

Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White: Science vs. the Bible

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Good morning, Central United Protestant Church! This morning we're going to be reading from Hebrews, chapter 4, just two verses: verses 12 and 13. So, it's just two verses; I should be able to get you out of here in 20 minutes! And so we should be good to go. Hey, there's a lot going on here at Central United Protestant Church, and I would encourage you to get involved. You know, we had to cancel church because of weather last week. And it's really encouraging that when we cancel the church and all of our notes, I don't get to reset my notes in terms of the announcements, and so then what I hand off to Pat is actually like last week's announcements. And so, make sure you check the reader board, the TV in the lobby, and stop by the Welcome Center and know what's really going on. Our ministries are taking off and moving in the direction and the will of God, and it is hard to keep up with them. And that is a horrible, horrible problem to have! So, would you stand with me this morning as we read from the book of Hebrews, chapter 4, verses 12 and 13.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

This is the word of the Lord, and we are grateful for it. Please be seated.

This week I just took my Christmas tree down. Who still has their Christmas tree up? It turns out that it's my job through the Christmas season to make sure in the morning that we turn the Christmas lights on, and then, just before we go to bed, to make sure that we turn the Christmas lights off. And turning on the Christmas lights requires plugging them into an extension cord that is plugged into a wall outlet, and turning them off requires unplugging them. You know, I used to have one of those magic plugs that I could just tell Alexa: "Turn on the Christmas tree." But it got so difficult to make sure that it was up to date, I finally just decided to go back to plugging it in and unplugging it. Well, this year has been fun because my daughter is old enough now to "help." And actually, she wants to do everything, and she wants to do everything by herself. And we can argue about whether or not and at what age a kid should be allowed to plug in electrical appliances. But keep in mind, I live in an old house and I'm not entirely sure that it's safe for me to be plugging things in sometimes! Anyway, Adelynn runs to the Christmas tree, and she says, "Daddy, I can help." And I said, "You know Adelynn, I would rather that you didn't." To which she replied, "Well, when you are at work, I can turn on the Christmas lights." And I knew at that moment that I had to explain to a three-year-old why it wasn't a good idea for her to be plugging things in, specifically the Christmas tree lights. So I said, "Now, Adelynn, when charged particles such as electrons or protons find themselves, either statically or as an accumulation of charge, energized into a current, the energy that results can be dangerous, because when a large current passes through your body, it can burn you to death or kill you by causing your heart to stop. You see, Adelynn, electric current flows kind of like water, but not really at all like water, and that flow is measured in amperes or amps. And the more amps, the more electricity is flowing, and that flow that isn't really a flow can flow through your body. That's not good. Your body has way too much resistance for you to safely pass that much electricity through it." That's not how it went down at all! Actually,

what I said was, “Adelynn, there's electricity in that cord. And if we're not careful, it will get you, and when it gets you, it hurts, and you will cry. Then Daddy will cry. Then Mommy will cry. And then we'll run out of tissues. So, I would really rather you just let me turn on the lights. It's just harder to make daddies cry.” To which she responded, “Okay, Daddy, maybe when I'm older.”

This morning we're continuing in our series titled: “Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White.” And today's sermon I am calling: “Science vs. the Bible.” Now, I do need to offer a disclaimer: I'm not a scientist. I had to write all of that down. I took the necessary classes to get through high school and the only thing math ever did for me was helped me to convince a professor that it really isn't fair to take five points away when you're only giving me two if I get it right. Ironically, that was a math professor, and the class was the only math class required for a Criminal Justice degree. I consider myself more of a theologian and philosopher, and so I really should have titled this sermon: “The Bible: What Is It Really Good For?” To know what the Bible is saying is to know what the Bible is trying to say. And to know what the Bible is not saying is to know what the Bible isn't trying to say. What if the Bible were a scientific textbook? I went to Open Textbook Library, and this is what I found. It turns out that “The Introductory to Earth Sciences” is 547 pages long. “Fundamentals of Cell Biology” is 347 pages long. “Human Reproduction: A Clinical Approach” comes in at 187 pages. “The Science of Plants,” 579 pages. But my favorite was “The Essential Guide to Planet Earth.” It only came in at 6 pages. I got so excited! When I opened it up, it turns out it's 6 pages of links to other information. It turns out that science generates a lot of words. If you assume 500 words per page, then “The Science of Plants” comes in at 289,500 words. And I know I'm not a scientist, but I know that there are a lot of you in here. Our history is connected to science. But “The Science of Plants” with its 289,500 words, how many of you would be willing to bet real money that it's definitive and all inclusive? Our Bible counts upward of 700,000 words total, of which Genesis' account of creation counts for only 722. And yet some of us, I think, expect the Bible to be scientifically definitive. I am confident that God never intended the Bible to be scientific text, which begs the question: What is the Bible good for? What did God intend to do with His Word?

Our passage this morning is the culmination of an argument that the writer of Hebrews begins in verse 7 of chapter 3. The Old Testament backdrop for his argument is Numbers, chapter 13 and 14, and specifically the sin of Kadesh Barnea. The Israelites had wandered in the wilderness for one year. A significant portion of the Law had been given, and the tabernacle had been built. Kadesh Barnea was an oasis at the border of the wilderness and the Promised Land. They could literally see the Promised Land from where they stood. Here Moses sends out twelve spies. Ten come back convinced that the Canaanites are too strong and cannot be defeated. Two, Joshua and Caleb, come back convinced that God can take the Canaanites. Unfortunately, the majority vote was with the ten, and there was widespread revolt against God and Moses, in which the Israelites came close to killing Moses and his brother Aaron. Now Israel had murmured and rebelled before, but not to this extent. And if you go back and read Psalm 95, you will discover this incident was called “The Provocation.” And what followed was God's judgment on the entire generation. The generation came out of Egypt, but it would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land, not even Moses. They would not be allowed to enter into God's rest. Now the Promised Land, in many hymns, is a picture of heaven. Arnold Fruchtenbaum says he's a Messianic Jew, and he says that the Promised Land is not a picture of heaven, but a picture of rest, and of ceasing to struggle with the enemy. The writer of Hebrews was going to use this incident and this

idea to remind his readers that they, too, could make an irrevocable decision and also be barred from entering God's rest. Over the course of his argument, he's going to discuss three different types of rest: The Canaan rest, or a rest from struggling with the enemy; this is the rest that comes with being set apart by and for God. The creation rest, or the rest that comes with the completion of a work; this is the rest that comes with the completed work of Christ. And the Sabbath rest, which refers to a spiritual rest; this is the rest that comes with maturity, specifically spiritual maturity. And so, the rest that the writer of Hebrews is wrestling with is the rest that comes with salvation, the rest that comes with being saved, and the rest that will come when we are saved for eternity. It's the then; it's the now; and it's the yet to be. So, we're talking about something more than just eternal reward and eternal glory. We are talking about God's rest: then, now, and yet to be. The writer of Hebrews then argues from this Old Testament context that, just like the generation that left Egypt and lost the blessing of entering into rest through their disobedience, the readers of Hebrews can also jeopardize their blessing. What's more is that the writer of Hebrews is saying that there is a point of no return. And so, he concludes in verse 11: "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."

How are we to strive to enter that rest? By close scrutiny and the application of the Word of God to our lives. It lays your situation before a perfect and just God, and then shows you how the perfect and just God restored your righteousness through the perfect application of His justice. That's a mouthful, but it is a miracle. It is what the Bible is good for. The intention and the purpose is this intention and purpose: to lay out your need of salvation, and to announce that that salvation has arrived. This is the purpose and the intention that unites the story of creation, the history of Israel, the judges, minor prophets, major prophets, all of the disobedience, with the good news of the Gospel and Paul's explanation of what that now means for us. This is what the Bible is good for. Indeed, the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It is living; it produces from the living God and possesses the ability to make a spiritually dead sinner live. It is active; it has a moral and spiritual power to transform, to take something dead and resurrect it into something alive and new. It is sharp and piercing, penetrating and dividing between the soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It can discern those parts of mankind that are material and those parts that are immaterial. It will deal with your very thoughts. And it is quick to do so, a quickness that comes from truth, a truth that the Word of God will hold up to your very thoughts and internal intentions in a way that often makes us uncomfortable with what we find.

One day each of us will have to give an account to the very One who uttered those words. One day the God from whom the Word comes will call upon you to answer for all of your actions, thoughts, and intentions. And you cannot hide. And if you get to that day, before you have accepted the gift that the Word of God lays available before you, on that day it will be too late. The Bible was prepared and preserved that you might be ready for that day. That is what the Bible is good for. You know, Jesus accused the Jewish leaders of his day, saying, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about me. Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." How would He accuse our generation? "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have found a description of the physical universe." I think that's a straw man. I don't know that we were ever supposed to find a description of the physical universe. Rather, we were supposed to find a

description of God's plan for redemption. It's more likely that He would accuse this generation by saying, "This generation refuses to search the Scriptures because in them they do not find an exact match of what they expect."

What if we approached the Word of God from a perspective that focuses on what His Word says about our standing before an all-powerful and perfect Creator? What if we were to approach the Word of God for what it is, for what it was intended to be? What if we placed our hearts under the authority of Him to whom one day we will give an account? What would our church look like if we all did that? What if we took His Word seriously enough to arrange every aspect of our lives in accordance with what it says, not just Sunday morning or Wednesday evening. Those of us who do not yet know God might find that God offers them rest. This generation, what they need more than anything is rest. Those of us who find ourselves poor, of material or of spirit, might find that we can rest in God's promised inheritance. And those of us who find ourselves persevering in obedience might find that we can rest in the maturity that comes from trusting in God over time.

At Central Washington University, we did a multi-day field exercise. And we did a 16-mile road march, and it was tactical and it was grueling and it was hot and it was miserable. And we gave them all of the equipment that they would need to attack an objective on the other end, to include a number of very heavy machine guns. One of our primary evaluations for our cadets was to put them through a physical fitness test. And it's an easy thing to test. How many pushups can you do? How many sit-ups can you do? How fast can you run two miles? And so, it's easy to rank cadets based off of this physical fitness test, and the cadets know it and so they prepare for it. They are in the gym every day. That just blows my mind! The last place I want to be every day is in the gym. And yet, that's where they are. And then we go to the field, and there was one particularly muscle-bound individual that absolutely refused to carry the machine gun. And when I ordered him to do it, he complained the entire time. I was furious. It must have been obvious, because my boss came to me and said, "Aaron, what's going on?" So, I explained to him the situation. He just chuckled, and he said, "Aaron, do not forget that you and I have experienced situations in which we needed a machine gun. And when you need a machine gun, only a machine gun will do!"

Science can do a lot of things, but it can't do what the Word of God can do. Do you want to enter into the rest of God? Then only the Word of God will do. It's what it is good for; it's what it was intended for. You're going to need a two-edged sword that is sharp enough to pierce your soul, your spirit, your joints, your marrow, capable of discerning the thoughts and intentions of your heart. I'm so grateful that the Word of God is good for that. Let us pray.

Lord, we just thank You for this beautiful day. And Lord, I just lift up every person here, and I pray that Your rest would touch their hearts in ways that would just help them to know that You are close and that it is what You intended all along. And Lord, I just pray that You would encourage every heart in here to search Your Word daily, that they might know that rest more and more and more, as they go about Your work in this dark and lost world. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.