

2.4 Significance of Words According to Scripture

Aim

- To understand significant words in the Bible
- To get to know Jesus as Word made Flesh
- To get to know the Word as Good News

Procedure

- Let the participants describe the context in which the ‘Word of God’ came to three prophets of the Old Testament (e.g. Jeremiah, Ezekiel)
- Lead the participants to identify in the Gospel of John the statements Jesus made about himself (“I am” statements).

Input

- Through out the Hebrew and Christian scripture, the word of God has awesome power. This is seen through prophets, Israelites and even in creation itself.
- The word of God becomes flesh and enters into intimate communion with men and women
- Communication in general is multi-faceted. It has to do with words, symbols, expressions and gestures.
- We need words. We are a people fashioned and fed by the words of a nourishing God. We are born out of covenants and promises that have been expressed in words and spoken with courage for thousands of years.
- The word provides a vital link between inner experience and outward clarification of that experience.
- A closer look at the meaning of the Word in biblical times can add depth to our exploration of human communication.
- The word, ‘*dabar*’ meant that the spoken word revealed the speaker.
- Human closeness and its expression depends on words and how they are used.
- Our words do not come back. Isaac could not undo the blessings he had showered upon Jacob through words. This shows that words have got long-term consequences.
- Prophets testify to the effectiveness of the Word spoken by God. (Is 55:10-11, Jer 1:12)

1. God’s Word Proclaimed by the Prophets

- The word of God came to Jeremiah with power that he could not restrain it (Jer. 20: 8 - 9). No one who experiences God’s word is left unaffected. Ezekiel ate the scroll which was as sweet as honey (Ez. 3:2 – 3).
- According to Biblical mentality, words enter a person –they get inside. They are alive with powerful energy that enables something of the speaker to penetrate, to enter into another’s core.
- It is in the shared word that the speaker and the one spoken to make contact. It is there that they meet each other and their destinies become intertwined, and they are one.

2. Urgency of Word

- Power of the words urged wisdom writers to comment repeatedly on the way words are employed in human interaction. Words have power, influence and exert urgency (Ps 39:1-3).
- Words can soothe
- More than oil (Ps. 55:21) and can be as fierce as fire in one’s mouth (Jer. 5: 14). They can be appropriate and “aptly spoken” (Prv 25: 11) or out of place and rambling, a “flood of words” (Prv 10: 15). Words can deceive and be “snares” (Prv 12: 6) and words can be “truthful” (Eccl 12:10). They wound (Prv 18: 8) and they heal (Ps. 107:20).
- It was a common belief in biblical times that those of wicked hearts could only utter words of wickedness, while those of integrity brought forth words of goodness.
- Hearts give shape to words and their quality depends on the character of the speaker.

Materials Required

- Pen and Paper
- A Bible

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3. Jesus the Word Made Flesh

- In Christian scriptures, Word is most often used with reference to the Gospel or to the Word of God.
- The continuation of prophets' words found home in the person of Jesus. The word of God is alive with personality and power (1Thess. 1:5)
- In John the word is the person of Jesus. The word is no longer a message to deliver but a person to know, a person like us, a person of flesh.
- The incarnate word is more than a message but a person to know, a person of flesh.
- This word-person, Jesus, lived in a world of words. He knew the words of prophets before him, the law and traditions and taught using powerful words.
- Jesus left nothing in writing and his words were recorded after 20 or more years after his death.

4. Following the Words

- Where does all this leave us with regard to better understanding of human communication? A communication that is at once psychologically healthy and compatible with Christian discipleship?
- We are called to follow Jesus of Nazareth, to model our lives after his. Part of living is talking.
- Following does not mean imitating or copying. Neither does it mean duplicating someone else's personality.
- Biblical following means walking alongside Jesus of Nazareth, in context of his own time in history, and being profoundly influenced by him – all the while retaining our own identity and personality. He instilled in his hearers, a zeal for God and his kingdom, dignity as children of God.
- To communicate as Jesus communicated means staying near enough to his words to be influenced by them, yet far enough to have perspective on how they can speak to our times.

5. The Words of Jesus as Memory

(i) Kingdom Sayings:

Through these he called attention not to himself but to the kingdom of God. "...the kingdom of God is close at hand" (Mk. 1:15). There are over one hundred kingdom sayings on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels.

(ii) Proverbial Sayings:

These presuppose that the speaker has looked and made observations and wishes to correct them. Jesus was observant. He walked and listened. After a keen observation, he commented that "a prophet is only despised in his country, among his relations and in his own house." (Mk 6:4)

(iii) The Prayer Taught by Jesus (Lk. 11:2 – 4)

His words at prayer are as faithful to his vision as are his words to the crowds. He sees a situation in which the values of the kingdom will be held central, where all people will have bread, where reconciliation will be foundational to relationships.

With the crowds, Jesus is sincere and real.

(iv) The Parables

It is a message in a story. This was a common method used in teaching especially by the Jewish rabbis. Jesus used parables in talking about the kingdom to make it more familiar. Parables called the attention of the people. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus is combining "good" and the "Samaritan". By this parable he is asking his hearers to imagine the unimaginable, that the Samaritans could be good.

6. The Vision Dimension of Words

His words are clusters around one central theme: A kingdom characterized by inclusive love.

- Equality in people.
- Our choice of words must be faithful to the discipleship of equals which Jesus proclaimed.
- Our language should recognise all people.
- Jesus attracted both friends and enemies (Lk. 4:22).
- Using words of inclusive love evokes strong responses in people.

Review

1. Through out the Hebrew and Christian scripture, the word of God had awesome power. This is seen through Prophets, Israelites and even in creation itself.
2. We need words. We are a people fashioned and fed by the words of a nourishing God. We are born out of covenants and promises that have been expressed in words and spoken with courage for thousands of years.
3. Human closeness and its expression depends on words and how they are used.
4. Our words do not come back.
5. According to Biblical mentality, words enter a person –they get inside. There they are alive with powerful energy that enables something of the speaker to penetrate, to enter another's core.
6. It was a common belief in biblical times that those of wicked hearts could only utter words of wickedness, while those of integrity brought forth words of goodness.
7. The power of words urged wisdom writers to comment repeatedly on the way words are employed in human interaction.

8. The continuation of prophets' words found home in the person of Jesus. The Word of God is alive with personality and power (1Thess. 1:5).
9. In John the word is the person of Jesus. The word is no longer a message to deliver but a person to know, a person like us, a person of flesh.
10. To communicate as Jesus communicated means staying near enough to his words to be influenced by them, yet far enough to have perspective on how they can speak to our times.
11. His words are clusters around one central theme: A kingdom characterized by inclusive love.

Reflection

Like the word we follow our word must become flesh, must be inviting, inclusive and loving, expressing the glory that is ours as the people of God, full of grace and truth.

Relevant Skills

List 10 character traits of Jesus as found in the Gospels. Rate yourself for each of these character traits on a scale of 1 to 10.

Resources

www.crosswalkmail.com

References

John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1965).

Ferder, Fran. *Word Made Flesh: Scripture, Psychology and Human Communication*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1986.

