

Introduction:

One Friday night, I was out late while Marita and the kids were out of town. At about 1:30 AM, I entered my house and walked up the stairs. I left the lights off because I was planning on going straight to my room and read the book I had just purchased. When I opened the door to my bedroom at the top of the stairs in the dark, a man was standing there. I nearly fell down the stairs in fright. Quickly, however, I realized it was not a real man, but rather someone (perhaps I should say some two) had snuck into my house and staged a life size cardboard poster of a man right inside my bedroom door. Just thinking about the shock that gave me causes my heart to pound even now. Every now and then, when I am reading my Bible, I come across a statement that shocks me like this. These statements are unexpected, surprising and sometimes even frightening. This week, as we continued our "Give Attention to Reading" trek through the New Testament I read **John 5:39-40**. "You search the Scripture because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." This passage sent shivers up my spine. One thing you will hear me preach regularly is about how we need to search the Scriptures. I will quote **Acts 17:11** to say we need to be like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily. One of the most important aspects of Christian growth is knowing the Word. This passage says we can search the Scriptures and still not have the life God offers. Most of you have heard me teach. You have heard the emphasis I place on studying and knowing the Bible. Can you imagine what a shock that was to me? How could these men search the Scriptures, believe eternal life could be found there and yet still not have the life? Worse, is it possible that is happening to us? To me? The fact is, I don't want to win any awards for most Bible knowledge. I want eternal life. I imagine you are the same. If we truly want eternal life above all else, we need to examine the context of this passage lest we come to judgment and learn we searched the Scriptures but are still dead.

Discussion:

- I. If you would have life, come to Jesus.
 - A. According to **John 5:40**, these Jews didn't have life because they came to the Scriptures, but they would not come to Jesus. If we want life, it is not enough to come to the Bible, we actually have to come to Jesus. This doesn't mean we avoid the Scriptures. Rather, it means we keep the Scriptures in their proper place. The Bible is not the end but the means to the end. We must not study the Bible merely to know the Bible. We must study the Bible in order to have a relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - B. This controversy started in **John 5:8-10** because Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath and told that man to take up his bed and walk. The Jews had studied the Scriptures enough to delineate all manner of rules regarding the Sabbath day. Somehow, however, it never occurred to them one who could heal a man lame for 38 years might know more about the Sabbath than they did. They searched the Scriptures in order to perpetuate their rules and traditions, but they ignored the parts that testified of Jesus (**John 5:45-47**).
 - C. We need to remember the Bible is not the way, the truth and the life, Jesus is (**John 14:6**). Don't misunderstand; I recognize we cannot know the way, the truth and the life apart from the Bible. We just have to keep it in its proper place. The Bible is our means to knowing Jesus and through Him having eternal life (cf. **John 20:30-31**). We must not be so enamored with how much we know the Word of God that we neglect to know God the Word (cf. **John 1:1**).
 - D. **I Corinthians 8:1** provides good insight into knowing the difference here. Knowledge puffs up but love builds up. When our Bible study merely makes us militant, harsh and arrogant we are spending too much time just knowing the Word of God and not enough time knowing God the Word. Proper Bible study should humble us and push us to serve even the ones with whom we disagree. Proper Bible study should make us more like Jesus. Then we are gaining life.
- II. If you would have life, believe all of Jesus' Word.
 - A. In **John 5:46-47**, Jesus rebuked the Jews because they did not believe Moses. On a blanket level, this was not exactly true. They knew Moses' writings. They believed Moses. That was how they were able to argue so vehemently about the Sabbath laws. The problem was they were

picking and choosing the parts they listened to. They studied and hashed out the parts that displayed the minutest details of law they could follow and look good before men. On the other hand, passages that foreshadowed the Messiah (cf. **Isaiah 53**) they overlooked. Those were not as important to them.

- B. If we would have life, we have to believe all of Jesus' Word. It is too easy to become a hobby rider. I don't know how many Christians I have met that every time you talk to them somehow they get the conversation back around to their pet peeves. They have studied the Scriptures inside and out on certain issues. We can become experts on some issue in Scripture. However, if we want life, we have to believe all of it. That is tough, because there are some parts in the Scripture that we just don't like. Loving our enemies? (cf. **Matthew 5:43-48**) That's tough. Get rid of all bitterness, resentment, wrath, anger and malice? (cf. **Ephesians 4:31**) Who wants to do all that? In fact, sometimes we convince ourselves these are practically impossible teachings we will only accomplish one day off in the distant future when we are super mature Christians.
- C. Isn't this at the heart of Jesus' statement in **Matthew 7:1-5**? How easy it is to study the Scripture enough to see how everyone else is wrong but not ever learn the parts of Scripture that hit us where we need to grow. If we are going to have life, we must believe all of Jesus' Word and not just the parts that appeal to us.

III. If you would have life, allow the Word to abide in you.

- A. According to **John 5:38**, these Jews didn't have life even though they searched the Scriptures because they did not allow the Word of God to dwell within them. The Jews, it seems, wanted enough of the Word to make them good enough to be saved, but they didn't want enough of the Word to change them. They wanted to continue being who they were but follow the rules enough to scrape by and get into heaven. Thus, their big concern about the Sabbath earlier in the chapter was more about keeping a checklist of rules than it was about being different people. It was more about being able to recite the instructions and less about being someone new.
- B. It is not enough to study the Bible. It is not enough to know the Bible. If we are going to have life, the Bible must change us. As **Ephesians 4:22-24** says, the Bible should cause us to put off our old selves and put on a new self. If the only thing that is different since we became Christians is adherence to a few new rules, then we haven't come to know Jesus. We haven't believed all He has said. And the Word does not abide in us.
- C. When the Word abides in us, it governs how we live and think. When situations come up, our first thought is what did Jesus say about this in His Word. Our decisions will be based on the Word. We will know the Scriptures. We will be in the Scriptures. But more importantly, the Scriptures will be in us. Sadly, too many Christians are satisfied with having a daily reading program. Too many are satisfied with memorizing some Scripture. The Bible is only doing us any good, however, when we are applying it and living by it. We only gain life when the Word dwells in us and changes us.

IV. If you would have life, have the love of God within you.

- A. The Jews searched the Scriptures but did not have life, because they did not have the love of God within them according to **John 5:42**. They saw the rules of God's Word, but they did not see God's love behind the rules. They saw God's Word as a standard to be measured by. They did not see God's Word as the means by which God lovingly set them free.
- B. Consider how they dealt with the Sabbath. Instead of allowing God's Sabbath law of rest and rejuvenation to benefit them, they made it a prison of burdensome rules. They didn't see God's love in the Sabbath; they just saw requirements. They saw an opportunity to make themselves look good by hashing it out to the nth degree and displaying their submission to the world.
- C. Having God's love within us means we recognize the love God has for us. That is, we recognize that God has not established rules for the arbitrary sake of giving us rules. He has established guidelines because He knows what is best for us. **Matthew 6:8** shows our Father knows what we need even before we ask Him. Further, **Matthew 7:11** demonstrates our Father wants to give us the good gifts we need. **James 1:17** says every good and perfect gift comes from our Father. That is a double-sided statement. On one side, it claims every good thing that has ever

happened to us has come from God. On the other side, it demonstrates that everything God does for us is good—even when we can't always see the good.

- D. Having God's love within us also means we love as God does. It means we love God and love those around us. Again, the problem with the Jews is they saw God's Sabbath law as a means to make themselves look good. They were unconcerned with honoring God through the Sabbath. They were unconcerned with serving others through the Sabbath. Have you ever stopped to think how these people could have been so dense to be so caught up in making sure someone didn't carry their bed on the Sabbath that they could completely miss what it meant that Jesus took a man who had been an invalid for 38 years and healed him? How could they not glorify God for that? How could they not rejoice with the healed man for that? They did not have God's love within them. **1 John 4:7-11** points out the love we should have because God has loved us. Consider how far God's love went for us. He was willing to sacrifice His Son for us. How then should we love Him and love the ones around us for whom He sacrificed so much.
 - E. If we are selfish and self-centered, using what we learn from the Bible only to our own personal advantage trying to make ourselves look good instead of honoring and glorifying God and serving others, then we have no life. If we would have life, we must have the love of God within us.
- V. If you would have life, seek glory from God, not one another.
- A. I can't help but wonder how these Jews could be missing it so bad and not realize it. **John 5:41, 44** explain. They were satisfied with the glory that they received from one another. They established their own rules and then went around patting each other on the back for how great they were. **Matthew 6:1-18** demonstrates three cases in which these Jews would often seek the glory that came from men. They did not help others because they loved them. They helped to receive accolades from men. They did not pray to glorify God. They prayed to be praised by men. They did not fast to devote themselves to God. They fasted to be noticed by men. They were satisfied with the glory they received from men.
 - B. This is so easy for us to do. I know I am guilty of it sometimes. It is so easy to preach a sermon in light of what certain people will think about it. It is too easy to try to gloss over some point that I believe is truth because I know some brother or sister I think a lot of will not like it. In those cases, I am seeking the glory of men rather than the glory that comes from God. How easy it is for us as a brotherhood to have this same mindset. We develop our traditions and rules. Then instead of being willing to question where we are because that might bring down the wrath of the establishment, we want their praise so we never even look at any other option. If we really want life, we need to seek the glory that comes from God. We may uphold all the traditions and rules of men such that our friends and fellow church members think we are great, but that will not give us life.
 - C. We need to be like Paul in **Galatians 1:10**. He could receive all kinds of praise from men if he had just said that circumcision was still necessary. But then he wouldn't have been a servant of Christ. He would have been a servant of men. This even led him to withstand Peter to his face when it was necessary (**Galatians 2:11ff**). We can search the Scriptures all day long to merely defend what we have always done and please the traditional brethren around us. But that will not give us life. We can search the Scriptures all day long to merely change everything we have always done and please the non-traditional brethren around us. But that will not give us life either. The only thing that will give us life is searching the Scriptures to know Jesus and allow that knowledge to change our lives by God's love. If we would have life, we must seek God's glory and not man's.

Conclusion:

As shocking as it is, brethren, we can search the Scriptures daily, seeking for life but never get it. Having life takes more than just Bible study and more than just knowing the Bible. It takes knowing Jesus through the Word and allowing the entirety of His word to sink into our hearts and transform our lives. Let us not be satisfied with patting each other on the back. Let's get to know Jesus through His revelation and seek His glory in all walks.