

The Power of Words

Sunday, August 22, 2021 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

John 6:60-63

Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."

- Introduction: It's not just what is said, but who says it.

I can remember a time when one of my teachers told us kids that words hurt, but it depends upon who is speaking. She said that if one of her family had something to say to her it would be important. If a complete stranger had a complaint against her it would not matter so much. In this sermon I want to consider not so much that words are powerful. I think that we already know that, but the power of words from a supernatural source. Words that have power to convey life; physical, spiritual, inspirational and eternal life.

- Set the stage: The Spirit gives life.

Jesus is speaking with His disciples and He tells them that it is the Spirit that gives life. An awkward, literal translation is that the Spirit is the "life-doer". The definite article before the first mention of the word "Spirit" indicates that Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, inspires, rejuvenates, gives life and brings life back from the dead. The second sentence about His words being spirit and life indicate the means that this life-giving power is transferred. It is done by words.

- Examples of Life-giving

The Bible features numerous examples of God, or the Holy Spirit, giving life. It is the Spirit hovering over the waters when the earth was without form and void (Genesis 1:2) and in that chapter the worlds were spoken into existence. There's Ezekiel's vision of the valley of the dead bones (Ezekiel 37) in which the prophet see a valley full of bones. It is all that is left of an army, all of them long dead. It is symbolic of the hopeless state of the remnant of Israel, overthrown and taken in to captivity. In almost every case, a conquered nation that is forced to re-locate and start over gets absorbed into the conquering nation and loses their old identity. It looked like that would be the case for the people of Israel, but God speaks, and has His prophet serve as the mouthpiece. Ezekiel makes a series of statements, moving the army from scattered bones to complete skeletons, to corpses with flesh and finally to a large army, alive and alert. Romans 4 makes it very clear that (Romans 4:19) childbirth was no longer an option for Abraham and Sarah, but they had Isaac anyway. Scripture is full of examples of God giving life where there is no life, figuratively and literally. God makes promises and He has no limits. You and I have plenty of limits. God has none. Now let's ponder one way the Spirit uses words to transfer power.

- Words Beyond Our Comprehension and Hope

Romans 8:26 The Spirit intercedes

One of the most intriguing ways in which the Holy Spirit communicates life to us by interceding for us. One of the most powerful endorsements of prayer is that God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit intercede for us. We are the subject of ongoing conversation in the Godhead. Romans

8:26 tells us that the Spirit intercedes for us with "groanings that cannot be uttered." It is a very difficult sentence to translate and to understand. I don't think that the Holy Spirit is literally groaning but rather the intercession for us is on a level and depth that we cannot comprehend. It is simply beyond us, but the God who speaks things into existence prays for us. Romans 8:25 hope is the eternal spirit sharing with our time bound minds

Just before this sublime statement, the Apostle Paul wrote about our hope, not a vague, general hope, but the hope of Resurrection and of life that has no bounds. I think the juxtaposition is deliberate. Our hope of destiny in Christ arises, I believe, when the eternal Spirit shares with our time-bound minds and we yearn for a life that we cannot fully comprehend, but the "life-doing" Spirit does, and He prays and acts on our behalf.

- Application

One of the references to God as life-giver is in 1 Timothy 6 (11-13), in which the aging Apostle encourages his protégé to "fight the good fight, and lay hold of eternal life. It is offered and held out before you, grab it! Paul urges him in the sight of God who gives life to hold this command without fault.

What is the command? verses 11-12 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Investing in people, especially children, is never a waste of time.

Finally, invest in prayer. It is the occupation of the very Trinity of God. Also, invest in people, especially children. Their souls are eternal and will continue millennia after everything built on this planet is reduced to dust.

- Conclusion

Jesus, in this strange conversation recorded in John 6, tells us that His words are spiritual in nature and are life-giving. He warns us that "the flesh profits nothing". The highest endeavors of humanity without God are vain and useless compared to eternity. He says that the Spirit is the "life-doer", who prays for us and then acts in our lives based not on our weakness, but on His limitless strength.