

A Sword  
By Bob Vincent

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**Bible Text:** Luke 2:34-35; Hebrews 4:12-13  
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**Trinity Presbyterian Church**  
2623 N Robison Road  
Texarkana, TX 75501

**Website:** [www.rbvincent.com](http://www.rbvincent.com)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/rbvincent](http://www.sermonaudio.com/rbvincent)

May we pray.

*Please help me, O Lord, to be clear, concise, compelling, and practical, Lord, that we may encounter the living Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, through the reading and proclamation of the Bible which is your infallible word. Apply it to our hearts. Change us, Lord, for there isn't a single soul here today from the preacher to the youngest listener, Iona, there isn't anyone here today that doesn't need grace, that doesn't need extra help. Lord, even a little one as young as Iona, Lord, can receive grace to help even though she does not understand what the words mean; still Jesus speaks to the hearts of infants and, Lord, we thank you that when they were trying to prevent people from coming to Jesus, that they brought even infants to him, and he touched them and blessed them. Thank you that the touch of Jesus on an infant can be life-changing, even though the infant may have no memory of it consciously later in life. Lord, so we pray for the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to apply your word today, the very word of Jesus. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Now picking this up from last week because I did two things, I ran out of time, and my aging brain remembered the passage but forgot the reference, so we're going to continue last week's sermon today.

What we remember are these words: Simeon blesses Mary. Remember that the Lord Jesus Christ at this point is 40 days old and that means that Herod did not send his soldiers to kill all the babies around Bethlehem at this time because much time passed since this point, because when Jesus was 40 days old he was blessed in the temple of God in Jerusalem, and after all that had been done, we read across the page in verse 39, Luke 2:39, "When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth."

So, again, the idea of a manger scene with the shepherds and the wise men all there at that time, not accurate but it's a pretty picture. Anyhow, a pretty inaccurate picture.

So, they returned but Jesus is blessed—but a strange blessing because notice that Simeon says in verse 34, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Now if you look right there in the margin is a reference to Isaiah 8:14. Why don't we turn to the left and go back to the book of Isaiah 8 and you'll find this on page 1,071. And in the middle of trouble in Judah and the desire on the part of the wicked King Ahaz to rely on foreign nations rather than the Lord, listen to the word of God as it comes to us in Isaiah 8:12:

“Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel, he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”

And you look there at the end of that sentence and there's the reference to Luke 2:34:

“And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured.” Now what do we see here? We see in Jesus that he is the divider of mankind. That sounds odd, doesn't it?

You know, you remember the hymn that we sang, “I heard the bells on Christmas day, their old familiar carols play.” And anyhow, then he says, “There is no peace on earth.” And so, there are a couple of things we want to think about today. What is the meaning of peace on earth that Jesus brings, is it for everyone, and what is his coming but a division, and you see that so clearly prophesied in Isaiah 8.

So, we go back to Luke 2 and Simeon is simply applying the prophecies of Isaiah to this child, this 40-day-old little boy, and he says again in verse 34, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.”

And then the last sentence; “And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Now “sword,” I want you to think about it. The gospel is meant to be spread by a sword. The gospel is meant to be spread by a sword, but what kind of sword? Holding your hand there, I want you to turn with me still in the gospel of Luke to Luke 22 and verse 36.

So, we see there on page 1,638, there they are, it is the Last Supper. They’ve had Holy Communion. Jesus celebrated the last official Passover of the old covenant and lifted the elements out of that meal and laid them down in the new covenant as the Lord’s Supper. And there they are and they’re talking, and I want you to look there at verse 36. Luke 22:36. He’s already asked them, “When I sent you out did you ever lack anything?”

“No,” they said.

“He said to them, ‘But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.’ The disciples said, ‘See, Lord, here are two swords.’ ‘That is enough,’ he replied.”

Now you’re really thinking, aren’t you? I said that the gospel is spread by the sword and then I took you to a passage that said, Jesus said, “Sell whatever you’ve got and make sure you get a sword.”

What in the world am I saying? Well, hang on to the hat because we want to look across the page here and I want you to look at verse 51. What is he saying? “No more of this!”

What happens? Let’s look at verse 47, page 1,638.

“While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’ When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, ‘Lord, should we strike with our swords?’”

Now he’s already armed them, right? Get a sword. And they asked, “‘Lord, should we strike with our swords?’ And one of them,” (that’s Peter) “one of them,” verse 50, “struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.” The gospel is to be spread with a sword.

“Where are you going with this, Bob? Where are you going with it?” Well, hang on. Notice that Jesus says in response to this, “‘No more of this!’ And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.”

I want to give a short rabbit trail. Rabbit trails are very profitable, by the way, because it's the rabbit trails where we pick up information we wouldn't have any other way, and it's like a parenthesis. And again, sometimes that dog that's trying to tree a raccoon gets on a rabbit trail, and you've got a nice rabbit stew. So, bear with me for a little rabbit trail and what is Jesus telling us here?

I'll tell you what he's telling us, he's saying that deadly force is valuable as a deterrent, but it isn't valuable once it's used. Let that sink in for a moment. What did Jesus' disciples have when they were armed with swords that prevented something happening to them—not to Jesus?

Remember, Jesus' purpose was to die. It had to happen. If Jesus had not died, if Jesus had not been arrested and beaten and then nailed to a cross, we'd all be on our way to hell. So, the very purpose of Jesus' life was not to preserve his life, but Jesus did want to protect his disciples and he knew this: When people know you're armed, they're not likely to mess with you. That's a very important principle. A weapon is of great use until it's used.

(Still on the rabbit trail. I think Bugs Bunny is just over there and I'll be through in a moment.)

The point is that once a weapon is used, people realize how impotent you really are in terms of defending yourself. "Oh, they only have two swords. Oh, they only have this." And I want to say that this is true with regard to nations, that a strong military—again on the rabbit trail—a strong military is a deterrent to aggression until the weapons are used, and then people realize, "Hm, they're not as strong as we thought they were."

I remember a certain Secretary of State named Madeleine and she said, "What's the good of all these weapons if I don't get to use them?" And she used them, and it had disastrous results. Madeleine Albright.

Weapons are used as a deterrent to aggression, but once you use them, the facade is over. That's when you finally see that the Wizard of Oz behind the curtain is not who he presents himself as being.

So, God's kingdom is not spread by the literal, physical sword, though the literal, physical sword can be useful, or a firearm can be useful as a deterrent towards aggression. Whenever I walk alone, and I have a few times, in the dark in a city, I try to present my body posture and my face as if I'm armed to the teeth, even though the only arm I carry is "the sword of the Spirit," the Word of God. But I want them to look and think, "I ain't gonna mess with

that dude,” because I want to look as if I’m heavily armed and ready to execute my plan.

My plan is, “Lord, help me!” And you know, I’m struck with that as I read the Bible. Depending on the Lord, that’s our ultimate defense physically.

I think about Abraham and how he lied to Pharaoh to cover up, he was afraid that they were going to steal Sarai, his wife, because she was a beautiful, beautiful woman. And he didn’t need to do that. Do you know why?

Because God’s purpose was to protect Abraham and Sarah and he sent a plague on Pharaoh (Genesis 12:17).

God will always protect his own. Always protect his own. I’m struck with it also in 2 Chronicles, reading about Rehoboam. When Rehoboam rebelled against the Lord, the Lord dropped the hedge and sent Pharaoh Shishak to go and invade Judah and Jerusalem, but when he repented God protected him (2 Chronicles 12:12-13).

You see, our protection is of the Lord. This is a very important truth because, what?

You are immortal until God’s purpose for you has been fulfilled. So, I don’t trust in a sword or a gun. I have both. I don’t trust in them. I trust in the Lord because I know I’m immortal until God’s purpose is done.

So again, what sword are we talking about? Well, we’re given that clue back in Luke 2 and he says that Jesus is going to be spoken against, and he says in verse 35, “So that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” And that, of course, at the end is a direct reference to Mary at the foot of the cross of Jesus, along with Mary Magdalene and others watching her son die.

There’s nothing more painful to a mother than to watch a child slowly dying and being utterly impotent, utterly unable to do anything to stop it. You know, my father used to say, “Boy, there’s no love like a mother’s love,” and I thought, “Well, does that mean you don’t really love me, Daddy?” But it’s true that the person who’s born a baby in her womb for nine months has a bond to a child that a father never quite has. And so, think of the heart of Mary, think of her at the foot of the cross of Jesus, think of her agony as she watches her son’s life slowly bleeding out there.

And so, there is that reference and it’s somewhat metaphorical but let’s look now at Hebrews 4 and beginning at verse 12. Hebrews 4 beginning at verse 12 because **this is the sword that conquers the world**. And let’s look at it, page 1,866, Hebrews 4 and verse 12, and he says:

“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. 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.”

Let’s ponder this a moment. I made a reference to this last week, and I said that in that phrase that’s there, “Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account,” that is a Greek word that takes us to the gladiatorial games.

When a gladiator defeated another gladiator and had him fully defeated and is ready to execute him and he’s looking to whoever the head officer is attending, generally in Rome it would have been the emperor, to find out whether he’s going to kill him or not, how does he have him? He has him on his back. He has his head pushed down and he has a sword, or his tripod or what other weapon he has, on his neck (trachēlízō τραχηλίζω). In other words, the picture here is of a gladiator who has been defeated, who is about to be executed, maybe, maybe not. He’s completely defenseless. He’s completely undone and he’s waiting the decision. His neck is laid bare. That’s what’s laid bare, the neck.

Now this is the purpose of God’s word, the purpose of God’s word is to strip you naked. God’s word’s purpose is to take all your defenses away. You know, we’re full of defenses, aren’t we? In psychology we speak of defense mechanism. Never forget that the most arrogant, the proudest people you ever meet, that’s a defense mechanism covering up for their terrible insecurities, and the purpose of God’s word is to take away all of our defense mechanisms so that we’re there in the words of that Negro spiritual, “It’s not my father, not my brother, but it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.”

That’s the purpose of God’s word, and that’s why God’s word hurts because it’s a sword that’s designed to penetrate. Why does God want to hurt you in preaching? Because he can’t heal you and help you until you’re hurt and wounded. He wants you stripped bare. He wants you lying on your back. He wants your head back and your neck open like that so that you can be finished off and that you’re at the end of the road.

You know, they talk about people haven’t come, they haven’t hit rock bottom when you deal with various addictions. People never get help until they’ve hit rock bottom. What’s rock bottom?

What's rock bottom for Sandy might be different than what's rock bottom for me. What's rock bottom for you?

God wants to spare you the agonies of life by making you agonize under a torturous preacher. [laughter] Wouldn't you rather be tortured by old Bob than to be tortured in an automobile accident?

I had a very close friend, I did her funeral, and she, early in the morning, she left Avoyelles Parish to go down near Baton Rouge. And as she dozed off, she hit an 18-wheeler, and she was trapped in her car and burned to death.

Now she was a real Christian, and she went to heaven, but I just ask this: Would you rather sit here and be tortured for another hour and a half, or would you rather be trapped in a burning car?

Thank the Lord you don't have to make that choice. I'm simply saying that the purpose of preaching is to expose in you what you don't see any other way, and he says so that it is designed to do that, and so he says in verse 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 an account."

Now notice how he describes the Bible in verse 12, "For the word of God is living and active." Have you ever thought of that? It's alive! Wow. It's active. Wow. You know, literally that's true, that there are molecules, there are atoms in every part of this book that are living and active. A single atom is like a universe. It's living and active.

But obviously that's not what he's saying. Obviously, what he's talking about is the spiritual impact, the emotional impact, the intellectual impact resulting in a change of people's wills and that's what the Bible is designed to produce. And what's in particular true here is this, it is the preaching of the word. Our confessional documents say—trying to sum up what the Bible itself says—that God makes the reading and especially the preaching of the word a powerful and effective means of drawing people to Christ (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, Answer 155). There isn't a person here this morning from the youngest, Iona, to the oldest—let's see, I'm not going to call your name, but you know who you are—who doesn't need God's word and he says it's sharper than any two-edged sword. Think about it.

You see, the Romans used short swords with two edges, and he has that in mind, but notice he says what it does: It penetrates to, what? Even to the dividing of soul and spirit. Now there are two positions that good, godly, Christian theologians take on soul and spirit. Some say that they are one and the same, the soul and the spirit are one and the same, and some say that

human beings have both a soul and a spirit, which is true? And I'm going to submit to you the answer to that lies in the next statement: "joints and marrow." Do you have joints? Do you have marrow? They are distinct, but they're all part of the physical body. But the nonphysical body has a distinction between a soul and a spirit. And so, does that make me a trichotomist as over against a dichotomist who's saying that man's nature is fundamentally two rather than fundamentally three?

I'm going to tell you: Theologians enter in where angels fear to tread. The Bible does not give us so black and white an answer to that question that we can be dogmatic and say, well, man is fundamentally three parts: body, soul, and spirit, as over against saying that man is fundamentally two parts, physical and nonphysical.

Now I'm just going to throw this out. Just as the physical body has various parts, I've got a heart, I hope it keeps ticking for another 20 years.

I've got a brain—I hope it keeps working and no Lewy body coming in on me.

I've got fingers, that they keep grasping in spite of arthritis, and feet.

I've got all these parts, different parts, but one body. That's the material part. It can be divided in different parts.

The non-material part can be divided into two parts as well, but the Bible oftentimes uses the word "soul" (ψυχή נַפְשׁוֹ) and the word "spirit" (πνεῦμα רוּחַ) interchangeably as if there's no difference. There is a difference and here is the difference: The non-material part of man as soul is related to this earth, the non-material part of man as it relates to God in heaven is the spirit, it's the non-material part. They're used interchangeably. They're synonyms. A synonym is not identical to its counterpart. There are differences.

Now notice what the Bible does, it divides between the soul and the spirit. Now let me give you a little rule of thumb.

The soul is your mind. What happens when the motherboard of a computer dies? The undertakers come, they dress it up and make like it's not really dead. They put that computer in a nice wooden box with flowers, with the thing opened up so everybody can admire. That was a wonderful Mac, or it was a wonderful IBM computer. Look at it. It looks just like it's asleep. [laughter] What happens when the motherboard of a computer dies? It's dead.

What happens when your motherboard, which is your brain, dies? When the motherboard of your body...

[baby crying] That's fine, Iona, you're not ready to die yet. It's okay, and I love those cries. I love to hear you. It's kind of like, for me, saying, "Amen, Bob, go on and preach another 20 minutes!"

And so, what happens when your brain dies? That's the motherboard. When it's dead, you bury it or cremate it.

But what is the program in a computer? The program in the computer, and the memory of the computer can go on and on, if you're smart and back them up. I believe in redundancy ever since I lost in 1988 something I had worked very hard on, and so I am a fanatic about backing up and redundancy.

Everything I have on one computer I have on another. And so, what happens when your computer is done for, what do you do? If you backed it up, you've got a program, and you've got the memory, that is all the data that you saved, it continues on.

I have to tell you a quick story that is a great blessing. I had a man who was in my congregation in Alexandria who was working on his PhD at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, and he had done all of his course work and he had moved back to Alexandria where his wife's parents lived, so he could live less expensively, and he was working on his doctoral dissertation, his PhD at the University of Aberdeen, and something happened to his Mac computer.

Now at that time, I did not have a Mac. But something happened to it. He was desperate. He took it to a computer store. They couldn't get it to reboot. They couldn't get it to do a thing. So, he called me up and he said, "Bob, I've got a really odd request. Would you anoint my computer with oil and pray over it?"

And I said, "Robert, sure. I do all kinds of goofy, crazy things, so you come on over to my office and you bring that computer and you bring two floppy disks."

So, I laid hands on his computer, and he had no backup of his dissertation, and he was ready to send it off to his professor for final reading. I laid my hands on it. I took oil. I anointed the computer with oil in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then I said to Robert—his name was Robert Lucas—I said, "Robert, turn that thing on." He turned it on. It powered up.

I said, "Let's put a floppy disk in there. Let's back your dissertation up." He did. It did. And I said, "I believe in redundancy. Let's make a second copy." He did, and it crashed, and it never came on again. But his dissertation was saved, glory to God!

Now that's a good illustration of the fact that God hears and answers prayer today. That man's work of years on his PhD was going to be totally lost.

Here's the deal: Your soul will never be lost. Your spirit will never be lost. The human mind is analogous to the human soul.

Everyone has a mind, and the human mind is analogous to the human soul.

The human soul and the human mind are used interchangeably, but people who may have a wonderful mind and may have a wonderful brain often are spiritually dead until the Holy Spirit comes and creates spiritual life in them.

So, this is what is said here in Hebrews 4:12, and that is: God's word is so powerful that it can split apart that which is designed to stick together in the human person, and it can split apart joints and marrow, and its purpose is it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. The thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

You know, I was reading something yesterday in the autobiography of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon wrote an autobiography. He tells stories about things in his life and he tells a story there about a man who was sitting there as he was preaching, and he said, "I don't know how I knew it but there was a man there, and I pointed at him, and I said, 'You, sir, are keeping your business open on the Lord's day, and you have taken a certain amount of money.'" He named the amount of money, and do you know what happened?

Several weeks later, this man is talking to another man, and he said, "I'm going to hear Mr. Spurgeon," and he said, "Why?" He said, "Because he pointed at me, and he knew exactly what I had done, and down to the penny and he spoke it out in the service." (Charles H. Spurgeon (1899), *The Autobiography of Charles Spurgeon*, Vol. II. (Curts & Jennings), pp. 226-27.)

Now how does that happen? I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life who proceeds from the Father through the Son and is here this morning. I believe that when I preach, the Holy Ghost is present to apply the word to your heart, so that you hear something maybe that I never said. But it's the Spirit of God taking a general idea and applying it to your heart and

sticking that sword in there and twisting it, because God wants you healthy in your soul. God wants your mind to be sound. God wants you to be alive in him. God wants you to be happy and joyful, and so God has arranged that his word will reveal things about you that nobody else knows because I'll say this: If we had a giant, drop-down TV that showed in high definition and with a Bose sound system, every thought that I have ever entertained—I'm not talking about a thought passing through the mind, I'm talking about a temptation that I said, "Hm, let me think about that a little bit. It sure would feel good to beat the mess out of that man after what he did to me."

If you could see in high definition and hear in surround sound every thought that I have gone on a date with, every thought that I've entertained and spent time pondering, if you could see it, you'd say, "Man, how can that guy get in the pulpit? Are you serious?"

Some of the worst people I know are preachers, but do you know what? Some of the worst people I know sit in pews.

If we knew what's going on inside, we would be like that gladiator lying on the ground with our head back, our neck exposed. What does God want from you and me today?

He wants what's inside us to be manifest to us, to you as an individual. That's what he wants. He wants you to be honest. You know most people are liars. Do you know who we lie to the most? We lie to ourselves the most. You know, I watch things happening in the world, and I realize that when man fell into sin in the garden of Eden, he didn't simply lose a gift of super-added grace, called in Latin a *donum superadditum*—man lost his ability to think rationally (Romans 1:18ff.). And who's better at lying than a sinner who's convicted in his own heart, making excuses to God, "God, you know I don't need to do that because blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Lord, I'm not so bad because, you know, my neighbor..."

What's God's word's purpose? It's to pierce your heart and to divide between your mind and your spirit, so that you're naked and laid bare before God and say, "Lord, it's not my brother, not my sister but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer."

May we pray.

*Lord, I pray that you would give each of us here today to be honest with you and honest with ourselves. Lord, people don't have to tell me what's going on, people need to tell themselves what's going on. Would you strip us naked this morning here so that you can clothe us afterwards with the very*

*righteousness of Christ? Would you reveal our hearts, the intentions of our hearts, Lord, that when we're saying things, we know deep down inside we're lying to ourselves, would you expose that and keep us from being humiliated by being humbled before you? And that, Lord, knowing this, if we humble ourselves before you, you, Lord, will lift us up, you will exalt us, you will protect us, you will cover us as you protected Abraham, as you protected Rehoboam, so you'll protect us that if our heart is right with you we need not fear Satan, or his demons, or cancer, or heart disease, or financial bankruptcy, or an invading foreign army, we need only fear you because when we fear you we are truly at peace. Lord, grant it be so. For Jesus' sake we pray. Amen.*