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SERMON TITLE: Jesus' Way with Words, Walk as Disciples Series

SCRIPTURE: John 6:57-69

DATE: January 19, 2020

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Jeremiah 36. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org

Imagine yourself in the story that Carol just told. Imagine yourself hearing God's Word. People respond in different ways. The Word compels some to respond positively, like the king's officials. The Word moves you to turn to God. The Word motivates you to change. It gives you energy and stirs transformation!

It was 605 B.C. A day of fasting had been called and everyone was at the temple to pray because their enemies were pressing in on them. Israel was in the midst of social and political upheaval. Good king Josiah had died and his perverse son had taken the throne. But God is always aware and involved. So at that exact time God told Jeremiah to write down God's words and read them to the people. Professor Walter Brueggeman said the scroll was a "deeply political act that advocates a particular slant on policy questions and passionately engages the issues of the day."¹ In other words, God was righting the sinking ship; but the question was, would people listen?

We, too, tend to seek our own political solutions. We have a desire to rule ourselves. We want to cut out the part of God's word that offends us.

God is not neutral about what we do! God puts the Word out there so we will turn from our own self-determined ways to embrace God's ways. You hear it, you turn, and you find a solid rock to stand on—that's the purpose of Scripture, and it is good news.

Just how powerful is the Word? Quite powerful.

It was powerful enough that the officials thought the king needed it. But Jehoiakim did not value the words, directions, wisdom or instructions of God. Yet, God's intention is that the Word will be heard in public and that the Word affects public policy. The living Word gets a living response—of either interest or anxiety.

His father, King Josiah, heard the Torah and he tore his clothes in repentance. King Jehoiakim heard the Word and began cutting it out. It resulted in his condemnation and death.

Notice that when you begin cutting out what offends you, you will soon cut out more and more. What's left will be meaningless, until you yourself have no meaning. You will find yourself meandering this way and that without any direction in hard times. But that does not mean the Word is powerless.

A few years back, many prisons banned cigarettes. So prisoners used anything they could find to make their own. A popular tool was the pages from the Bibles supplied by the Gideons. A prisoner in Ukraine named Volodymyr tells this story:

"I started rebelling when I was a teen, only interested in girls, drugs and my drug-taking friends. At 18 I enlisted in the Soviet army but it didn't last because of my lifestyle. [I also lost my marriage and my four-year-old son.]

That's when things really started to go downhill. I became totally addicted to drugs and would steal to buy more. I was imprisoned several times. I realized that my life was spiraling out of control but I didn't see any way out of it. I fell into a deep depression.

But then one day a Christian group came to the prison and talked about a totally different kind of life that was available to us. They said that we could be close to God and filled with his love and joy.

I heard what they said but didn't believe that could happen to me. I took the Bible that they gave me but I didn't plan on reading it. I planned to use its pages to roll my tobacco into cigarettes.

But just as I was about to tear out a page, something drew me to read at least a bit of this book. As I began to read I could feel something changing in me. I didn't tear any of the pages out. I read more and more. There in my cell I fell on my knees and prayed to God to give me a new life.

I had smoked for 20 years but stopped in an instant. I had used swear words and curses all my life but my language immediately became pure.

In 2002 I came out of prison and was baptized. Shortly afterwards, God gave me a wonderful wife. Today I am a free man but I am totally dependent on God. Through his divine intervention I am living a life I could never have dreamed of. My parents had almost given up on me but now they have their

¹Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1998), p. 347.

*son back. After many years of separation, I also have a relationship with my first son. He, too, is a Christian. Praise the Lord!*²

God's Word is living and active, like a double-edged sword cutting to the bone and marrow. The Word calls for us to listen to it. King Jehoiakim thought he was autonomous but he could not destroy the Word.

As we turn now to Jesus' words, we see the same dual response. READ Jn 6:57-69

We said the Word calls for us to listen, but sometimes we are offended. Sometimes it is so hard to understand, we walk away in confusion.

Do you, like the hearers in this story, ever wonder what Jesus is talking about? You might be right there wondering this morning, *what could Jesus possibly mean by "eating his body and drinking his blood?"* What you need is help so that instead of turning away, you press in.

Is the Bible sometimes like a puzzle to you? Jesus' followers were honest, "This is difficult; who can understand it, much less accept it?" Perhaps when we feel frustrated to the point of quitting, we can live in the tension but hang in there.

Understanding this is like a man understanding a football game who has never heard football. Let's imagine what it would be like:

This man thought he was going to a tent revival in a distant college town. He arrived and looked for a place to eat. He followed some people going to a hotdog stand. Our man got a hotdog, but before he could take a bite a whole raft of people came up around him.

He was swept along with the crowd through a gate. The crowd was moving fast and he figured he might as well move along with them, until he could see where he was. He described it like this:

"I saw two banks with people all over them looking at one another across this pretty little green cow pasture. Somebody had drove white lines all across it. Then I seen 5-6 convicts running up and down and blowing whistles.

Suddenly 30-40 men run out of a great big outhouse. And everybody where I was sittin' got up and hollered. Then, 30-40 men run out of the other end of that outhouse, and the other bank started hollerin. I asked a man, "What are they hollering about?" He whopped me on the back and said, "Buddy, have a drink."

Then I saw that the men had gotten in two bunches and they voted. They elected one man apiece and those men came to the middle of the cow pasture. A convict came and flipped a quarter and they commenced to "odd man." Soon I saw what they were "odd manning" for. Both bunches wanted this funny-looking pumpkin to play with. And friends I seen the awfulest fight I've ever seen! They would run at one another and kick one another and throw one another and stomp on one another and grind their feet in one another and just as soon as one'd get hurt they'd tote him off and run another'n on.

They done that until this boy came to me and said, "Mister you don't have a ticket. You gotta leave!" So I did. And now, the best I can figure, it's a contest where they see which bunch can take that pumpkin and run from one end of that cow pasture to the other without either getting knocked down or steppin' in somethin'."³

Trying to understand Jesus' words can sometimes be like that man trying to interpret a game he's never seen. It is hard to conceive of faith or the spiritual realm. So we must give ourselves grace and return again and again to the Word; then God will begin revealing it. The basic thing Jesus was saying:

When he said "I'm the bread that comes down from heaven," he was reminding the people of the manna which God supplied to feed Israel in the wilderness. Without it, the people would have died. So Jesus is the bread for your spiritual life. Without it, you will languish and the seed of faith within you will die. You need to consume his words daily.

When he references the need to "drink his blood," he's reminding the hearers of the animals they sacrificed in the temple for forgiveness. His crucifixion would accomplish the same thing—forgiveness of sins. He was saying when you believe by faith, you are forgiven and have a new start.

When he says, "What if you see me ascend," he is pointing to the resurrection. He ascends to heaven fully alive; and with faith in him, you will too.

This is Jesus' way with Words. To disciples of Jesus, the scroll of God is different from any other literature. It remains. No human can destroy it. It is Jesus, so do not run from it. He, and no one else, has the words of Life. Consume them in faith.

AMEN

² "I planned to use the Bible for cigarette paper" by Communications, United Bible Society, Dec. 12, 2012, <https://www.unitedbiblesocieties.org/i-planned-to-use-the-bible-for-cigarette-paper/>, accessed January 15, 2020.

³Andy Griffith, "What it was, Was Football," see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNxLxTZHKM8>, accessed January 15, 2020.