

Reading: Deuteronomy 8

Singing:

402:1-6

41:1-7

333:1-4

202:1-3

LIVING ON THE WORD

“Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.” Deuteronomy 8:3

The main thing for every one of us is life. What would it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world and lose his own life? Of what use would riches be if life were gone? What is the value of many acres of land to a dead man or the praise of nations to one who lies in his grave? The most important thing, therefore, that a man is to look to, is life.

There are some people who take this truth in a wrong sense. They say, “We must live,” but in the sense in which they mean it, it is not such a necessity at all. That we must continue to live here is not at all clear, it were far better for us to die than to live by sinning. Martyrs have preferred to suffer very fearful deaths rather than, even by a word, to dishonour the name of Jesus Christ, their Lord and Master.

Now, according to our common knowledge, if we must live, we must eat; we must eat bread; and sometimes, when bread is scarce, and hunger begins its sharp pangs, people have been driven to wrong to provide for themselves necessary food.

You remember how our divine Lord, who is our perfect Example in all things, acted when He was in this case. When He had fasted in the wilderness forty days and forty nights, He hungered, and then the evil one came to Him and said, “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.”

This was, in effect, saying, “Stop trusting in Your Heavenly Father. He has clearly deserted You, He has left You in the wilderness among the wild beasts, and though He feeds *them*, He has not fed *You*. He has left You to starve, therefore, help Yourself, exercise Your own power. Take some of that power which You have devoted to His great work, and use it for Your own comfort.”

But at once this text flashed forth, as the Master drew it out, like a sword from its sheath, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” It was only by the use of this “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,” that the arch-enemy was driven off from Christ, and I want to use that weapon now. I may say of it what David said of the sword of Goliath, “There is none like that; give it me.” That sword, with which Christ won the victory, is the best one for His servants to employ.

This answer of our Lord to the tempter teaches us that the sustenance of our life, although naturally it depends upon bread, yet really depends upon God. It is God who gives the bread the power to nourish the man. What an amazing process it is by which bread turns into flesh, and blood, and bone, and muscle, and hair, and all sorts of things, by a continual working of the power of God.

But it is more remarkable still that our very soul and the living principle within us should be dependent upon being sustained by the food of the body. Can any of us tell how it is that the inner spirit sets in motion the muscles of the hand, and the nerves that communicate with the brain? How is it that the inner spirit—a thing which you cannot see or hear—yet possesses powers by which it controls our outward body? And how is it that the material substance in bread somehow works to the keeping of our spirit in connection with this flesh and blood? I cannot explain this mystery, but I believe it to be a continual miracle wrought by God. It seems to me that everywhere, things of marvel and of wonder are to be perceived if we will only look below the outward appearance. According to our text, we are called to observe that the power which keeps us alive is not in the bread itself, but in God, who chooses to make use of the bread as His means in nourishing our frame. I do not conclude from this truth that therefore I ought never to eat, but to live by faith, because God *can* make me live without bread.

Some people seem to me to be very unwise when they conclude that, because God *can* heal them, therefore it is not fit and proper to take medicine for a disease, because we are to trust in God. I do trust in God, but I trust in His own revealed way, and His way is this, if I wish to satisfy hunger, I must eat bread; if I wish to be cured of any illness, I must take the remedy He has provided.

That is His general rule of working, but still, it would be an equally grievous error if we were to say that it is the bread or the medicine that does the work. It is the bread that feeds, it is the medicine that heals, but it is God who works by these means, or if He pleases, who works without them. If He did not choose to use ravens to bring Elijah bread and meat, or if He did not command a widow woman to sustain him, yet He could have supported him without any means, for “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” When the Lord speaks, and bids him live, he lives. God spoke the world into existence, His Word still keeps the whole fabric of the universe upon its pillars, and surely, that Word is able to sustain our soul in life even without the use of outward means, or by means as long as God pleases.

That, I think, is the meaning of the text. God took His people into the wilderness, where there was no sowing, no reaping, no making bread, and they seemed as if they must be starved there, but then, God made the manna drop from heaven, to show that, if not by one means, yet by another He could sustain them. He took them where there were no rippling brooks or gentle streams of water, but His servant struck the flinty rock, and the water came forth to show that God could give them drink, not only from the fountains of the deep below, or by rain from the clouds above, but from solid rocks if He so pleased.

God can give you bread to eat, my friend. Though not perhaps in the way you hope, it may come in a way of which you have never even dreamed. I have read of one who was condemned to be starved to death, and as the judge pronounced the sentence, he said to him, “And what can your God do for you now?” The man replied, “My God can do this for me—if He pleases, He can feed me from your table.” And so it happened, though the judge never knew it, for his own wife sent food to the poor man and kept him alive till at last he regained his freedom.

God has a way of using the most unlikely instruments to accomplish His purpose. He can, if He pleases, make the waters stand upright in a heap, until His chosen nation had passed through the midst of the sea, or He can permit the fire to blaze around His people, and yet keep them from being burned, as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego came out unharmed from Nebuchadnezzar’s burning fiery furnace, and not even the smell of fire was upon them.

I now come to the more spiritual meaning of the text, and I pray God to make it to be rich food for your souls.

I ask you to notice, first, the Word, “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.”

Secondly, consider the use we are to make of the Word: we are to live upon it.

And then, thirdly, note the application of that Word to our use—every word of it, for according to the text, we do not live upon some words that come out of God’s mouth, “but by *every* word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.”

I. First then, let us think a little about THE WORD OF THE LORD.

What do we mean by the expression “the Word of God”? God sees fit to use figures of speech such as we can understand, for we are like little children, who have to learn by pictures. Now, with regard to us, our word is often the expression of our wish. We desire something to be done, and we say “Do this,” or “Come here,” or “Go there.”

Of course, often our wishes are strong, but our words are weak: we order something thing to be done, but it is not done. We have perhaps many wishes in our hearts which would not happen in spite of all our saying them. It is only where the Word of God is that there is power.

When God wills a thing, He says, “Let it be,” and it is immediately. Power goes forth from God with His will. He said, “Let there be light: and there was light.” God said, “Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear; and it was so.” He only has to will anything and it comes to pass. His Word is His will in motion, His power put into action.

God’s Word is also the expression of His truth. A man says to us, “I promise you,” and we say to him, “We rely upon your word.” A man’s honour is involved in his word: he who does not keep his word is not a man of honour, and he soon falls into disgrace with those who know him. It is hard to trust one whose word is not reliable.

Sadly, the words of men are often fickle and false, but the Word of God is the promise of One who knows what He is saying, who is able to perform what He promises, and who will never change nor ever be untrue, so that, if we look at His Word as being the expression of His truth, we see His faithfulness, and upon these two—the power that can keep the promise, and the will which is faithful to keep it—we may rest with joy and confidence.

A person’s word is a revelation of himself. One of the ancients said of a very beautiful boy, when he had looked at him, “Speak, boy, for then I can see you.” We often see a great deal more of a person’s character when he speaks than when we simply look at him. You may admire a person’s pretty face, but when they begin to speak, there may be little admiration left. There are some people who talk in such a way that, when we see their inner selves, they appear as unpleasant as their outer selves seem to be lovely.

But a true man reveals himself by his words. This is why the Lord Jesus Christ is called, “The Word of God.” Jesus Christ is God speaking. The thoughts of God are personified in the person, work, life, and death of Jesus Christ, His dear Son. With all reverence, we say that God never could have revealed Himself so fully in any other way than by giving “His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Well did Dr. Watts write—

“Nature with open volume stands,
To spread her Maker’s praise abroad;
And every labour of His hands
Shows something worthy of a God.
But in the grace that rescued man
His brightest form of glory shines;

Here on the cross, 'tis fairest drawn
In precious blood and crimson lines.
Here I behold His inmost heart,
Where grace and vengeance strangely join
Piercing His Son with sharpest smart,
To make the purchased pleasures mine.”

Dear friends, our text reminds us of something very sweet, “Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.” It is beautiful to think of the Scripture as proceeding out of the mouth of God. Pray the Holy Ghost to speak it into your heart as coming immediately from the mouth of God. The Holy Spirit puts into the Word a power which makes it go right into your heart with the very tone and majesty of the God of grace, the Father of your spirit. This manna falls ever fresh from heaven. The Israelites never had stale bread in the wilderness, they gathered it new every morning just as it came down from the skies. In the same way, take every passage of God’s Word as coming to you fresh from God, regard it as your Heavenly Father speaking it straight to your heart.

Mark Pearse wrote of a simple, but godly man who said, “I am quite sure my Father will take care of me. He never rested during the six days of creation till He had fitted up a place for His child to come and live in, until He had put the finishing stroke on it, and got the house all ready for Adam, He would not rest at all. And now my Heavenly Father will not rest until He has made heaven ready for me, and made me ready for heaven, and all that I need on the way He will surely give me.”

When I read that, it gave me fresh perspective on Genesis 2, as a fresh and living message proceeding out of the mouth of God. And there is many a dear child of God who, taught of the Spirit, has given new readings to old texts, and thought as we have looked at them, “Can they be the same texts? They seem to have fresh beauty and fresh meaning put into them.” This is what you are to feed upon, dear children of God—His own Word, and you must feed upon it as continually coming forth out of His very mouth.

The text further says, “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.” Don’t be at all disturbed, dear friends, concerning the doctrine of inspiration, as to how the Bible is inspired. It does not matter how it is, but that it is inspired. I do not say that our English version is inspired, for there are mistakes in the translation, but if we could get at the original text, just as it was first written, I am not afraid to say that every small detail was infallibly inspired by God the Holy Ghost. I believe in the infallibility and the infinity of Holy Scripture. God inspired the whole record, Genesis through to Revelation, and all that is between, and He desires us to believe one part of the Word as much as another.

If you do not believe that, I am sure that it will not be food to you. It cannot feed your soul as long as you are not certain about it. If it is not God’s Word, then it is man’s word, or the devil’s word. But God’s Word is food for the soul that dwells with God, and it cannot be satisfied with anything else.

Pause to sing 333:1-4

II. Now let us pass on to our second point, that is THE USE WE ARE TO MAKE OF GOD’S WORD. We are to live on it. I was sitting one day in the forest, under a beech tree. I like to look at trees, for every tree has its own features, its special ways of twisting its branches, and growing its bark, and opening its leaves, and so on.

As I looked up at that beech, and admired the wisdom of God in making it, I saw a squirrel running round and round the trunk, and up the branches, and I thought to myself, “Ah! this beech tree means a great deal more to you than it is to me, for it is your home, your living, your all.” Its big branches were the main streets of his city, and its little boughs were the lanes, somewhere in that tree he had his house, and the beech nuts were his daily food, he lived on it.

Well, now, the way to deal with God’s Word is not merely to contemplate it, or to study it, as a student does, but to live on it as that squirrel lives on his beech tree. Let it be to you, spiritually, your house, your home, your food, your medicine, your clothing, the one essential element of your soul’s life and growth.

There are some whom I know, who take God’s Word, and play with it. They are interested in its narratives, they study its histories in the light of modern research, and so on, but it was not meant merely for such a purpose as that. Loaves of bread are not put on the table for you to carve them into different shapes simply to look at, they are intended to be eaten. That is the proper use for bread, and that is the proper use for God’s Word.

Some do even worse than this, they do not so much play with the Bible as fight over it. They contend fiercely for a doctrine, and condemn everybody who cannot accept their particular interpretation of it. Do not act so, beloved. The worst implement with which you can knock a man down, is the Bible. It is intended for us to live upon—not to be the weapon of our disagreements, but our daily food, upon which we rejoice to live. I do not think that our Bibles were given to us that we might merely employ them as telescopes to peer into the heavens, to try to find out what is going to happen in fifty years’ time.

I know some who say that “this passage does not apply to us, it is meant only for the Jews,” or, “That was only for the church in the wilderness, and not for us in these days.” Let us not so misuse the Word of God, but prize it as the bread upon which we are to live, “Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.”

“But how can we live on words?” you ask. It is true, we cannot live on words if they are the words of men, but there is nothing like the Word of God to live upon. To that Word we owe our life. He spoke us into being, He spoke the soul into our body. By that Word of God we are daily kept alive, until God will say, “Return, ye children of men,” and we must at once go back to the dust from whence we came.

Certainly, it is by God’s Word that we began to live spiritually, we believed on Christ through the effectual working of His Word. The living and incorruptible seed was sown in our heart, and by it we began to live, and it is by that same Word that our soul has been sustained in life. Up to this moment, you and I have received no nourishment from the Holy Spirit except by that Word of God which is the food for the spiritual Israel in the wilderness of this world. Christ said, “My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed,” and it is by Him, as the Word of God, that our life is yet further to grow.

There is no growth of the Christian that will come to him in any way but by God’s Word. He who spoke us into being must speak us into yet stronger being. Faith is God’s gift, but so is assurance. The very first spark of life is the gift of God’s grace, but so is the pure flame of zeal. That all comes from God’s Word, and when we are about to enter heaven, the last touch that shall perfect us will be given by no carving tool, but by the Word of God. Our Lord prayed for His disciples, “Sanctify them through thy truth; thy Word is truth,” And that Word shall complete the entire process. See then, beloved, on what your inmost spirit must live—God’s holy Word.

Brothers and sisters, may I ask you whether you are all sufficiently aware of this great truth? You never received spiritual life by your own feelings. It was when you believed God's Word that you lived, and you will never get an increase of spiritual life, and grow in grace, by your own feelings or your own doings. It must still be by your believing the promises, and feeding on the Word. There is no other food for your souls, all else in the end will prove but husks.

Therefore, are you hungry? Come and feed upon the Word. Have you backslidden? Come and feed again upon the Word. God heals His people by feeding them. "How so?" you ask. When the church at Laodicea was neither cold nor hot, so that Christ felt that He must spew her out of His mouth, yet even then He said to the angel of that church, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." I am bold to say, "There is no cure for lukewarmness like a good supper with Christ." If He enters in and sups with you and you with Him, your lukewarmness will disappear at once.

Do not begin to be saved by faith, and then go on to be saved by works, do not try to mix the two. If you have lived on the pure, simple Word, believing it by a living, God-given faith, go on to live in the same way, and grow by the Word. Feed thereon continually, that you may be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

III. Now I come to my last point, which I want to point out very urgently, and that is THE APPLICATION OF THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE FEEDING OF OUR SOULS, "By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live." "*By every word.*"

If you restrict yourselves in your food to one or two kinds, every doctor will tell you that there is a danger that your body will not be supplied with all the nutrients that it requires. A good wide range of diet is recommended to those who want vibrant health. And in spiritual things, if you keep to one part of God's Word, you may live on it, but the likelihood will be for you not to reach complete spiritual health because of the lack of some nutrient which the Word would have given you if you had used it all. *Every Word* of God is that upon which man lives in the highest and healthiest state.

Look for instance, at the *doctrine* in the Word of God. "I do not like doctrine," says one. Do you know what you are saying? You are a disciple, yet you do not like teaching, for doctrine means teaching. For a disciple to say that he does not like to be taught, is as good as to say that he does not like to be a disciple, and in fact, that he is not one at all. Whatever truth is laid down in God's Word, it is important for us to know it.

"Oh!" says one, "but there are some truths that are not important." I do not know of any. In places where they cut diamonds, they sweep up the dust, because the very dust of diamonds is valuable, and in the Word of God, all the truth is so precious that the very tiniest truth, if there is such a thing, is still diamond dust, and is unspeakably precious.

"But," you object, "I do not see that such a truth would be of any practical use." You may not see it, dear friend, but it is so.

I believe that everything that is in God's Word ought to be preached, ought to be believed, and ought to be studied by us. Every doctrine is profitable for some purpose or other. If it is not food, it is medicine, and sometimes we need that more than food. Every plant in God's garden has some good purpose, so let us cultivate them all, and not neglect any doctrine.

Yet, when I come to God's Word, I find that it is not all doctrine, and I discover many *commands*. Some people, if you preach about any duty of a believer, say at once, "We cannot bear the word, 'duty,' it has a legal sound in it." If you preach good sound doctrine, if you preach on the privileges of believers, then they are as pleased as possible, but when you begin to talk about the practical

parts of God's Word, then straight away they are offended. No wonder, for their conscience pricks them for their neglect of those portions of the Scriptures.

But dear friends, we live upon the commands as well as upon the doctrines, and they have become to us as our necessary food. You know how David said of the Lord's commandments, "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb; moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward."

Blessed be God, there is also a large portion of this Book that is taken up with *promises*. Dear friends, be well acquainted with the promises. It is very helpful when you are in trouble, to refer to all the promises which are given to those who are in similar circumstances to yours, for instance, to the sick, or to those in poverty, or those suffering from slander.

As you read them over, one after the other, you say to yourselves, "This is my checkbook, I can take out the promises as I need them, sign them by faith, present them at the great Bank of Grace, and come away enriched with present help in time of need." That is the way to use God's promises, so that they shall minister to the life of our spirit.

But dear friends, much of God's Word is taken up with *histories*. Here you have the stories of the Creation and of the fall, of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, and of Moses, and of the kings and princes and people of Israel. You ask, perhaps, "Is this food?" Certainly. There are critics who belittle the Old Testament, and talk as if the Gospels are the whole of God's Word, even the epistles are by some thought to be of less importance. But this is all wrong, it is by *every* Word of God that man doth live, and often, a history, giving us an example of faith, or a proof of God's faithfulness in helping His tried people, becomes more suitable food than the promise by itself might be.

There is more weight, men say, in the concrete, than there is in the abstract. Certainly, there is more power in a thing put into actual life than there is in that same thing merely stated in words. If you ever you go to the picture galleries in the French palace, you may walk amongst portraits of kings and important men, but they are just portraits. But downstairs, there are paintings of the same men, only here they are pictured in battle, or in various positions which show them in action. Now they are so much more interesting, for you can see the way in which they lived. So, sometimes, God's promises hang up like pictures on the wall, and we do not notice them, but when we see men who have trusted those promises, and proved the truth of them, this wins our attention, and speaks to our hearts. Never neglect the historical parts of God's Word, for they are full of food to the children of God.

It is precisely the same with regard to the *prophecies*. I once heard Mr. George Muller say that he liked to read his Bible through again and again, and he liked especially to read those portions of the Bible which he did not understand. That seems rather an unusual thing to say, doesn't it? For what profit can come to us if we do not understand what we read?

He explained it to me like this, he said, "There is a little boy who is with his father, and there is a good deal of what his father says that he understands, and he takes it in, and he is very pleased to hear his father talk. But sometimes his father speaks of things that are quite beyond him, yet the boy likes to listen, he learns a little here and there, and by and by, when he has listened year after year, he begins to understand what his father says as he never would have done if he had run away whenever his father began to talk beyond his understanding."

So is it with the prophecies, and other deep parts of God's Word. If you read them once or twice, but do not comprehend them, still study them, give your heart to them, for by and by, the precious truth

will permeate your spirit, and you will gradually drink wisdom which otherwise you never would have received.

Every part of the Word of God is food for the soul, so, dear friends, it may be that there is a message of *threatening*, which speaks very sharply to you, but which is also most profitable for you. Perhaps some Sabbath, you go out of the church and you say, "Our Pastor has not comforted us this morning, he seems to have harrowed us and ploughed us." Yes, I know that it is so sometimes, but it is for your profit, for as Hezekiah said, "by these things men live."

It often happens that we need humbling, and proving, and testing, and bringing down, and every right minded child of God will say, "Do not let my training be according to *my* mind, but let it be according to *God's* mind." That sermon, which pleases us most, may not profit us at all, while the one which grieves and vexes us may perhaps, be doing us a most essential service. When the Word of God searches you through and through, open your heart to it. Let the wind blow right through your whole being, and carry away every dirty rag that ought to be taken from you.

Oh, keep to the Word, my brothers and sisters! Keep to it as God's Word, and as coming out of His mouth. Suck it down into your soul, you cannot have too much of it. Feed on it day and night, for thus will God make you to live the life that is life indeed.

If there is a poor soul here that wants to find eternal life, my dear friend, I bid you seek it in God's Word and nowhere else. "I thought I would go home and pray," says one. Do so, but at the same time, remember that your prayers are of little worth without God's Word. Hear God's Word first, and then go and tell God your own word, for it is in His Word of promise rather than in your word of prayer that salvation is to be found.

Remember that grand sentence in the book of Exodus, where God says, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." It is not said, "When *you* see the blood," but when *I* see it. So, when God looks upon Christ's shed and sprinkled blood, it is then that He looks on you with pity and compassion. Look where God looks, and then your eyes will meet His. If you look to Christ, and God looks to Christ, then you shall see eye to eye, and you shall find joy and peace in believing.

God the Father admires Christ. Oh soul, do you admire Him too? Then there will be a point on which you will both be agreed. God the Father entrusts His honour and glory to Christ. Trust your soul with Christ, for so you will be agreed. God grant that you may do so this very hour! Remember this one text as you go your way, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." God grant that every one of you may have that everlasting life, for Christ's sake! Amen.