing different people at different points in history.

So there's human personalities involved in the composition of the Bible. God doesn't bypass human personalities, but by his spirit, like the wind into the sails of a ship, he speaks through human personalities as we find them in the Bible.

66 books, 40 different authors. But standing behind all of this, the voice that spans eternity is God's one grand voice.

[8 : 00] Which means that the Bible rightly understood and correctly applied is the same as having God in the room. The Bible is inspired.

Secondly, real quick, it's inerrant. Which means that the Bible holds up to scrutiny. As a historical document, it is reliable.

And if that's something you want to think more about, then I highly recommend this book by Amy Orr Ewing, who's one of the sharpest minds in our country, certainly, when it comes to understanding theological truth.

In this book, she's written called Can... I've written down here, Can I Trust the Bible? I think it's so popular, she's actually done a revised edition called Why Trust the Bible? And you know something's good when it gets lots of new editions printed, isn't it?

Can I Trust the Bible? Now, that's not to say that it is wrong to have questions. On the contrary, it's right to ask questions.

[9 : 05] The day we stop asking questions is the day that we stop growing. But the very fact that the Bible is reliable means that we can bring our questions to God, seeking answers, as opposed to thinking we've got nowhere to go in hiding them.

And the cash out to all of that is that we can trust the Bible. We can trust it. And so, and here's what I'd love you to do, if you feel comfortable in this, you can join me in this.

There's three things that we do with our Bibles. So if you've got a Bible, right? Literally, come on, we're all family here. You can pick it up and just hold it here. Three things that we do, okay? Hold it down.

We sit under the Bible. In fact, sorry, hold it above your heads. That's the wrong one, right? We sit under the Bible, right? This is how King Jesus rules his church, through his words.

We don't shape the Bible according to our logic. We allow our logic to be shaped by the Bible. And that's really good news in case you're wondering what that's about. You can put them down now.

[10 : 09] Because the truths that we have in here, if we allow the Bible to shape our truths, the truths that we have in here, I would not believe them if it weren't for the fact that God told me they were true.

They are true. I would struggle to believe I could be forgiven if the Bible didn't tell me about Jesus and what he'd done for me on the cross. I would struggle to think I'm loved if the Bible didn't tell me that God has adopted me as his son and loves me as a father.

I would really struggle if it weren't for the fact that I want my mind to be shaped by the Bible, not that I bring my logic to the Bible. We sit under it.

And secondly, again, with your Bible, get it there. Picture it at your feet reverently. We stand on the Bible. It's a solid place in which we can stake our lives. We don't hedge our bets.

We don't spread the risk. We put all our eggs in the Bible basket. And thirdly, and this is what we're going to tease out over the next 15 minutes or so, we allow God through his spirit, we allow it to work its way in our hearts.

[11 : 15] So above the head, under the feet and on the chest, we allow God's word to be at work in us. Because here's the thing, you can believe correct things about the Bible and yet completely miss God's intention for what he longs to accomplish in the lives of his people through his words.

And this is where we jump back into Ephesians 4 and verse 11 is where we'll jump in. What does God long to accomplish in our lives through his words?

Look at the text if you've got it there. Let me give you one word, verse 13. It's the word maturity. Do you see that? Maturity.

Maturity. And how does that happen? Let me give you one phrase that you find at verse 15. It's by us speaking the truth to each other in love.

Do you see that? Speaking the truth in love. Here's a little phrase maybe to help you remember this. God's goal is our growth and God's means is his word. Right?

[12 : 20] God's goal is our growth. God's means is his word. So when you become a follower of Jesus, it doesn't matter what age you are. The Bible says spiritually that we are infants.

We are babies. Right? You've seen plenty of them on show this morning. And God's desire is that we grow up by drinking the milk that is his word.

So God longs for us together to be able to grow. From verse 11, God's given his church apostles. He's given them prophets. He's given them evangelists.

And then we get that lovely little phrase, pastors and teachers. So here is my job description. And everyone else who comes up here and delivers God's word.

My job is to, do you see, equip you, and that's a workout in the gym word, for works of ministry. How?

[13 : 23] By teaching and unleashing God's word to do its work by his spirit amongst us. Committed to the Bible.

You know, I was listening to Ramesh Ranganathan. I think that's how you say his name. DJing Radio 2. Listened to him a couple of years ago before he started presenting a show on Radio 2. And at the time, he's a stand-up comedian.

And they ask him how he's getting on with being a stand-up comedian. And he says he's really struggling. And the reason he's struggling is because he feels the pressure of having to come up with new material all the time.

Right? It makes sense, doesn't it? That's why comedians, they just disappear off the scene for two years. What are they doing? They're working on new material. Because you can't stand up there and deliver a joke in front of 5,000 people that you delivered last time around.

And he says, I feel really jealous of pop bands. Or bands. Right? Because people go to their concerts. When people go to Oasis next August.

[14 : 23] They're not going to say, can you play us your most recent stuff, are they? Can you give us some new material? What do they say? Why is everyone flocking to get there? Because we just want you to play your greatest hits.

We don't want novelty. We want new stuff. We want stuff that we know. Give us your greatest hits. And he says, if only as a stand-up comic it was that easy. But it struck me listening to him that the Christian preacher does neither of those things.

We are not, the person up here is not chasing originality. Coming up with new material all the time. Right? I would really struggle if that were the case. Not chasing new material.

But neither is it delivering the greatest hits. I've done this long enough. Right? That you could do that if you wanted. Come up with the greatest hits. But the Christian preacher is committed to the Bible because the power is here.

The power is here. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. So there is an unashamed commitment to delivering the same old message.

[15 : 27] Because the power is here. And this message, it comes not just from a preacher. It comes through a preacher. And the aim is that God's Spirit would take his word and do his work in our lives as his word goes forth.

Think of it. You remember when we were young. Have you ever played like me a domino rally? Have you ever done that? I should have had a picture on the screen. But this came to me this morning. And you just tip the first domino and they all go.

Right? That's the kind of idea here. The preaching goes. And the idea is that God's word does its work in our lives. You want to change the analogy? Think about the first guy to light a firework in a fireworks night.

Always felt sorry for that guy when I was young. Bravely stepping out to light the match. To set off the firework. And then the whole thing goes. It's that kind of idea.

God's word by his Spirit doing his work in our lives. That's how we'll mature. That's how we'll grow. And here's the assumption of this passage.

[16 : 30] And it's something that we so often miss because of the individualistic culture in which we live. Speaking the truth in love assumes what? It assumes that there's a group of people close enough to you who you can do that with.

Here's what that means. Listening to sermons online. Brilliant thing. Listening to Christian podcasts. Brilliant thing. Reading your Bible and praying individually. Great thing.

But you know what's a better thing? It's being part of a church family where people will share with you not just truth from the Bible, but who will share their entire lives with you as well.

Who will open their home to you. Who will meet up with you for coffee. Who will know your name. Who will notice when you're not here on a Sunday morning. It's why I know I've done this gig long enough to know that this time of year we do this church search thing.

And I know many of you are here this morning. One of many. It's a great thing. There's so many churches here I could recommend to you. Really, really are. But here's my top tip. I haven't done this for a few years now.

[17 : 39] Pick somewhere where people will notice when you're not there on a Sunday. Right? Where people will know your name. Because I've just seen people drift so often.

Pick a church. Commit to a church where they'll know your name. Where they love you. Where they'll preach to you every week. And where they'll get involved in your life. That, friends, is gold dust.

It is gold dust. Let me encourage you to take the time to be known and to know when it comes to a church family. You know, a little girl came to me this morning.

She said she loves the first Sunday of the month at Brunsfield. Because in her eyes, it's eating Sunday. So we have pastries before this little bit.

Before the service starts. We take communion together. Some of us will go home and have lunch together. And then we come back at 5.30 and have pizza and prayer. She says, I love the first Sunday of the month because it's eating Sunday. And I led a great conversation about Jesus.

[18 : 44] And about how in Luke's gospel, Jesus is just always, what's he doing? He's eating with people. Right? You can make a very good case that he's killed precisely because he's eating with the wrong people in culture's eyes.

But it's such a biblical thing, eating together. Because it's a way of saying, I want to know you. I want to care about you. I want a relationship with you. And I really love you.

So let me encourage you to make the most of eating Sunday. But go, come and be part of this church. Be known and know. Speaking the truth in love.

In a world where individual is king. Says that you can't do both of those things. Think about it. Because if you love someone, you'll simply just affirm what they want to hear.

But not true, says God in his word. Actually, God calls us to be a community who does both truth and love. So here's some questions for you to think about. Who is close enough to us, who we've allowed into our lives, who will tell us from the Bible, both the hard things that we need to hear and the good things that we sometimes doubt.

[19 : 55] Who is perfectly placed to specifically speak God's truth into your life as we walk together through the ups and downs. That is what church membership is all about.

We're going to think more about this next week. It's the one another in language in the New Testament. God's goal is our growth. And God's means is his word. Let me just pull out really quick two points that Paul makes when it comes to teaching what it does in the life of the church.

Number one, and this is playing the defense. Teaching combats drift. So maturity looks like us together developing the ability to discern what is true and what is false.

Between what is right and what is wrong in God's eyes. Now, in Ephesus, which is where this letter is, where money is easily made, where the occult is massive, where superstition is mainstream.

And right at the heart of their city is that statue of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And all the sex worship and trade that goes with it. These Christians are breathing in false narratives all the time about what they think life is all about.

[21 : 07] You know, our kids are desperate to go on a Jet 2 holiday. Do you know why? Because we watch YouTube every night at Family Devotions, a little video. Before, because we haven't paid for the version, up pops a little video for a Jet 2 holiday.

People loving it in the sun, whatnot. The kids, can we go on a Jet 2 holiday? We're breathing in narratives all the time about where we think the good life is to be found.

And being familiar with the Word of God and growing in the knowledge of Christ is how we're going to stop being like a lilo on a stormy night at sea. Getting buffeted all over the place.

Paul wants this church and God wants us through his words to be planted. To be rooted. You know, I read a stat recently that said that we spend seven and a half years of our lives watching TV.

Take that one in. That 400 new hours of content is uploaded to YouTube every minute of every day. Friends, we are a generation who are swimming in information and opinions.

[22 : 12] And we're a culture that's swimming in cliches. How can we help each other grow in discernment? To grow to see all of life through the lenses of the Bible.

Let me ask you, do you spot anyone this morning that's not here? Could you follow up this morning? Send them a text to say, I'm just thinking of you. I love you.

How can I pray? And potentially as you're reading God's word on your own during the week, could you think about someone who you could encourage with that? Who are you uniquely placed to get alongside in this church family to help?

Whose shoes have you walked in? For whom do you look at and think, I remember what that was like and how hard it was. And I remember what God taught me and what I know now that I wish I knew then.

I remember being a final year student and having the fear of not knowing what was next after I graduated. I remember being a young parent and feeling like I've got absolutely no idea what I'm doing.

[23 : 17] I remember having a relationship breakdown and struggling with loneliness and sadness. I remember having older children who just don't seem to be interested in the things of God.

Friends, in my experience, rarely does someone have a moment crisis of faith. What's way more common is the slow drift that comes when a hurting heart becomes a doubting heart, becomes a hardened heart.

And if we spotted it in loving each other and lovingly sought to listen to each other and speak God's truth into each other's lives, what a difference that would make.

Teaching it, it combats drifting. And real quick, secondly, playing the offense, teaching enables growth.

And Paul says, picture your church as a body. Christ is the head. And we're all different body parts. It's a whole different sermon there, but that's how God has designed the church.

[24 : 18] We've got unique roles to play. And at the end of verse 16, what do we need? We need to help each other grow. Imagine if all of us, as a normal part of our church life, were caught up in a web of Bible reading relationships.

This church should be full of people who are just passing on. Our Sunday gatherings, our formal settings, our growth groups during the week, our women's and men's groups.

But informally, if we were doing this as well, dipping into the word privately, reading with our kids, reading with our spouse, reading with a non-Christian colleague at work, coming alongside someone who's new to the faith, saying, would you love to read the Bible together?

God's goal is our growth, and God's means is his word. So friends, think about those questions. Who can you get alongside this morning? Who would you love to come alongside you?

Come and speak about these things. But just as we close, maybe to help us see the cash out of this, let me tell you about a lady who used to be part of this church family who died, and she went to be with Jesus about five years ago.

[25 : 28] And listen, if you're coming into the Brunsford story at this junction, this time in history, know that we are really standing on the shoulders of spiritual giants. People who have given their lives over the years, people who faithfully prayed and prayed and given themselves to the work of the church here over the years.

We really are standing on the shoulders of giants. This lady's name was Lavinia. Lavinia was from a little village in the north of Ireland, just to clarify, not Northern Ireland for a friend to anyone, called Donegal.

And she had two children, she has two children called John and Pamela, and I remember going around to see them to plan her funeral. And there's always one of the first questions you ask when you come to plan it, is is there any readings that are special to you?

And with no prompting and no warning whatsoever, they both turned to each other, they smiled, and they said in wonderful unison, we would love Psalm 121, because mum made us memorize it when we were young.

Psalm 121, I lift my eyes to the mountains, where does my help come from? And so this is a psalm that the Old Testament worshippers would rehearse as they travel to the temple in Jerusalem for worship.

[26 : 44] Now here's the thing, if you have to lift your eyes, what does it assume in the first place, about your eyes, where they were to begin with? Were they up or were they down? They were down, right?

If you have to lift your eyes to the hills, your eyes were down to begin with. So if your eyes are down, when life's scary, when life's uncertain, when that diagnosis comes that knocks you for six, when redundancy happens, when that relationship breaks down, when the dream job you thought you had doesn't materialize, and we say, where can we look for help?

Lavinia had spent her life getting the word of God into her children's systems, into their heads, into their hearts, so that they knew in any moment of crisis what they needed to do was Psalm 121, to lift their eyes to the hills.

Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Friends, particularly if you're a parent here today, don't underestimate the power of memory verses.

Because God does his work in our hearts, and his means is his word. So friends, let me ask you, where's your life base? Remember, go back to the three pegs at the start. One, what are you building your life?

[27 : 59] Why don't we pray, and let's ask that God would help us build our lives on the truth of his word. All scripture is God-breathed.

The word of God is living and active. It is sharper than a double-edged sword, piercing to the deepest point, exposing thoughts and hearts.

Father, thank you for your words. Lord, we don't take it for granted that we have this in our language, that we can read, and we can understand, and we recognize that many, down the centuries, have given so costly for that to be a possibility.

So Lord, we thank you for your precious word. And Lord, may we continue to be a church that is unashamed in our devotion and love for your word. And I pray particularly, Lord, I recognize I have thrown out a lot of questions there.

And Father, I pray that you would be moving amongst us by your spirit this morning. Would you be encouraging? Would you be prompting? Would you be challenging?

[29 : 18] Would you be comforting? Lord, would you be putting people on our minds and on our hearts? Father, may we leave this morning with a greater picture of Jesus.

Thank you that he is the center point, the high point of this Bible story. And so Lord, we pray that you would lift our eyes to him as we close. Father, thank you for your love for us.

And we pray these things in Jesus' worthy name. Amen.