

## **The Letter**

Hebrews 4:1-13

#1 (of 3) in our mini-series "Reading Your Bible"

Peter Hiett

April 10, 2016

["The Letter" was sung by Vince Colbert, worship leader at The Sanctuary]

Give me a ticket for an aeroplane  
Ain't got time to take a fast train  
Lonely days are gone, I'ma goin' home  
My baby just wrote me a letter

I don't care how much money I gotta spend  
Got to get back to my baby again  
Lonely days are gone, I'ma goin' home  
My baby just wrote me a letter

Well she wrote me a letter  
Told me she couldn't live without me no more  
Listen mister can't you see  
I gotta get back to my baby once more, anyway

Give me a ticket for an aeroplane  
Ain't got time to take a fast train  
Lonely days are gone, I'ma goin' home  
My baby just wrote me a letter

Well she wrote me a letter  
Told me she couldn't live without me no more  
Listen mister can't you see  
I gotta get back to my baby once more, anyway

Give me a ticket for an aeroplane  
Ain't got time to take a fast train  
Lonely days are gone, I'ma goin' home  
My baby just wrote me a letter  
Cause my baby just wrote me a letter

"The Letter" written and composed by Wayne Carson Thompson

## **Prayer**

Lord God we ask that you would help us now to preach, in Jesus' name, Amen.

## **Message**

**Hebrews 4:1-13**

*Therefore, since a promise remains of entering his rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them;*

"Them" is the Israelites in the wilderness. And the author just said that the Gospel was preached to them—that's an interesting thought!

*but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith ("trust," "belief") in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,' although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works"; and again in this place: "They shall not enter my rest."*

Remember the Promised Land was given to the Israelites, but they didn't enter. They didn't enter because they didn't believe "God is Salvation." They thought *they* were salvation . . . so they didn't enter the promised rest. The Prophets, like Ezekiel, Saint Paul and even Jesus, seem to say that they will enter, but no one enters *until* they "cease from their work" and believe.

*Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua (Greek: Yesous –which should be pronounced "Jesus") had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his works (ergon) as God did from his. Let us therefore be diligent (strive, work) to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful (energes—"at work," "active")*

So: "Rest! Cease from your work, for the Word of God is at work."

*For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account (literally: "to whom we must surrender the word").*

-Hebrews 4:1-13 NKJV

Well, I doubt you got all of that, but you're probably familiar with those last few verses: "*The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword (Machaira).*"

*Machaira* was the Roman short sword or simply a large knife.  
A knife . . .

Yet, countless times I seem to have fallen asleep right on that knife . . .  
A full face plant right into the open word of God, and I was never cut . . .

Countless times, particularly in junior high, I'd make myself do "devotions"—only to wake up around three in the morning with the light still on and those onion skin Bible pages shellacked to my face with skin oil. I'd have to peel them off.

All I'd have to show for my "devotion" was nose prints throughout the book of Romans.

. . . Hardly a sharp two-edged sword!

I tried to study—just like I'd do my homework—I'd *really work*. But I struggled with reading as a kid (I was in the slow group). In high school and college, I took only the required courses on *literature*. To me "*literature*" was always dull—anything but sharp. And the Bible is *literature*.

Scripture hardly seemed sharp. But even if it was, why would that make you want to read it? The *machaira* was used by the priests in the temple to cut animals apart in order to lay them naked and exposed on the altar, where they would be consumed by the eternal fire as an offering to God. *Golly! That sounds like fun!*

Every night, before bed get cut to the division of soul and spirit and get "devoted." (That's what "devoted" means in Scripture—"sacrificed to God.") How on earth could that help you enter rest?

*"The word of God is living and powerful sharper than any two edged machaira."*  
- Hebrews 4:12a

So the author of Hebrews writes, "Strive to Rest" and then prescribes "the word."

Well #1: How do I work at rest or rest at work?

And #2: How does the Word of God, cut?

What is the Word of God?

- In Hebrews 4, "*word of God*" seems to refer to that which God spoke to the Israelites, which was recorded in the Old Testament. And it seems to refer to Joshua, which means Jesus, which literally means, "God is Salvation."
- In John 1 we read that the "*Word of God*" is God. God has integrity! And He became flesh in Jesus.
- Even in the Old Testament, the Word of God shows up as a man and does stuff, like wrestle with Jacob and name him Israel.
- The "Word of God" is a *person* and yet prophets spoke the "Word of God," and what they spoke is recorded as Scripture.
- In the New Testament – Jesus, *the Word of God in flesh*, says, "*Scripture cannot be broken*" (John 10:35b).
- 1 Peter 1:25, Peter writes: "*The word of the Lord abides forever, that word is the gospel that was preached to you.*"
- Ephesians 1:13 Paul writes: "*...the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.*" That means "gof your salvation"—personal gospel—your salvation.

So the *Word of God* is the Word God speaks,

- Which is Jesus,
- Which means "God is salvation,"

- Which is faithfully recorded in Scripture.

“*God is Love*,” says Scripture, so the Word of God is the Word of Love, spoken to you and faithfully recorded in Scripture—“*the good news of your salvation*.”

The Word of God is the Word of Love given to you. And come to think of it, there has been one particular genre of literature that I never had to work at reading, and has always cut me like a knife.

In 6<sup>th</sup> grade Mrs. Black, my teacher, labored at her job in order to motivate all of us (her students) to read every genre of literature: mystery, poetry, adventure. But it was all dull; every genre was dull . . . except one! And that one genre of literature was illegal in Mrs. Black’s 6<sup>th</sup> grade class. It was illegal because it was not dull; in fact, it was so exciting that it would utterly distract a student from all his or her assigned reading.

It was dangerous. It could cut like a knife into a 6<sup>th</sup> graders heart. If Mrs. Black found Literature of this type, it was taped to the classroom door in an effort to shame the participants into complete isolation. *Shame!* For you see, when this literature was addressed to someone else, by someone else, it seemed ridiculous and absurd. But if this literature was addressed to you, it *pierced* your heart and *cut you open*. It was the literary genre of personal gospel.

On a few occasions I received it by stealth under my desk and it would read something like this:

“Dear Peter, I think you’re cute. I like you, if you like me.  
If you like me, check this box.”

I’m talking love notes—the literary genre of the love letter: good news that one of those amazing, intriguing, complex, mysterious, and fascinating creatures of the opposite sex desired you.

The Bible is many things, and next week we’ll get into that in more detail. It is history. It is poetry. It is songs. It is parables. It is drama and adventure. It is instructions. It is law and judgment, *but all for the sake of* “gospel”—“The good news of your salvation.” God desires you!

Scripture is a *love letter* from the Father to His prodigal children—saying,  
“*Please come home.*”

Scripture is a *love letter* from the Bridegroom to His bride—saying,  
“*Please would you be my home.*”

Well, since 6<sup>th</sup> grade I’ve forced myself to read, and in fact I’ve become an expert at studying. By the time I was in college, I was getting trophies in reading and regurgitating. I’d put off studying all semester. Then, about thirty-six hours before the final, I’d lock myself in my room with all my books. I’d take Folgers instant coffee and water and slam it down, then brush my teeth so I didn’t throw up. Then I’d just ingest a whole lot of information all through the

night and into the next day, right up to the moment of an exam, and then I would regurgitate it all back out onto the test: dates, names, places, ideas.

. . . And I'd get an A. I could regurgitate well.

It was absolute torture, but it was worth *the price* to get the grade.

*What price* are you willing to pay in order to make the grade with God?

Well, if you read Scripture the way I read my textbooks in college, you've already failed.

- You're reading to comprehend the words and not letting the Word comprehend you.
- You're reading in order to use the meaning, and therefore can't know the meaning, for you've killed the meaning.
- In other words, you're not reading by Grace through Faith and you certainly are not *"entering God's rest."*

*For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith (trust) in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest.*

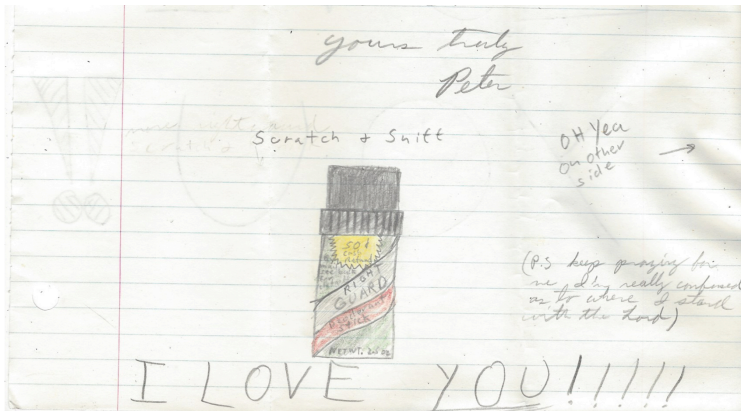
- Hebrews 4:2-3a

You know, all that reading in college—pelagic sedimentation, stratigraphic variation—I barely remember any of it. I was hardly affected by any of it. It was not "living and effective." Thirty thousand dollars and four years of restless striving flushed down the toilet. None of that reading was effective. EXCEPT of course... for my personal gospel reading. I mean love letters; these love letters. [Peter holds up a stack of old love letters.]

Now it almost seems sacrilegious to use the word "read" when referencing these love letters. I mean it wasn't work. I didn't just "read" those letters. I consumed them like a starving man eats bread or drinks wine. I desired them. And amazingly there was no test or I should say not that kind of test. I wasn't tested on them, BUT they did test me.

Susan and I started dating in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. But after graduating we told each other we were "free to date whomever" when we attended college. Susan was in Durango, and I was in Boulder and I was free to date whomever I desired. I was in control. But . . . she wrote letters—love letters. And she sent them, to me.

Every couple of days, the Kittridge Dormitory mailroom would smell of perfume and people knew I had received another love letter. Susan would scent her letters with perfume, and I would rub Right Guard Stick all over mine. Once I even drew a little scratch and sniff can.



Well, I began to really miss Susan, so when her letters came I devoured them. Of course, my roommate, Ronald Schultz, just thought it was ridiculous the way I'd read the letters, kiss the letters and sleep with the letters. But that's because the letters were not addressed to him, and so he did not receive them in faith. They said, "Peter, I love YOU."

The Word of God is the gospel of your salvation; it is the ultimate Love letter applied by the very Spirit of God resident within you. It is addressed to you from God, and He is far more mysterious, intriguing, passionate, complex and fascinating than any 6<sup>th</sup> grade girl in Mrs. Black's class.

I remember when I first caught a glimpse of that. It was my senior year in high school on a campus life retreat at Sunlight Ski area in the lounge with my friend Dave. The words of Romans started jumping right off the page at me, right out of those old nose oil prints. God was talking to me and so I *wanted* to read.

When Susan's love letters would come in the mail I wanted to read. One thing I never said was: "Gee Ron, I'd love to play ping-pong but I vowed to Susan that I would spend half an hour in serious inductive study of the letter she sent."

No Way! I couldn't wait to read them. This is what I'd do.

### How to Read Good News Addressed to You

(Biblical Exegesis and Hermeneutics 101)

- Read a letter start to finish.
- Read it again and again.
- Memorize pivotal lines.
- Decipher vocabulary and syntax.
- Read the parts in terms of the whole and the whole in terms of the parts—context.
- Investigate linguistic, historical and cultural context.
- Place yourself in that context (Lectio Divina).
- Commune with the Spirit behind the letters.
- Pray.

Several years later in seminary I took a whole course on this and discovered that it's called Biblical Exegesis and Hermeneutics. But no one told me that I had to do this to get some grade; I just did it.

How to read Gospel (Good News addressed to you):

- When I would get a letter from Susan I would read it through start to finish (Not like a verse for the day—how do you ever expect to understand a letter like that?)
- I'd read it through, and then read it again, and again, and again.
- And then I'd go back and read a sentence like:  
    *"Peter, you are so much more handsome than all your friends... including Alan Parsons."*
- And maybe I'd memorize it.
- If there were a word or phrase that I didn't understand, I'd look it up. Like: *"maximum viral hunkulosity."* What does that mean?
- I'd read the parts in terms of the whole and the whole in terms of the parts (that's called context).
- I'd remember our unique vocabulary, history and think about where she was when she wrote it (that's called linguistic, historical and cultural context.)
- I'd picture her and the events she was talking about. I'd meditate on it till it was like I was there. (Some call that *lectio divina*.)
- I read between the lines. I communed with the spirit behind the letters.
- If there was something that troubled me, I'd give Susan a call.
- Either way I'd give her a call. Talk to God as you read the word.

See? Susan's letters were far more than just ink on a page. I didn't just study them. I ingested them and digested them. I devoured them like manna from Heaven.

And I never even had to consciously ask myself:

- *"How does this apply to me?"*
- *"What are three tangible applications points that can be deduced from this letter?"*
- *"What are three action steps?"*
  1. *"Oh, uh I could tell somebody that I have a girlfriend (yes, that's a good one)."*
  2. *And, I could call her and talk to her.*
  3. *When I see her, I could kiss her . . . and not kiss other girls. Maybe she'd like that."*

I didn't have to apply her letters.

You apply make-up (it helps you act a part), but you ingest and digest food. And it changes you.

Jesus quoted Scripture to satan saying, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."* That Scripture is in Deuteronomy 8 and it refers to the manna with which God sustained Israel as they journeyed to the Promised Land.

The Word of God is manna for our exile. Ingest it and digest it. The shepherd feeds his sheep NOT to have the sheep regurgitate the feed back at his feet, so he can say *"Oh good sheep I see that you've been eating."*

The Shepherd is unimpressed that you can regurgitate John 3:16, *"For God so loved..."* Blah blah... No, digest it. Don't *apply it* to your life. *Eat it* and let it become *your life*, or better yet, *God's Life* in you and as you . . . *as if*, you were His Body.

I didn't apply Susan's letters. And I never took Susan's letters to an expert and asked, "How do I apply this love letter to my life? I don't take my cheeseburger to an expert and ask, "How do I apply this cheeseburger to my life?"

The shepherd's job is not to chew the food for the sheep. You might think my job is to build a pen for the sheep and chew the food for the sheep. But the shepherd's job is to take the sheep on a journey and point out green grass.

We just finished a series on the parables of Jesus. And I know it was frustrating at times. You may have thought, "Peter just explain it and apply it." Well, nobody can fully explain it or apply it but the Spirit of God. I've been chewing on some of those parables for fifty years. And I still can't explain them, but they're explaining me, even creating me.

Few (if anyone) understand food: vitamins, minerals, metabolism—few understand but all eat, lest they die. If you eat it, it will change you. Even while you're sleeping, when you're doing nothing, when you're at rest it will change you. You are passive. It is living and active. I didn't work Susan's letters... but the letters worked me. In other words, I believed.

But don't misunderstand me. I hope y'all do the hard work of Bible study, but only, *only*, for the sake of *reading* the letter, NOT *using* the letter.

Soren Kierkegaard said,

Imagine getting a letter from your beloved, but the letter was written in a foreign language. Well, you'd work like mad to get that letter translated. And if someone found you with the letter and a stack of language dictionaries and said,

*"So you're reading the letter from you Sweetheart?"*

You'd say,

*"No...I'm getting ready to read the letter from my Sweetheart, and I'm nearly bursting with impatience."*

You'd get it translated as "a necessary evil," wrote Kierkegaard, then go lock yourself "alone in a room with the letter... and read."

The tragedy is that there are people who can parse every verb in all of scripture but they've never read the Love Letter and maybe you've allowed them to



convince you, you can't read it either until you become like them, who don't read, and only parse.

Kierkegaard went on to say this, "The one most qualified to determine a love letter's meaning is the one that it's addressed to,"

...that one that receives the letter in faith.

...that one that doesn't seek to master the letter, but surrender to it's meaning and so is mastered *by* the letter.

I hope you realize that,

- We often, maybe usually, prefer control.
- We often prefer *cold and passive words* to *living and active Logos—meaning*.
- We often prefer *the letter*, to *the Spirit* in the letter.
- We often prefer *words on paper*, to *Word in flesh*.

Jesus said to the Pharisees, "*You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have life; and it is they that bear witness to me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.*" (John 5:39-40)

They preferred *dead* words in a book to "*the Living and Active Word*" in their presence;

- It's easier to manipulate words on a page than to manipulate a living person.
- And they did manipulate the words on the page in order to use them as they pleased.

Jesus said to them, "*You make void the word of God with your tradition (paradosis—literally 'your handing over' or even, 'your betraying')*." So this passage, Mark 7:13, can be translated: "You religious leaders make void the Word of God, with your betrayal, betraying the word of God with all your commentaries."

You do remember that it was the Bible scholars that crucified Jesus – The Word of God in Flesh, and they did it with strictest attention to every detail of their law. They crucified the Living Word, for their knowledge of the written word. They crucified Him on a tree in a garden. And I don't think that was the first time it happened.

Two years ago, I read a fascinating statement one night in the bathtub. I actually had a heart attack immediately after I read it. I'm not making this up!

I was reading *The Information*, by the acclaimed science writer James Gleick. In chapter two he quotes Socrates (in Plato's *Phaedrus*,) who laments the fact that words have been changed into letters.

You know, before the invention of the written word, all words were kind of like living. I mean, a *person* had to say each word and you experienced that word in flesh. Mom said, "bread" and experienced bread through Mom. Someone said good and you experienced the word in flesh.

With the invention of the alphabet, living words became written words. So Socrates laments that fact saying, "*The discovery of the alphabet will create*

*forgetfulness in the learners souls... you give your disciples not truth, but only a semblance of truth.*" That is an ink mark on a piece of paper. For example, the letters g-o-o-d are not good; they are only the semblance of "the good." With letters, you might know about the good, but you wouldn't know the good.

Well, Gleick quotes Socrates and writes about the loss of meaning (or logos), in reducing living words to ink on a page, and then he writes:

*The alphabet was invented only once. All known alphabets, used today or found buried on tablets of stone, descend from the same original ancestor... sometime not much before 1500 BCE... in a region [near] Palestine.*

At the top of the page I scribbled, "Wow crucifixion of the Word in Palestine." Then I had a heart attack. I don't know if that's significant, but the thought might just be significant.

Think about it:

According to Genesis, Adam (which means humanity) walked with the Living Word of God in Flesh; He walked with "the Good" in Flesh in a garden, in a garden near Palestine, not much before 1500 BC.

But Adam and Eve—humanity traded "knowing the Good" for "the knowledge of the good," by taking the life of "the good" on the tree in that garden.

In the same way, the Pharisees traded "knowing Jesus the Living Word" for their "knowledge of the written word" by taking the life of the Word on a tree in that garden.

They traded Living Love in flesh, for dead law in a book.

We do that, whenever we turn a person into a thing.

Whenever we turn Love into law.

Whenever we say, "God what do I have to do to be saved?"

Whenever I say, "Susan what do you want me to do?"

But she can't tell me what to do,

Because, what she wants is love . . . living in me.

Well, I don't know if the invention of the alphabet has anything to do with the fall of humanity and the crucifixion of the Word. So, make of that what you will. The point is that we often prefer dead word, written on a page, to the Living Word standing right in front of us, because dead words are easier to control.

Like I said, I went to CU a free man. Part of me really loved Susan and missed Susan, but part of me really loved "me"—my self-centered old "me," which was rather excited about all the girls I might conquer in Boulder, Colorado.

You see, when I was in Susan's presence, she would conquer me. She'd speak a word and I would melt—clearly I was losing my autonomy, and it genuinely scared me. It wasn't that Susan was bad, but that she was so good. I

was afraid of losing myself, lost in her. I was scared to lose “me”—the self-centered autonomous and lonely “me.” The restless “me.”

So we went to colleges 350 miles apart with freedom to date around. I lost the presence of the living word of Susan, but she wrote letters.

Adam and Eve were exiled from the garden.  
They lost the manifest presence of the Living Word—God. But He wrote letters.  
He sent words; the words looked dead, but the words are actually seed. He even wrapped His Word in flesh; we killed it placed it in the ground thinking it was dead . . . but the Word is seed.

Susan sent letters. They appeared to be safe, but they were living and active; they were seed. In 1979, they took root in the lonely broken soil of my heart. In other words, I began to have faith in Susan’s Love. And the faith grew. Faith, Hope and Love grew.

My love grew that year like it never had before. That year in exile—the year she sent letters—they cut me, captured me and applied me to her life.

We’re all in exile, but we’ve got letters.  
The Bible is a love letter . . . so read it like one.  
Let it cut you, capture you, and let it even impregnate you.  
Let it apply you to God’s life!

Now I know some of you have been thinking:  
“Oh, that’s sweet, Pastor Peter.  
Scented love letters, but I’ve read the Bible.  
It’s full of sacrifice, blood and tears.  
Touching in places, but terrifying through out.  
IT SCARES ME!”

This week, I reread some of those letters and they scared me.

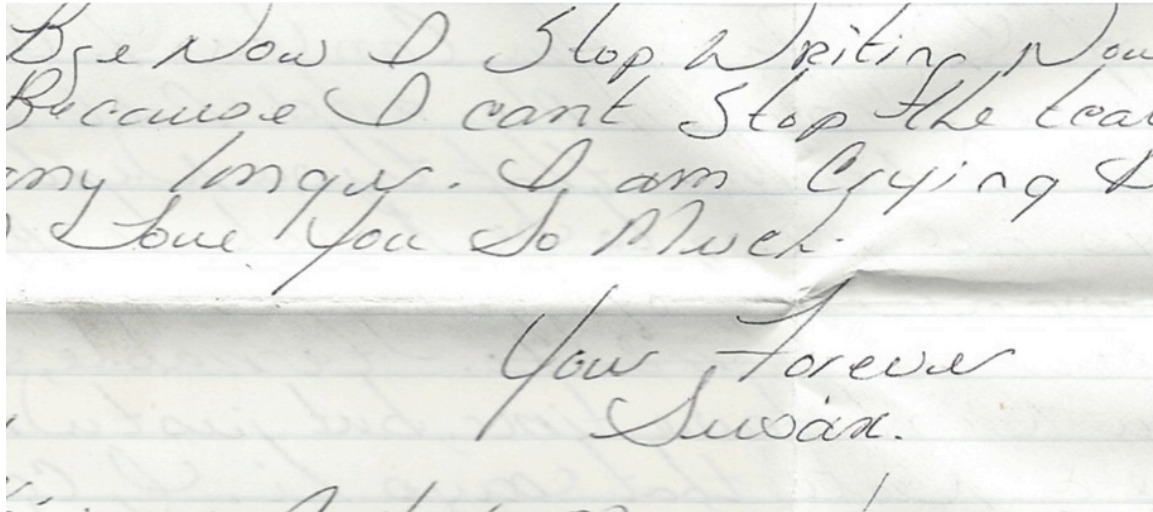
Look at the image below:



And so the Scriptures are stained with sacrifice, blood, and tears.  
Susan's old letters made me scared for her. And Susan's old letters made me scared for me, not just her, me (that old self-centered independent lonely me)! Like the love of God in Christ Jesus, His Word, should make you scared for you (that old self-centered independent lonely you).

I went to CU a free man, but "Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all."

Look how she signed this letter, stained with tears.



*"I can't stop the tears any longer. I'm crying because I love you so much.  
Yours Forever, Susan."*

Holy Crap! I'm eighteen. And she writes, "Forever." I realized, that if I would've tried to ignore those letters, they would've haunted me all my life. And to believe those letters was to be judged by those letters. She signed her letter with tears, and God signs His letter with blood. The blood of the eternal covenant. That's Forever Love.

We ask, "How can the Word of God be a love letter... when it's so bloody, painful and demanding?" But that's *exactly* the way real love letters are!

Instruction manuals, self-help books, cookbooks, rulebooks, and study guides are NOT. I think that's why we like them. They tell you what you must do to make yourself good.

But Love letters are Good, and they make you good.

The law tells you what you must do to make yourself good.

But the Gospel is Good and cuts to the division of soul and spirit, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Dead words leave you in control.

But the Word of God, living and active, judges you, and applies you to His own life.

When Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden, God placed a flaming sword that turned every which way at the eastern entrance to the garden. When the Children of Israel finally entered the Promised Land, from the east, they encountered this bizarre God/man with a drawn sword.

When the Israelites would enter the temple from the East, they'd bring a sacrifice and hand it to a priest with a *machaira*, the short sword. He'd cut the sacrifice to the division of joint and marrow and lay it naked and exposed upon the altar, where it would be received by God, who is Holy Fire. That's Burning Love.

*"Present yourself a living sacrifice,"* (Romans 12:1b) writes Paul.

*"For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged machaira, piercing to the division of soul and spirit... discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart..."* (Hebrews 4:12)

Your soul has believed a lie.

The lie is that you must, take knowledge of the Good to make yourself good (in God's image) and thereby earn His Love. Your old soul is what makes you constantly restless and imprisons you in fear. But your spirit is the very breath of God.

The Word cuts to "the division of soul and spirit."

The Word cuts away the soul that believes *you* are your own salvation

And the Word is the Truth, "God is Salvation." In a name Jesus!

The Word is the Truth. It is Jesus rising from the dead in you.

Dead word that you ingested, now living and active!

He cuts out your heart of stone . . . I bet that feels like a heart attack.

And He gives you a heart of flesh—His Body and His blood.

He is creating faith within you—faith that you are eternally, relentlessly and unconditionally loved.

When you believe, you will rest.

And you will believe, for nothing is as powerful as the Word of God.

I went to CU a self-centered, independent, autonomous and lonely man.

And to a very great extent I still am.

But those letters cut me . . . right down to the division of faith and Love and a lack of faith and Love. They discerned the thoughts and intentions of my heart and before Susan my heart was naked and laid bare. I finally had to surrender the Word—the Word of Love.

Under the knife that was those letters, I was a living sacrifice. Like a lamb lead to the slaughter, so I stood before the sacrificial alter. She came to me down

the aisle holding the knife. It was bound in white leather with a little gold zipper, The Word of God. An old man (like a priest is in the stone temple) bellowed,

“Will you covenant yourself to her in all love and honor, in all duty and service, in all faithfulness and tenderness, to live with her and cherish her according to the ordinance of God (Word of God) in the holy bond of marriage....till death do you part?”

And with a huge grin on my face I said, “I will and I do.” I surrendered to the Word of Love and returned the Word of Love.

I gave my life away . . . and then I rested. I rested in her arms as if they were my temple, my sanctuary. In this world, there is no place, in which I find deeper rest. And that’s because I’ve come to believe I don’t have to earn her love; I just am loved.

All my assigned reading in college produced basically nothing, but those love letters ended up producing Jonathan, Elizabeth, Rebecca and Coleman. I rested in her arms and fruit happened. (And I don’t know how it happened! Well . . . I have an idea, but I don’t consider it work.)

Now of course that’s only the picture . . . so don’t get stuck on the picture. That’s only the sign. The substance belongs to Christ. And Christ belongs to you.

You can’t earn His Love.  
He is the Word of Love, and He has earned you.  
When you trust Him, you will rest.

You know our journey ends at a wedding banquet in a promised land, at a garden, that has become a city. And the city is a temple and a bride, and also you. The Word of God rests in you, and you will rest in Him—when you believe.

You can’t make God love you. God *is* Love, and He makes you with His Word. You are not salvation. God is Salvation—in a Word, “Jesus.”  
And “IT IS FINISHED”

Strive to enter His rest.  
Let the Word cut you, comprehend you and fill you.  
At times it will be confusing. At times it will be painful. At times you will suffer.  
But keep reading the letter because you know what the Letter means.  
It means Love.  
It means “God is Salvation.”  
It means this: [Peter points to the communion table.]

On the night that the Word of God, in flesh, was “handed over” (*paradosis*) He took the bread saying, “This is my body given to you. Take and Eat.”  
And He took the cup saying, “This is the covenant in my blood,” drink of it all of you.



We invite you to tear of a piece of bread and dip it in the cup.  
It looks dead . . . but it's seed.

### **Benediction**

I preached the sermon today as if all the letters in my story with Susan were written, tied up in a bow, and it was finished. But the truth is we live in space and time still and that means there are letters still being stacked on top of this And it's not finished.

You may look at your life and think: "My life is not tied up nice and tidy like that." Believe me; mine isn't either. I chose to tell the story that way for a point. Maybe you're on a letter right in the middle, where there's a whole lot of pain and suffering, and you're wondering what the plot to this whole thing is. You see? A stack of letters through time comprises a story. And that's what we'll talk about next time. But the reality is you already know the plot to this story because, in the middle of this story, the Author has revealed it to you, and the Plot is good.

I'm telling you  
It's a Love story so keep reading.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, we thank you that you are Love and so the only stories you write are love stories. But love stories include pain, sacrifice and suffering. Help us to have faith in the Plot. Thank you that even though we run from you, because your glory is more than we can bear in the state that we are in now, you still come after us. You write letters. You send seed. And the seed is not dead. The seed is living and active. In Jesus' name Lord God, help us to keep reading.

[Peter holds up a Bible] You may look at this and think to yourself: "That is a hard read." It is. But when you think of this [Peter holds up a Bible], I want you to also think of this [Peter holds up the stack of love letters]. This is also a hard read. What does this mean? It means this [Peter points to the communion table]. And if you think to yourself, "Well, what does that mean to me?"

(See next page)

It means:

Give me a ticket for an aeroplane  
Ain't got time to take a fast train  
Lonely days are gone, I'ma goin' home  
My baby just wrote me a letter

Believe the Gospel. Amen!

*Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.*