

TABLE OF LOAVES

Where is your bible right now? Do you have it with you or is it sitting on a shelf somewhere?

During the early days of World War II, when the German armies invaded France, French citizens took down all signposts. As the German armies advanced, they didn't know which way to turn or in what direction lay their objective. Does it seem to you that the signposts of life have all been taken down? They were not taken down by us to confuse the enemy; they were taken down by the enemy to confuse us. So many people today including believers do not have a biblical worldview. We don't know which way to turn until we open the Scriptures. The only reliable signposts are there.

The third piece of furniture in the tabernacle was the Table of Bread of the Presence (or Shewbread in the KJV). It was located in the tabernacle on the right hand side just across from the candlestick. Fresh bread was placed on it everyday.

Ex. 25:23 "Make a table of acacia wood--two cubits long, a cubit wide and a cubit and a half high. 24 Overlay it with pure gold and make a gold molding around it... 30 Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before me at all times.

The children of Israel knew about the importance of daily bread. During their years in the wilderness they had to rely upon fresh bread for that day. What was it that God was trying to teach them through those years in the desert?

Deut 8:2 Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. 3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Jesus used these words when responding to the devil in the wilderness:

Matt 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: `Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

In the church today this bread represents the Word of God. As we come into the presence of God we do so based upon what God has spoken to us in His Word. We need to hear it daily and it has to remain fresh in our lives. Fresh baked bread makes you hungry! We should enter into God's presence hungry to know Him and ready to take the word He has given us.

2 Tim 3:14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

You cannot live on yesterday's bread. It does not matter how much you ate yesterday – sooner or latter you will be hungry again. The same is true of God's word. You must continue in it everyday and not rely on what you had yesterday to get you by. There are two kinds of books that always sell well: mysteries and love stories. The gospel is both. It is a mystery, long hidden, at last revealed.

It is a love story in the finest sense of that word. It unveils God's love for the world and for us.

1. Revelation – the mysteries of God revealed

The Bible is the story of God's unfolding salvation to all people. It is the way in which we grow in our understanding of who God is and what He has done for us. All that we can know about God is found in His revealed word. The more we read it and allow it to become part of us the more it will become understandable and real and living in us.

Col 2:2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Pope St. Gregory once described the Bible as "a stream of running water, where alike the elephant may swim, and the lamb may walk without losing its feet". The message of the bible is so simple that a child can understand it and yet so wonderfully deep that many scholars spend their entire lives seeking to explore its depths and yet never scratch the surface.

We need to be constantly growing in our knowledge and understand. The more you learn the more you realize you have to learn. E.g. seminary. While we do not yet have multiple services here, I have usually preaching in churches that do. Often I will preach the same message twice. Even though it is the same message from the same text often I find it comes across very different. The more I meditate on the passage the more it begins to say and reveal to me.

The problem is that so often we do not take the time or effort to truly dig into the bible. We tend to think of bible study as treasure hunting, you skim through the pages until you find your 'verse for the day' and then you quit. Bible study is not like treasure hunting, it is like mining. You have to move a lot of dirt to get to the gold that lies within. You start at the beginning and go to the end.

A family was driving to Tampa, Florida. As far as the eye could see, orange trees were loaded with fruit. When we stopped for breakfast, I ordered orange juice with my eggs. "I'm sorry," the waitress said. "I can't bring you orange juice. Our machine is broken." We were surrounded by millions of oranges, and I knew they had oranges in the kitchen -- orange slices garnished our plates. What was the problem? No juice? Hardly. We were surrounded by thousands of gallons of juice. The problem was they had become dependent on a machine to get it. Christians are sometimes like that. They may be surrounded by Bibles in their homes, but if something should happen to the Sunday morning preaching service, they would have no nourishment for their souls. The problem is not a lack of spiritual food -- but that many Christians haven't grown enough to know how to get it for themselves.

To receive the benefit of scripture you need to read it. Three sons left home, went out on their own and prospered. Getting back together, they discussed the gifts they were able to give their elderly mother. The first said, "I built a big house for our mother." The second said, "I sent her a Mercedes with a driver." The third smiled and said, "I've got you both beat. You remember how mom enjoyed reading the Bible? And you know she can't see very well. So I sent her a remarkable parrot that recites the entire Bible. It took elders in the church 12 years to teach him. He's one of a kind. Mama just has to name the chapter and verse, and the parrot recites it." Soon thereafter, mom sent out her letters of thanks: "Milton," she wrote one son, "The house you built is so huge. I live in only one room, but I have to clean the whole house." "Gerald," she wrote to another, "I am too old to travel. I stay home most of the time at home, so I rarely use the car. And the driver you hired is so rude!"

"Dearest Donald," she wrote to her third son, "You have the good sense to know what your mother likes. The chicken was delicious."

When we find ourselves deficient in wisdom, it is not because the Word of God has pages missing, but because we have not seen all there is on the pages we already have. It is not another book we need, but better attention to the book we have; it is not more knowledge we require, but better vision to see what has already been revealed in Jesus Christ. -- Eugene H. Peterson

2. Inspiration – the love of God made known

In the Bible we not only learn about God and what He has done but we also grow in our relationship and love for Him. In any relationship there must be communication. It is hard to get to know a person without speaking to them. As Christians we need to understand that one of the primary ways that God speaks to us is through the pages of His word. When you are lonely and hurting you want someone who you can lean on to and share with and encourage you. In the Bible we read of the promises of God for us. On days when we feel weak we read that we have strength in Jesus. On days when we feel defeated we see that we are more than conquerors in Jesus. Whatever your need and wherever you are at the Bible has what you need. It has the answer.

A Bible that's falling apart probably belongs to someone who isn't. -- Christian Johnson

I have heard many testimonies on how, when going through a time of personal crisis, a verse from the Bible came alive as God's direct word to that person at that time. I have experienced this myself many times how the Bible has come alive to me especially during times of difficulty.

The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me. -- Martin Luther

As we study the Bible and the stories of Jesus our viewpoint is everything. Have you ever seen a baby look at itself in the mirror. When the baby moves; the reflection moves. When the baby waves; the reflection waves. Suddenly the baby's face lights up. He realizes, that's me! Every so often that happens when you're reading the Bible. You pick it up, and it's black print on a white page, telling stories about the long ago and far away. But as you read the text, the print seems to disappear. On the page of Scripture, you see a reflection of yourself.

Elizabeth Barrett was born in 1806 in England. She had a jealous and dominating father. Her first 4 books of poetry had been published when she was just 12 years old. At 15 she injured her spine, and the resulting confinement in London affected her lungs, and she came to be regarded as a permanent invalid, doomed to spend her life in bed. But still she kept writing. As time passed, the grief caused by the drowning of a brother, and her father's refusal to allow any of his children to marry made her a recluse. Nearing 40, she seemed destined for a life of helplessness and gloom. But the publication of one of her books brought about a correspondence with another poet, a man by the name of Robert Browning. He visited her, and then they wrote often to each other, with him encouraging her to try to get out of bed and make every effort to resume a normal life. But this met with strong resistance from her parents. And they resented Robert for even suggesting it.

They refused to allow him to visit her again, but the correspondence continued and soon they were in love. Finally, more than a year later, she escaped the possessive vigilance of her father and they were secretly married.

They immediately moved to Italy and in that sunny climate it wasn't long until she was strong and active once again. Her parents disowned her, but she wrote almost every week, telling them that she loved them and longed for a reconciliation. After 10 years of writing to them, she received a huge box in the mail that contained all the letters she had ever sent. Not a one of them had been opened! Although these "love letters" have now become a precious part of English literature, it's sad to know that they were never read by her parents. Had they looked at just one, the broken relationship with their daughter might have been healed.

We hear a story like that and we think, "Oh, what a pitiful story. What a pitiful thing for her parents to be like that." You're right. But let me ask you a question. Is it possible that as far as God is concerned, that some of us are acting exactly the same way that her parents did? How often has God made His love known to us? How often has He expressed it? How great a gift He has given that we might know that He loves us! And we never open His letters. We never talk about His love. We never respond to His invitation.

3. Transformation – the power of God for service

The Table of Shewbread stood next to the Candlestick in the tabernacle. Both work together in transforming us into the likeness of Jesus. As we grow in the word we grow in power. The Word and Spirit together are provided for our empowerment so we may move forward in wisdom and strength. We cannot separate the two.

Eph 4:14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

As I have traveled around the world I have met many different Christians. One of the greatest needs in the church today is for Christians to grow in their understanding of the Bible. Living in Canada we have lots of opportunities every day to hear God's word. Unfortunately we have become so used to having others feed us they we have become unable to feed ourselves. Biblical illiteracy is on the rise. Maturity in Christ is impossible without constant and careful study of the Bible.

Hebrews 5:11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

Have you ever tried cutting down a tree with a dull axe. Living the Christian life without study of God's word is like that.

Fresh bread is delicious isn't it? It smells and tastes wonderful. It is hard not to be hungry around fresh bread. Old bread, however, is not very appealing. Yes if you are hungry enough you will eat it but it is not desirable.

When we have the fresh bread of God's word within us then we will speak and people will respond. I remember a professor in seminary said to me once "It is a sin to bore people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ". That sentence has stuck with me through the years. It motivates me to work hard at my preaching. Why offer stale bread when the fresh bread is there for the taking.

I started today by asking you all a simple question – where is your bible? So, where is it? Who has it with them? For those who don't have it with them, where is it? I made it a habit long ago to try to always have my bible with me as much as possible. I would take it to University with me in my bag. If I got a moment I would pull it out and read a little. I would always try to take it if I went on a trip. Certainly I have always tried to have it with me in church. WHY? Because if I have it with me the chances are much greater that I will read it than if I leave it at home.

The bible says it is impossible to please God without faith. So where does faith come from?

I prayed for Faith, and thought that some day Faith would come down and strike me like lightening. But Faith did not seem to come. One day I read in the tenth chapter of Romans, "Now Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." I had closed my Bible, and prayed for Faith. I now opened my Bible, and began to study, and Faith has been growing ever since. -- Dwight L. Moody

Do you believe the bible is inspired inerrant the word of God? Do you believe it is an important book? If you never read it then you don't really believe it. So where is your bible? What good is it doing you sitting on a shelf collecting dust? Do you truck drivers have a copy in the truck with you for when you take a rest break? Maybe the bible on CD to listen to as you go. Do you students have a pocket NT in your school bag? Do you have a copy in your desk at the office? The chances are much greater you will read it if you have it. Have you set aside some time every day to read it?

The bible is the story of the mysteries of God revealed. It is His love made known. It is the power of salvation for everyone who believes and the power of transformation for everyone who receives it.

Isa 55:8-11 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. 9 As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. 10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

A young man was getting ready to graduate from college. For many months he had admired a beautiful sports car in a dealers showroom, and knowing that his father could well afford it, he told him that was all he wanted. As Graduation Day approached, the young man awaited signs that his father had purchased the car. Finally, on the morning of his graduation, his father called him into his private study. His father told him how proud he was to have such a fine son, and told him how much he loved him. He handed his son a beautiful wrapped gift box. Curious, but somewhat disappointed, the young man opened the box and found a lovely, leather bound Bible, with the young man's name embossed in gold. Angrily, he raised his voice to his father and said, "With all your money you give me a Bible?" and stormed out of the house, leaving the Bible.

Many years passed and the young man was very successful in business. He had a beautiful home and wonderful family, but realized his father was very old and thought perhaps he should go to him. He had not seen him since that graduation day. But before he could make arrangements, he received a telegram telling him his father had passed away, and willed all of his possessions to his son. He needed to come home immediately and take care of things. When he arrived at his father's house, sudden sadness and regret filled his heart. He began to search through his father's important papers and saw the still new Bible, just as he had left it years ago. With tears, he opened the Bible and began to turn the pages. His father has carefully underlined a verse, Matthew 7:11, "And if ye, being evil, know

how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father which is in heaven, give to those who ask Him?" As he read those words, a car key dropped from the back of the Bible. It had a tag with the dealers name, the same dealer who had the sports car he had desired. On the tag was the date of his graduation, and the words....PAID IN FULL. How many times have we missed God's blessings because they are not packaged as we expected? May God's blessings touch your life always.