

1. Introduction

What does it mean for the bible to be powerful?

At first you might think it is a strange question to ask of a book. (P) Perhaps if it was this ½ tonne bible you might say – yes that could be a powerful book – especially if it fell on you! But generally to think of a book as powerful, it's a bit strange? We tend to think of powerful things as big things, strong things like Rivers, big machinery, earthquakes, armies. But there is a saying you may have heard (P) "The pen is mightier than the sword." It's a saying which shows the power a book can have. It implies that books can have a bigger affect than even swords and armies. The bible has a verse with a similar message in (P) Hebrews 4:12 which says "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

There has even been a TV show on ABC that looked at a list of books that have changed the world. And that's the key word, change. Some books have the power to change us, to change humanity. That's what makes them powerful. Something is powerful because it has the ability to affect change or produce an effect.

Today we are going to see why we say the bible is powerful, how it is powerful and finally what that means to us.

So why do we say the bible is powerful?

I want to start briefly with what it doesn't mean. When we say the bible is powerful We don't mean that the bible has Magical words, where if we speak the words from it, it can conjure up power. Like a spell book for a witch.

It also doesn't mean that the book itself is powerful. That if we hold it or just have it with us that it has power as we open the book. We shouldn't worship, and bow down to the Bible because it's all powerful. The bible is the medium through which God speaks, it's just made out of paper and perhaps leather or cardboard.

2. Why is the Bible powerful?

So why can we say the bible is powerful? Well I think to say a book is powerful, is to say that it can have an effect on people, and it comes down to 3 things the (P) author, the content and how it relates to us. And that's part of what we've been learning over the past few weeks that the bible is inspired, is reliable, is understandable, and is totally sufficient for us.

Let me ask you a question.... who is likely to write a more powerful book on politics, Malcolm Turnbull our Prime Minister or Matt Preston from masterchef. Malcolm Turnbull

of course, because he lives and breathes politics and has been in politics for quite a few years.

Think about it, God is the creator of the whole world, the creator of us. He knows our inmost being. He is an expert on us!

Because God is the author of the bible it is powerful, we can know that the Bible is useful and relevant for us. Because it is inspired by God, because the bible is totally reliable and trustworthy, because it is understandable and because it is sufficient the bible is powerful, the bible can affect us and transform us.

Throughout the bible there are verses which describe the nature of God's words, and we'll now have a look at 2 passages that help to further explain why the bible is powerful.

The first passage we'll look at is the first sentence of Hebrews 4:12 which says "For the word of God is alive and active.

This tells us that God's words are not dead letters on a page.

God's word's are always doing something. His words are alive and active because of the work of the Bible and the Holy Spirit together. It's what we've heard about over the past few weeks. As we read the bible the Holy Spirit is helping us to understand, he is teaching us, he is working within us. The Bible is not just about reading a record of what God has said in the past. God actively speaks to us in the here and now through the words of the Bible and the Holy Spirit. This is why the bible describes God's words as living and active.

My second point to show why The bible is powerful is this... God's word will always accomplish what God has intended.

Have a look at what Isaiah 55:11 says..

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, 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.

God's words are not just nice sayings, or an interesting read, or good poetry, NO, his words, will accomplish what he desires and achieve the purpose for which he sent it. And they will achieve their purpose because God is all powerful.

This is why the Bible is powerful, because they are God's words, which are living and active through the work of the Holy Spirit. And so Whenever God's word is read and heard something happens.

3. How is the Bible Powerful?

So, how is the Bible powerful?

Let's look at the Acts 2 passage it is a good example for us to see how the bible is powerful. Just before Peter speaks the followers of Jesus had been filled with the Holy Spirit and had started to speak in different languages. The God-fearing Jews around them at the time

were amazed and confused about what was happening, were the followers of Jesus drunk they asked? And then Peter jumps up and starts speaking to them.

What does he say?

No we're not drunk it's only 9am in the morning. And he begins to speak about Jesus and uses words of Scripture, from the book of Joel, from the book of Psalms, he speaks about King David and what the scriptures tell about the Messiah. The Holy Spirit gave Peter the words to speak exactly what these God – fearing Jews needed to hear. That they crucified Jesus The Messiah that they had been waiting for, for hundreds of years.

What does this message do to the God-fearing Jews? Does it have an effect on them? Have a look at verse 37...

When they heard this message – they were pierced to the heart. And this is the first point about how the bible is powerful. It's powerful because it exposes and judges us.

God's exposing and judging message is not an easy one to take. It's uncomfortable to be shown that we're not living the right way.

Illustration: Gordon Ramsay illustration. Things are ok, but not really good!!

I enjoy watching a TV show Called kitchen nightmares, the show is about Gordon Ramsay a successful chef, going into a struggling restaurant to help it become better. When he first comes in, he does a total inspection. He tastes the food, he goes into the kitchen, and inspects everything- opens the cupboards goes into the fridges, and a lot of the time he discovers the muck, the dirt and the grease, the off food in the fridges. Their kitchens are

exposed and are told that they need total transformation. And there's always an uncomfortable response. Then you get different responses which range from getting angry and too proud to accept Gordon's judgement on them, to the other response of acknowledging that yes, there is a massive problem and please Gordon Ramsay we need your help.

It's not nice being exposed and told that we need to change is it?

This is what God's word does to us.

(P) Hebrews 4:12-13 summarises this point well..

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Nothing is hidden from God's sight – he sees everything within us, all our thoughts and attitudes. this is the power of God's words.. it exposes who we are. God's living and active words challenge us to admit that we need God. This has happened throughout history to many different kinds of people, young and old, people from different nations. God's word powerfully exposes and convicts us of our need for God.

(P) Now I just want to pause there and talk about how people might respond to the exposing nature of God's word.

The first is that when someone hears God's words and feels exposed, their response could be to get angry and no longer want to listen to God's words, because they don't want to be told that they're in the wrong, and so they reject God and his word. Although not a positive response it is still God working in them.

The second response could be to ignore what God's words say, they just don't care, and this may seem that God's living and active word has no effect on the person, but in actual fact, there is an effect and it's that they too are closing their ears off to God and rejecting him.

And the third response is to hear what God has to say and respond to this uncomfortable message of who we are and be willing to receive the help we need from God.

Why do I mention these different responses? I think it's helpful for us to remember that different responses to the bible can occur. That even though people can respond positively or negatively to the Bible, God is the one who is acting on them, and they either reject God or accept him. The power of the bible is that it can transform any heart, even the most stubborn of hearts can be transformed into a heart that loves and serves God.

Let's go back to our story in Acts 2 and look at what kind of response do the God-fearing Jews give to God's exposing words? Verse 37 says, they are pierced to the heart and they realise they've done the wrong thing. And they plead with Peter "What can we do?" And Peter calls them in verse 38 to, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

They respond and ask what's next?

And this brings me to my second point. (P)

2. God's living and active word is powerful because it can transform us

When we repent, and accept Jesus and the Holy Spirit into our life, then God's living and active word begins to work within us.

You see, God's word doesn't leave us in the depths of despair and left exposed— Yes his words have cut us open but his words also comfort and heal us, his words tell us that we've messed up, but his words also get us back onto the right path.

His words transform us.

Recently Mark and I went on a holiday and we visited a village on Mystery Island in Vanuatu. We heard stories about the way they used to live. They were cannibals, that is they ate humans, and were always fighting with other tribes, This weapon you see in the picture was specifically made for the killing of the warriors wives when a warrior died. It was terrible, but then as I was listening to their stories, my heart lifted with joy because the woman said this, whilst holding the bible in her hands.. but for the words of God, but for God's grace found in the bible, we would still be living this way. A missionary had found his way to these people, found a way to converse with them and share God's words, and a full transformation took place, and it wasn't in just one person, it was the whole island of

people. People who lived in such terrible violence and hatred were transformed into people who loved God and each other. Such a powerful story.

This is just one story of millions in which God's living and active word changed a person.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 shows us this kind of ongoing transformation of someone who follows Jesus. —

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

The passage tells us that God's word works within us, work's within those who believe in Jesus. What work is it? Well it's the work that is making us more like Christ.

As we saw last week, the scriptures which are God breathed are useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness, it's like duct tape – useful in all situations. God's word equips us for every good work. As we read the bible it's changing and transforming us.

For example, God's words teaches us how to be wise as we make difficult choices, God's words will make us strong enough to be patient with others and patient enough to respond with kindness when others hurt us. God's words give us hope through suffering, God's words will help us to be truth lovers and truth tellers, it will send us out to care for the poor and welcome the stranger. God's living and active words help us to love and serve all kinds

of people, like bringing meals to new moms, and pray for people who are sick. This is the power of the God's word.

So we've seen this morning that the bible is powerful by exposing us and causing a response and because it transforms us. But really that doesn't make it different to other powerful books does it? I was thinking about a book that I've read recently, about decluttering the home. It's very good, and I heard the author on the radio speak about it, and I've heard many testimonies from people saying how good it is. As I read it, the book exposed the issues I have with clutter, it challenged me and gave me advice on how to transform my life to be clutter free, it's a book that has been powerful enough to change people's lives.

So how is the Bible's power different to this kind of book?

Like other powerful books the bible does expose, it does transform, yes, but there is something that the bible does that no other book has done or can ever do and that is the message that we find in bible can save us if we accept it. God's powerful word rescues us from death into the kingdom of eternal Life. God's word can revive the dead heart. No other book is capable of that. If you come into my home, you can see the I'm not very good with clutter – in that we have a lot of stuff. I read the declutter book, and it has really great and powerful things to say, and very helpful points, but it doesn't have the power to change me, I have to have my own power to begin to declutter (and I'm sure the help of family and friends). But the bible is unique, because through the Holy Spirit, he gives us the power to transform, we don't do it ourselves, God does the changing in us.

As we hear the powerful words of God, it exposes and convicts us of our need, and all we need to do is Repent and believe, and then as we read the bible it will transform us into being more like Christ. That is powerful isn't it?

4. Do we really believe the Bible is powerful? - implications

SO now we come to the question, do we really believe that the bible is powerful, that it is God's living and active words? I would encourage you to think about whether this is displayed in your life. Would your family and friends know that you believe that the bible is powerful?

Here are just a few things that I've mulled over as I was preparing this sermon.

If we believe the bible is powerful, are we willing to open it and hear what it has to say, and not just because it's a duty or you read it because Marty and Emily say to read it, but you read it because you know that when you do, God's word will work within you and transform you to be more like Christ.

Sometimes it's really hard to open the bible, we avoid the Bible because we know that if we read it, it's going to make us uncomfortable.

It's like me and my gym membership. I have a membership to a gym, and I'm supposed to go to at least two exercise classes per week. Now sometimes I am a bit busy to be able to get to the gym for the classes, but a good chunk of the time I'm avoiding the gym because I'm out of shape. And I don't want to go to the gym because I know it will hurt, the exercises will expose my unfitness. I know I should go because it's good for me, but I avoid it.

Let's not avoid the bible like this. It may be hard and uncomfortable reading God's words, but they are life changing, and they are good for us to read. Let's read it!

Or perhaps sometimes when we read the bible we may not feel like God is transforming us, but we have a promise that God's word is living and active, that even if it feels like it is doing nothing that it is a worthwhile activity. God's word always accomplishes his purpose. As you read the bible, expect it to powerfully transform you.

If we believe the bible to be powerful and life changing then we would want to share this good news with the people around us. And this happens in many ways.. here are just a few examples..

The missionaries we support certainly believe the bible is powerful, and they are willing to spend their lives working to introduce people to the bible, because they believe it is powerful, because they believe it saves.

People risk their own lives to smuggle bibles into countries where it's illegal to do so. They do it because they believe that the bible is powerful to transform.

Our ESL classes in our church believe in the power of the bible, because they read the bible in their lessons, and we pray that God might use this opportunity to hear of what God has done for them. Expect that God will work in these moments through his word.

A team of helpers from our church go down the road to Waitara Public School every Wednesday to open up the bible with the students in SRE, because we believe that the bible is powerful.

We too can have confidence that if we have the opportunity to open the bible with our non christian friends and family, that as they read God's words in the bible that God will work within them. We don't know what their response will be, it could be a rejection of God's words, or it could be that they believe. But what we can do is whenever we open up our bibles is pray that the Holy Spirit will work through God's words and soften their hearts so that they can receive God's word and be transformed.

D.L. Moody, a famous Chicago pastor from 100 years ago, said, "The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge; the Bible was given to change our lives."

If you're someone who has not received Jesus into your life and trusted in him, I encourage you to read the Bible, find out about who God is, and let him show you the love he has for you and I pray that you will respond to him in trust.

If you're a follower of Jesus, let's do this together, encouraging each other to read the powerful bible, and allow God to transform all of us to be more like Christ everyday.

Let me Pray