

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of April 2016

(added progressively after each Sunday)

Delivered Sunday 3 April 2016

Back to Basics:

God's Word Written Down (Part 5 – What should we do with it?)

(from last week)

So far: We know what the Bible is; how it was written; its inspiration; why we need it (what could we fully know about God without it?); that the OT is God's word ; and the NT is God's word.

So: What should we do with it?

- You should read it. (Acts 8:26-40)

Remember the Ethiopian eunuch, who was 'looking for God'. What was the proof that he was 'looking for God'? He was reading the scriptures! Philip comes to him and asks, "Do you understand what you're reading?" (in those days, people read aloud, so Philip heard what he was reading) "How can I, except someone should guide me?" Philip gets up into the chariot and explains to him from Isaiah 53 about the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Who He is and what He came to do.

You should read the Bible. Christians went for 100s and 100s of years without being able to have their own personal copy of the Bible. We don't have to act as though we are underprivileged like that. The Bible is available in almost any language. We can read it for ourselves. What a wonderful opportunity and treasure that is.

Though we need to work hard at increasing our understanding of God's Word. Remember, Paul wrote to Timothy: (2Tim 2:15)¹⁵ *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.* "

The Bible is a book, a library of books. It needs interpreting. There's poetry there. Poetry not prose! There's something strange called apocalyptic literature, very extravagant picture-language being used. You have to interpret the Bible. When the Bible says: " the trees of the field shall clap their hands", we're not to go around expecting to see trees with hands on. It's poetic language which is teaching us something. It has to be interpreted properly. And we have to work hard at that. It's also a life-long quest a life-long discipline. What is the intended meaning of each part of the Bible. What is God telling us in each part?

Each new generation, from their youth need to be life-long students of the Bible.

- We should memorise it:

The psalmist was able to say: (Ps 119:11) *"Your word I've hidden in my heart,*

that I might not sin against you.” The Bible speaks to every problem, to every difficulty, and to every situation. Sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, but it always has something to say. The best place for your Bible is in your head. Memorise it. You can't always have a written copy in front of you. But you can get as much as we are capable of getting into our minds. “Then we won't sin against Him”. For God's word will keep coming back to us, to keep us from sin. [ASIDE Many years ago science students at school were expected to learn many formulae by heart. These days when in an exam students are provided with a sheet of all the likely formulae written down. The problem is that when you don't have them readily available in your mind, it is easy to overlook the very one you might need in an otherwise unfamiliar situation.]

- We can meditate on the Bible. (Ps 1:1-2; 119:97)

¹ Blessed is the one

*who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,*

*² but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.*

⁹⁷ Oh, how I love your law!

I meditate on it all day long.

Meditate means to pass something through and through our thoughts. Firstly we can meditate on the passages we've learnt by heart, then the passages we haven't we can read and ponder. Taking time to 'chew' over as we meditate: the secret of spiritual prosperity!

- We can use the Bible to test all we hear. (Acts 17:11; 1John 4:1-6)
Because there are all sorts of voices speaking to us today. Voices from the Churches (but by and large they are pretty weak and confused). Voices from TV or from the newspaper. From friends and peer groups; colleagues and families. Voices from the books we have to read or choose to read. All sorts of voices. All the time. Who shall we believe? What scale of values will we use to weigh it all up?

The Bible! Especially when we hear honest and true (Bible based) preaching. When Paul preached to the Bereans, we read that they were a more noble people, they searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. John says to all Christians:

¹Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus, is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

⁴ You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognise the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

Behind every voice there is a spirit: the spirit of a man; the devil; or the Spirit of God. How do you weigh up or recognise and evaluate the particular spirit behind the voice? Only through the Word. In Ephesians 6:16-17, we find that we are in a Spiritual battle. There are many types of armour mentioned that can protect us. But God's Spirit above all defends us and the Spirit's weapon – His sword – is the Word of God.

Don't look for visions! Don't look for strong feelings. You'll never know if these are visions from God or from the devil or from your own selfish desire or to please your own will.

So don't trust 'strong feelings'. But you can always know that the Bible is God's word, and therefore you can use it to test everything you hear to evaluate it.

[ASIDE That reading from John has a further message: Note that false voices are from the world – they speak the world's viewpoint. AND the world (the majority of people) listen to them willingly. Are there meetings which attract and entertain large groups of people who are steeped in the world's viewpoint and listen avidly. Can these be Churches of God?

John goes on to say we (the true Church) are listened to by those who know God rather than the world, while the rest do not listen to us. Is the true Church then the one that is popular with that majority that has the world's viewpoint? Or not!]

- We must apply the Bible.

What did James say? (James 1:22) Don't be content, he said, to be hearers of the word only, but be doers of the word. If you're not you'll be deceiving yourself. You'll be making a fool of yourself! You'll be tricking yourself into believing that you're something you're not.

And as we have read, several times, in the past few weeks, “ All scripture is given by God and is profitable for teaching, for correction, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be mature in every way, equipped for every good work. The Bible is not just to fill our minds, but to reform our lives and to correct them.

Now consider the last four references on the sheet:

The last and most important thing we should do when we:

read the Bible

meditate on the Bible

work hard at the Bible

use the Bible, and

apply the Bible.

Every time we have anything to do with the Bible we should:

- Seek the Lord Jesus Christ in it.
Jesus Christ is THE Word of God. (The Bible is the written word of God)

Luke 24:25-27. Jesus, said to some disciples on the road to Emmaus:

²⁵ ... 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

You meet Jesus Christ in the pages of the Bible. Nobody ever came to Jesus as saviour, who didn't meet Him through the reading or preaching of the Word of God.

Jesus said: John 5:39.

³⁹ You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, ...

You want to know about Jesus Christ the saviour of sinful men and women, the only one who will bring you right with God, through His cross and resurrection? You'll have to go to Scripture: "These are they that testify of me."

Acts 8:35 we have already mentioned. What did Philip do when he was talking to the Ethiopian?

³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

The only way he could show this unconverted (though conscientiously seeking) man, who Jesus was; why He'd come; what He'd done; and how to come to Him, was from the Scripture.

The last reference is 2 Tim 3:15, the verse just before the one we have been featuring regularly. This is what the Apostle, Paul writes to the much younger man.

¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

What a privilege! For young people to be reared from childhood in homes where the Bible is loved and opened and followed. To become *wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ*.

If you want to know, and bring others to know, the way to be saved through Christ, the only place you'll find the answer is in the Scriptures.

This is basic!

[1779]

“May this be so for all the saints gathered here today”

Delivered Sunday 10 April 2016

COMMUNION Sermon by Richard Wilson

Back to Basics:
God: His Existence - the parable of Jack

(from last week)

we should :

read the Bible

meditate on the Bible

work hard at the Bible

use the Bible, and

apply the Bible.

And then every time we have anything to do with the Bible we should:

- Seek the Lord Jesus Christ in it.
Jesus Christ is THE Living Word of God. (The Bible is the written word of God)

How do we know that God exists?

Here is a simple explanation. We will use 6 key texts to help us with answering the question we will weave these texts into a parallel parable as follows:

Our parable starts with Jack. Jack was incredibly intelligent, but also incredibly stupid. Let me explain how this apparent contradiction can come about.

[Jack you see stands for every one of the human race in their 'fallen' – natural – state.]

He was intelligent: You could give him any maths problem to sort out; he had read and understood many books; he had even written some; he had made many inventions that had made him rich and famous; he composed music and was quite an expert in philosophy. [That is he applied, reliance on human rational argument, to the study of such things as existence, knowledge, values , reason, mind and language. But all this originating in ones mind and limited by such.]

But he was also incredibly stupid. You see he was blind from birth – not directly his fault. But he was stupid, because recently the doctors had diagnosed precisely what sort of blindness he had. And they had told him that if he just stood in the sun, the effects of the rays of the sun on his eyes would give him his sight. **But Jack didn't believe that the sun existed.**

Ps 14:1 *The fool says in his heart,
'There is no God.'*

Now this was a tragic situation, because Jack has a brother called Christian. Christian also had been born blind! But Christian, when diagnosed with the same sort of blindness, had followed the advice of the doctors. He had stood in the presence of the sun and little by little, but surely, he had received his sight. He could see! And he knew that there was a sun.

Jack and Christian used to have (as brothers often do) lively discussions about the sun. Jack would say, "Prove it!" and Christian would answer, "Jack, proof is not what you need.

"Prove it!" Jack would repeat, even more strongly. "Well if you want to talk about truth and proof," says Christian, "prove to me that you do need proof. And while your at it: What kind of proof? What kind of proof is it that you say you need? In fact prove to me that if you were to have that kind of proof you'd be persuaded by it. Prove to me that you'd be convinced if I could give you the proof you want." At that moment Jack would always go quiet.

"However", continued Christian, "even if you had your proof it still wouldn't make you see. That's not what you need. What you need is what the doctors told you. You need to stand outside under the rays of the sun and then little by little, what happened to me, will happen to you."

Jack wouldn't follow this advice either. But Christian continued to insist.

Heb11:6b. because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

"No, no, no," said Jack, "I don't believe there is a sun. And, as a matter of fact, dear Christian, I'm happy as I am!"

But you know, he wasn't actually as happy as he claimed. Because he could detect a great difference in his brother. He had noticed that when his brother spoke about the sun, there was a note of certainty in his voice. But that wasn't what upset him the most. Jack was noticing that although he lived in darkness, sometimes the darkness was not quite so dark. And sometimes the darkness a lot less dark. That's what really upset him! Despite all his arguments about the sun not existing, actually there were times when he had glimpses of light.

Rom 1:19-20. ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen,

being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Now Jack used to wake up in the night knowing that what his brother said was true. But he pushed this out of his mind. He couldn't actually imagine a world with a sun in it. The very idea of a sun rather frightened him. He realised that if he ever admitted that the sun existed, his life would have to change a great deal. It was much more comfortable to stay in familiar 'darkness'. So, he resolved to stay as he was. Blind in a world with no sun.

But it wasn't that easy. Try as he would he still had doubts. This was his dilemma. Sometimes he would go out for a walk with his brother and he felt the warmth and could tell that this wasn't an enemy. Yet he continued to deny the existence of the sun. He even took comfort in the fact that he knew that many, many people like him believed as he did. (Or is that, didn't believe – in the sun.)

To prevent all these troublesome thoughts he decided that the best thing was to stay in his bedroom during the day and never go out of it, except in the evening. In that way Jack, came to have a sort of peace. [ASIDE. The fable of 'Sour grapes' as an example of the psychological syndrome of Cognitive Dissonance' – explain]

Now, of course, Christian was still very concerned about his brother. How could he get his brother to receive his sight? Jack no longer would leave his bedroom, except in the evening.

Looking around that bedroom, Christian noted that it was really dilapidated. So he took the initiative and decided to make it a little more pleasant. He went to Bunnings (or Masters) and bought a great big box of wall tiles. He had in mind to put these on one of the walls of Jack's bedroom. He open the box. And he found there were 66 tiles [You understand]. Some were quite small and others much larger, but they were all mirrors. And if they were placed together in accordance with the instructions the patterns on the mirrors combined to make a picture of a face.

He stuck the mirror tiles up as directed on a wall of his brother's room.

Psalm 119:130. ¹³⁰ *The unfolding of your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.*

A number of days later, after the tiles had been put on, the sun shone [you can see from this, that the brothers lived in England!] Then the 66 mirrors reflected the rays of the sun into the bedroom where Jack was. That bedroom, which was really a very sombre, dull place was now filled with sun-light and Jack began to see. Just a little at first. But each time, as the rays of the sun were reflected on to him, he began to see a

little bit more and then even more. Until, at last, he could see “really quite well”.

What beauty he saw! What colours. Marvellous. It was another world and now he really wanted to go fully into that world. Out he went (in daylight) and he saw the sun! His eyes, of course, were very delicate and weak at first. Yet the sun was much more brilliant, much more dazzling, much more majestic than he could ever have imagined.

2 Cor 4:6. ⁶ For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Jack had escaped the darkness, like his brother before him had done months before and had entered a world which was previously completely unknown to him.

“Well Jack”, we might ask, “How did it come about that now you can see and know that the sun is?”

“Well I can't give myself any credit, nor even to my brother. I didn't even believe that such a thing as the sun existed. It was the reflection of the sun by the mirrors with the image of the face of the sun that changed me and gave me my sight.

“Amazing grace how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch, like me.
I once was lost and now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

1 John 1:5-7. ⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

We believe that God exists!

[1585 +]

“May this be so for all the saints gathered here today”

Back to Basics:
God: What Is God in Himself?

(from last week)

We related a parable of Jack to show how we come to know that God exists.

We believe that God exists!

Note: Refer back to Order of Service booklets from 13th March, where Catechism questions 5 – 9 (concerning God have been provided).

The WCF articles commence on today's booklet.

God is a Spirit. You haven't seen God and nobody has ever seen God. It's true of course that the Bible speaks about His **hands** – but that's just a way of getting it over to our poor minds that God is **very powerful**.

It's true of course that the Bible speaks about His **eyes** – but that's just a way of getting it over to our poor minds that **God sees everything**.

It's true of course that the Bible speaks about His **mouth** – but that's just a way of getting it over to our poor minds that God **speaks** and reveals Himself.

God is a Spirit. He has no body. He can't be weighed. He can't be measured. He can't be touched. He can't be felt. He is a Spirit!

AND God is a personal Spirit, because He's not a something He's a someone! That's why God has Names and God's best known Name is Jehovah, Yahweh. Which is just the English way of writing (from the 4 consonants used in Hebrew) the Name when He revealed Himself to Moses at the 'burning bush'. I AM THAT I AM. [print and introduce the emblem of the Presbyterian Church.]

God is a someone that's why several times in the Bible we read that people became His friends, and He theirs. That's why from the beginning of the Bible to the end, we read that God can be known. This is the Great God that we find in the Scriptures. But what is He like in Himself?

Look now at the sheet and the second group of references. We'll consider these references:

As far as 'space' is concerned, God is everywhere: (Jer 23:24)

*²⁴Who can hide in secret places
so that I cannot see them?
declares the Lord.
'Do not I fill heaven and earth?'
declares the Lord.*

Now what that means is that God is not absent anywhere!

It means that God in all His Glory, all His being, all His majesty, all His purity, all His power, all that God is, is in any place at any time and in every place at every time. As far as 'space' is concerned He's everywhere.

Now our mortal minds can't take that in. [You might remember some basic science definitions: Matter – has mass and occupies space (meaning one space at a time). This we understand, but with God??]

How can it be that the whole of God is here and yet the whole of God is there? How can it be that God in all His fullness is here yet if we went to the furthest and farthest fleeing galaxy, the whole of God is also there? That completely baffles us and 'blows' our human mind.

But that's what the Scripture declares and all we can do is bow down in adoring wonder and worship God.

So far as 'time' is concerned: (Psalm 90:2)

*²Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*

When Abraham prayed to Him, or when David prayed to Him – in Psalm 90 – He was exactly the same. He's completely unchanged. He had no beginning. He has no end. He has no age. He's infinite. There's no sort of limit for God.

As far as 'knowledge' is concerned: God knows everything. Now we're poor men and women here, our knowledge is very small and even if we put together all that the human race knows, it's still a very small part of the whole. [diagram of knowledge – “the more I know – the more I know (realise), the less I know”. And specialised knowledge: “We know more and more about less and less until we know everything about nothing”.]

When we come into the world we have very little knowledge and we have to learn things one at a time. And quite often we forget them just as quickly! God never learnt anything, ever. And there is nothing that He doesn't know, anywhere. And He sees all things as they really are. All things as they really are, all the time. We read in the Scripture: (Psalm 147:5)

*⁵Great is our Lord and mighty in power;
his understanding has no limit.*

His understanding is infinite. And that means of course, if your unconverted, it's impossible to deceive God. You can't 'pull the wool' over His eyes. You can't make things out to be different from the way they really are.

As far as 'power' is concerned: He does whatever He chooses. (Psalm 115:3)

*³Our God is in heaven;
he does whatever pleases him.*

He has done whatever He pleases. Again in the book of Daniel: (Daniel 4:35)

*³⁵All the peoples of the earth
are regarded as nothing.
He does as he pleases
with the powers of heaven
and the peoples of the earth.
No one can hold back his hand
or say to him: 'What have you done?'*

We read in Ephesians: (Ephesians 1:11)

*¹¹In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of
him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,*

We will come back to this reference in several week's time.

The very movement of an insect. The very blowing of the wind. And note this: Even what wicked men do, every detail, brings to pass exactly what God planned, without Him being wicked in any way.

That's what God is in Himself.

[939]

“May this (understanding) be so for all the saints gathered here today”