

In the interest of full disclosure I should tell you something: I have an agenda today. I have a goal. In the words of a former president, "Let me make myself perfectly clear": ***It is my goal to raise up strong Jesus-followers who can raze hell!*** In that goal statement I deliberately used homonyms, two words that sound exactly the same but have different meanings. The first is "r a i s e," which means "to cause or help to rise to a standing position;" in other words, to lift up. The second is "r a z e," and it means "to tear down, demolish, level to the ground." I have a vision of thousands of Jesus-followers rising up in the power of the Holy Spirit and tearing down the works of the devil! I have a goal for you to be part of that, for you to be a hell-razer! Can you see it? Remember the words of John (recorded in 1 John 3:8): *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.* Jesus was a hell-razer! Doesn't that stir your blood? We are engaged in a cosmic battle with an incredibly powerful adversary, and yet we can win over Satan and sin! We can destroy the works of the devil! We can raze hell!

Perhaps now is a good time for a "reality check." Not every believer, not every Christian, not every pastor or staff member, not every Jesus-follower is ready to raze hell. If some of us go out this week determined to engage the enemy, we may return here next week bleeding and bruised, defeated and deflated! Hear me carefully: We must prepare for the battle! We must be disciplined if we are to destroy the works of the devil! We must engage in training as we engage the enemy of our souls!

Listen to this sentence: A strong and healthy Christian life is a prerequisite to **razing hell!** Does that make sense to you? Without spiritual strength, without spiritual health, hell will raze us! We have several of our members in Chicago today, competing as the Team World Vision Ozarks in The Chicago marathon. This team has raised enough in cash and pledges to sponsor at least 13 children. Every two miles they can say: "Another child with hope! Another child taught about Jesus! Another opportunity to raze hell!" Now, how many of that team do you think woke up on Friday, having never jogged a mile, and thought, "Wouldn't it be cool to run 26.2 miles in Chicago on Sunday!"? Not a single one! They have been in rigorous training for months! Countless hours have been spent; sacrifices have been made;

they have battled the elements and they battled their own fears in order to be ready for this challenge. The cause is worthy; the men and women are ready!

That brings me to a second statement: There is a direct correlation between a healthy Christian life and the Word of God. Donald Whitney, a professor at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, says it plainly: “A healthy Christian life is impossible without the daily intake of God’s Word.” (Don Whitney, in *revive*, a publication of Life Action Ministries.) If I want to raze hell, if you want to raze hell, we must train ourselves in the Word of God. We must live in the Word, and we must live by the Word!

Turn with me to 1 John 2:12-14 and let’s listen in to John’s encouragement of those who were seeking to follow Jesus:

12 I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. 13 I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. 14 I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.

I trust you picked up on the battle language of this text. John had an agenda, and it was expressed in this same chapter in verse 1 with the words *that you may not sin*. For that to happen, there would have to be some hell-razing! Then, in verses 13 and 14 the victory is envisioned with the words *you have overcome the wicked one*. It seems clear that the forgiveness of sins and fellowship with the Father are essential weapons in this warfare with the enemy of our souls. As John addresses the young men in verse 14 he says these three things about them: First, he said *you are strong*. Can that be said of you? Then John said, *the word of God abides in you*. What does that mean? Listen to John Piper: *The abiding of Jesus’ word in us means that his words find a home in us. They fit. They belong. . . When the word abides in us, it finds a place, a home. It’s not foreign. It belongs. You move other things around and even get rid of some things so that the word has room and “feels at home.”* Piper goes on to say: *The words of Jesus don’t “abide” without effect. When they take root, they produce faith and holiness. . . We are transformed. Holiness, Christlikeness, happens.*

May I ask you a personal question? Is the Word of God finding a home in your heart? Let me strongly suggest that if you are going to try to raze hell, don't leave home without the word of God abiding in you! The third thing the Apostle John said in verse 13 was *you have overcome the wicked one*, In the language I am using it would be, "You have razed hell!" That is our objective, brothers and sisters! We are to "run a rescue shop within a yard of hell!" (C. T. Studd)

Do you think there is a connection between the clauses in verse 14? Is there a correlation between *you are strong* and *the word of God abides in you*? Is there a correlation between the first two and the third, *you have overcome the wicked one*? My absolute conviction is that there is! It is only as we learn to live in the Word of God and live by the Word of God that we will have the power to overcome the wicked one, to raze hell!

I shared with you in a previous sermon from 2 Timothy 3 that the Word of God *is profitable*. Paul told Timothy that it was the Word that would bring people to maturity and ministry (*that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work* – verse 17). In verse 15 Paul reminded Timothy that the *Holy Scriptures . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*. Today I want to remind you again of the profitability of the Word of God, especially in bringing you to Christ and to conversion. Listen to why we need the Word of God:

***The Word reveals our condition** (John 16:8-14; Hebrews 4:11-13)

John 16:8-14 *8 And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 of sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; 11 of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.*

12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

Notice the connection between the work of the Spirit and the Word of truth. The Word works when it is planted in our lives!

Heb 4:12-13 *12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

Friend, we don't just read the Word, the Word reads us! We need the Word because **the Word reveals our spiritual condition**. But it doesn't stop there. There is a second reason we need the Word of God in us:

***The Word leads us to repentance** (2 Timothy 2:24-25)

2 Tim 2:24-26 *24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, 26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.*

Did you hear again the way the Word accomplishes the will of God in our lives? His Word, carefully taught and received, leads us to repentance!

But there is a third reason the Word is so important in salvation:

***The Word imparts the gift of faith** (John 20:30-31; Romans 10:17)

John 20:30-31 *30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. Did you hear it? These are written that you may believe. . .*

Rom 10:17 *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

The Word of God is the means by which God awakens faith in us! Now listen to this fourth powerful reason why we need God's Word:

***The Word brings new birth** (1 Peter 1:22-25)

1 Peter 1:22-25 *22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, 24 because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, 25 But the word of the*

LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. Oh, what a blessed mystery! Born again . . .through the Word of God! It is proper to say that we are born of the Spirit and it is equally proper to say that we are born of the Word!

The Word reveals our condition, the Word brings us to repentance, the Word imparts the gift of faith, and the Word brings new birth. But there is one last truth I would share today, and this will bridge us to next week's teaching:

***The Word works effectively in our lives** (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

Notice the sequence here: Paul preached the Word, they heard the Word, they received or accepted the Word, and the Word was effectively working in the lives of believers. The Word of God is not just about salvation; it is also about sanctification, that process by which we become increasingly more like Jesus. I have been saved (that is regeneration); I am being saved (that's sanctification); and I will be saved (that's glorification)! It is by the precious Word of God that we are brought to completeness, to maturity. We need the Word of God! We need it planted deeply and firmly in our hearts and lives. Then we will be strong! Then we will overcome the enemy! Then we will raze hell!

Can I remind you one more time: that will not happen without training! We must discipline ourselves, especially in the Word of God! Through discipline we will gain the strength to engage the enemy and raze hell.

Let me close with a blog post by Chris Miller, the captain of Team World Vision Ozarks. See if you can translate this into what you and I need to do if we are going to raze hell.

Chris Miller, Team Captain, Tuesday, June 23, 2009

It's hot. Really hot.

This Saturday's practice was a tough one. By the time we started at 7:00am, it was already 80 degrees with 90 percent humidity. Although six miles is normally not a big deal for our more experienced runners, the conditions made it tough for everybody. It was definitely not one of those practices that you walk away from feeling like you conquered the world.

To be honest, it was one of those runs that makes you question why you are doing this. You wonder if you are really cut out for this marathon stuff. You fear that the next 16 weeks are going to be just as miserable. You begin to think that signing up for the team might have been a bad idea.

I went through the same thing when I was training for my first marathon two years ago. I had completely failed at doing an 11-miler. It was so bad my dad, who had been riding his bike along side me, had to go ahead, get the truck, and pick me up. As I drove home I was on the verge of quitting.

However, through the engagement of my friends and family, I kept training. I pressed on. Did I still have bad runs? Oh yeah. Several of them. But I also had good ones and great ones. And that is what marathon training is all about.

It's about getting out there and moving forward - on good days and bad days. It's about determination. It's about dedication. And I can promise you there will come a time when it all seems worth it. For me, it was the moment I crossed the finish line, when a race volunteer placed the medal around my neck and said congratulations. At the moment, I knew exactly why I ran through the good days and the bad days.