

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of March 2016

(added progressively after each Sunday)

Delivered Sunday 6 March 2016

Back to Basics: **God's Word Written Down (Part 2)**

2. How was the Bible written? (continued from last week)

Last week we introduced Paul's advice to his young protegee:

2 Tim 3:16-17

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We had found that the way David wrote and Paul wrote were different. They each had their different styles and their different way of coming at it, but both were able to say it was all breathed out by God. (2 Samuel 23:1-2)

¹These are the last words of David:

*'The inspired utterance of David son of Jesse,
the utterance of the man exalted by the Most High,
the man anointed by the God of Jacob,
the hero of Israel's songs:*

*²'The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me;
his word was on my tongue.*

You want to know what to believe: This book's good for **doctrine**. You want to know what God thinks about your sin. This book's good for **reproof**. You want to make your life right: This book's is good for **correction**. You want to grow in pleasing God. This book's good for **instruction in righteousness**. You want to be a man or woman of God, with nothing missing from your Christian life: you can become that man or woman of God, just by studying **this book!**

You want to do what's good in God's sight: You can learn how to do it from the Bible alone. That's what 2 Tim 3:16-17 is telling us AND God hasn't given any other written revelation.

Then to the very end of the Bible. The very last page. THE Revelation, chapter 22 verse 18 & 19.

As John writes the last book, the last apostle of Jesus Christ, writes the last book he's going to write. He writes:

¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: if anyone adds anything

to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. ¹⁹ And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

We don't readily speak ancient Greek, today, however the Greek word John uses here means putting one book on another. He's in fact saying: "Here are 65 books and I am putting another one on top making 66. If you put yet another book on the top of that, then God will add to you all the plagues that are in John's book. And if you take away this book or any part of it, then God will take away your name in the 'book of life'. There is no way that he could have said more strongly that this is the end of God's written revelation. No way more strongly!

Thus last week we were reminded how the Bible was written.

3. Why we need the Bible:

We read in Psalm 19 that God reveals Himself. *The heavens declare the Glory of God and the firmament (the open expanses of the sky) show forth His handiwork.*

If we look at the mountains and the sky and plants; amoeba; DNA; molecules; amino-acids and so on All these things reveal to us, that there is a designer and we can know that God is – and we do! Because this otherwise invisible God makes His presence felt in the things that He's made (creation) and the effects He has (providence). Like the invisible wind is experienced from its effects. From what is seen and felt!

We can know that God is – and we do!

And then inside us we recognise what is said in Ecclesiastes:

¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Deep down, inside us, we know that God is. We do know! We all have a sense of right and wrong. We don't all agree on what is right and wrong, but we all have a sense of it. And we all know that that came from the hand of God.

So you know that God is, and you can know that God is right and you can know that He is good and that He is just. But that is all you can know. That's all! You can know that He is invisible. You can know that He is powerful. You can know that He IS God. But that's all you can know. If you're going to know, more than that, God has got to tell you Himself. That's why we have the Bible. The **general** revelation that He shows is not enough to lead us savingly to God. It's enough to leave us without excuse if we go on to ignore God. It's not enough to bring us to God. We've got to have **special** revelation. God has to do something special, so that we can know more than that. And He's done it! That's why we have the Scriptures.

When Jesus talked about the Scriptures He said to God: "Your Word is truth". We may know the truth: What would you know about the life of Jesus Christ if you didn't have the Bible? What would you know about how awful sin is, if you didn't have the Bible? What would you know about heaven and hell? What would you know about the way of being saved?

If you didn't have the Bible would you have known about repentance, known about

faith? What would you have known about any of it, if you didn't have the Bible? But you do! And it is truth.

That's not to say that absolutely everything about God is in the Bible. BUT everything you need to know about God is in the Bible. In Deuteronomy 29:29 we are told that the secret things belong to the Lord our God. There are lots of things that are secret and we can never know them. But the things that are revealed are for us and for our children, that we may do all the things of the law.

There are lots of things about God that we can never know. But since we don't need to know them, we haven't been told. However there are many things we do need to know and everything we need to know we've been told in the Scriptures.

We don't even know everything about the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't know the date of His birth nor even the year of His birth. We don't know the details of His life, especially those early years up to 12 and then afterwards to 30. We don't know all His miracles, because John told us that if everything was written down that could be written about Him, there wouldn't be enough room in all our libraries. We don't know when Jesus is coming back – nor should we! But the Bible does tell us all that we need to know and as we saw in Tim 3:16 – 17 by the Bible alone you can become a man or woman of God, thoroughly equipped for every good work. You can become all that God wants you to become, through the Bible alone.

As we finish we look at four texts, which give further reasons for a written Bible:

- Luke 1:3-4 ³ *With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*

This tells us that you couldn't know for certain what had happened in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ without the Bible. But you can know because we have the scriptures.

- Matthew 4 When Jesus was tempted by the devil, each temptation He answered like this:

verse 4: “ it is written”;

verse 7: “it is also written”;

verse 10: “it is written”.

Evil is in the world. The devil is in the world. If you're going to resist evil, whatever its shape or form, whatever its strength or power, you must have the Bible. You can't resist evil except by knowing and using the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit working through the Word.

- Romans 15:4 ⁴ *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*

There's things to learn about life. Things to learn about pleasing God. Things to learn! We can learn them from the Scriptures.

We can learn from the Scriptures how to be patient – have endurance.

We can learn from the Scriptures how to have God's comfort – encouragement.

And best of all we can learn from the scriptures how to have HOPE!
But those things you couldn't learn without the Bible.

- Isaiah 8:20 ²⁰ *Consult God's instruction and the testimony (that is the Scriptures) of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.* People all around you are living in darkness. In every area of life. Children wake up in the morning. They do various things and the parents don't actually know whether the child is doing right or wrong. They have no definite scale of values to apply to their children. It's a terrible situation to be in, where you've got nothing to measure by, no 'plumb line' as Amos says: Amos 7:7-9

⁷ *This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand.* ⁸ *And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?"*

"A plumb line," I replied.

Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

⁹ *"The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam."*

But if they had the Scriptures they would know!

And then they go to work and somebody suggests that they do that; and somebody else does that. They hear of a project and they don't know whether it is right or wrong. They don't know what to make of it. Or even how to begin thinking about it. They can't even balance their family life and their work life and their personal life. Because they have no clear scale of values. Any clear plumb line. Any clear standard. If they had the Bible they would know! Things that don't come up to the Bible standard – that's darkness. Where they do come up to that standard; that's light.

Then they come to the great things of heaven and hell. We're going to one or the other. We come to the question of how to face death and the judgement. We come to how to please God or how we displease Him. We come to the great fact of what sort of God is He; what does He promise and what does He threaten? What does He do and what has He done?

We can't know for certain without the Bible. But by the Bible we can know!

If it's not according to the law and the testimony it's darkness. But if it's what the Scripture says it is light.

The first basic and the most basic truth of all!

[1962]

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

Delivered Sunday 13 March 2016

Back to Basics:
God's Word Written Down (Part 3 – OT is God's Word)

(from last week) Part of a Series on Back to Basics: If one has no grasp of the basics of the faith, one can't become strong in that faith.

We have learned what the Bible is, how it was written and why we need it.

Now we Consider :

1. The Old Testament as God's Word.

When Jesus came He came into a Jewish world and in that world there was a known collection of religious books called “the Scriptures”. This revered set of scrolls had been in existence for 400 years when Jesus came, having been written over a longer period than that, back to when Moses wrote the first 5 books of the **Pentateuch** (meaning 5 scrolls – from the Greek). Also called the Law of Moses or the Torah by the Jews. In addition, as early as the 3rd Century BC the Greek King of Egypt commissioned 72 Jewish scholars – six from each of the 12 tribes – to translate the Hebrew OT (and some other writings) in Koine Greek, the common language of Jews in the north African areas, particularly Alexandria. The King's commission was for the purpose of adding to the State library. In this context only the Torah was translated, but the work continued over Centuries, being completed in 132 BC (obviously by many others than the original 72).

Once the Romans overthrew the Greeks the Roman language, Latin, was used to name this OT Translation, as the Septuagint (translation of the seventy). The Roman numeral LXX is used as an abbreviation.

There are many quotes from this translation in the New Testament, particularly by Paul.

The original Hebrew version was strictly confined to the 39 books we recognise as the OT and no others, but in a different order from ours.

Jesus recognised these 39 books as God's word. There were other books known – some added to the Greek version – that were called the Apocrypha, but never referred to by Jesus.

It is the same 39 books that Jesus refers to as God's word. When for example in John 10:35 he uses the phrase, “*the word of God came – and Scripture cannot be set aside* – “ and again at 17:17 when Jesus prays to God the Father for the Apostles, as He is about to leave them, saying, “*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*” He is talking about the OT Scriptures.

The 39 books were the ones He studied carefully and memorised.

Now we consider 4 ways Jesus interacted with these Scriptures:

The OT governed His Ministry; governed His teaching; was recognised by Jesus as inspired by God; and Jesus saw the OT as always right and never wrong.

The OT governed His ministry

When Jesus commenced His earthly Ministry He went to the local synagogue and introduced this Ministry, and Himself, in this fashion, by referring to the OT Scripture: (Luke 4:16-21, quoting Isaiah 61)

¹⁶ *He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

¹⁸ *'The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*

²⁰ *Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'*

His mindset was completely focussed on, and He was governed by, the OT Scriptures. If you look through the Gospels you will find this was always the case.

Even the titles He called Himself came from the OT.

Son of God: Mark 8:29; 14:61 (Psalm 2:7, 110:1) and more often and usually,
Son of Man: Mark 14:62 (Daniel 7:13-14) ¹³ *'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

Jesus came to die!

When announcing His coming death He pointed to the prophesies of this and how these must be precisely fulfilled. Thus He traced the purpose of, and reason for His death, from the OT accounts. Luke 22:37; 18:31; Mark 14:21.

³⁷ *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 fulfilment.'*

and again,

³¹ *Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.*

³² *He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; ³³ they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.'*

or,

²¹ *The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who*

betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.'

Jesus never had the OT out of His head. He appeals to it all the time. You can't understand His sayings or His doings without understanding the OT.

Likewise about His crucifixion: (Luke 24:44-49 and others such as – Is 52:13, 53:10; Ps 110:1, 16:8-11)

At the conclusion of His appearance to those on the road out of Jerusalem, after the resurrection:

⁴⁴ He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, 'This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

The OT governed His teaching

He takes the teaching of Scripture to a new level. He reminds that the OT requires that you do not commit adultery, but He takes the OT command and then applies it in a new way. A way that draws in the 'spirit of the Law' not just its letter.

(Matt 5:27,28 – quoting Exodus 20:14)

²⁷ 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Later on at the last supper, He takes the wine, and says, '*This is my blood of the new Covenant.*' (Mark 14:24) In doing so He is referring to the Covenant in the OT. (Ex 24:8 Jer 31:31)

⁸ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.'

³¹ 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD.

Also, He will tell His Disciples, during His Ministry: ⁴⁵*'for even the Son of Man did not*

come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' (Mark 10:45) When He uses that expression He is using one which is used many times in the OT, such as, Psalm 49. (read vv 7-9 and then verse 15!)

All the time the OT impregnates and perfumes everything Christ does and says.

Jesus also spoke about the Scriptures and said some striking things: He taught that behind each of the human authors (as we mentioned last week) God Himself was its real Author.

Jesus saw the OT as inspired by God (God-breathed)

Here are a group of 5 examples:

Mark 12:36

³⁶ *David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:*

Now Jesus is about to quote the Psalm that Jesus has said was by David and yet it was nevertheless, *by the Holy Spirit*.

He is explaining that when the Psalm was written, by David, the Holy Spirit was the author (it was *by the Holy Spirit*). David wrote what he wrote because the Holy Spirit required that those words should be written. It is the Holy Spirit's Word.

Mark 7:13

Here Jesus tells the Pharisees, after having quoted one or two Scriptures, saying,

¹³ *Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.'*

Here He clearly calls the OT, not the word of Moses or the Prophet but the Word of God. He knew full well that the prophet Moses and others had written it, but it was the Word of God.

Matthew 22:31

We read:

³¹ *But about the resurrection of the dead – have you not read what God says to you?*

Then He quotes the OT. Jesus is telling you, that when the OT is read to you, or you read the OT, God Himself is speaking to you. It is God's Word.

Now look at,

Matthew 19:4-5

⁴ *'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female,"* ⁵ *and said, ...*

Here Jesus is about to quote Moses, but says that the Creator who made them – said! So when Moses **wrote** it was God who was speaking.

And finally on this point

Matthew 15:4

⁴ *For God said* (or commanded),
and then Jesus goes on to quote from two passages of the OT (written by Moses) Ex
20:12 & Deut 5:16

Can you not see what Jesus Christ is teaching you and me? The OT is the voice of God. It is the Word of God. It doesn't 'contain' the Word of God. It IS the Word of God. It doesn't become the Word of God as you read it. It 's already is the Word of God. It's the Word of God whether it strikes you or it doesn't. Whether you're interested in it or you're not. Whether you understand it or you don't.

It is, in and of itself the Word of God. Those 39 books.

And so, this is why, for our 4th point,

Jesus saw the OT as always right and never wrong. Can we do less?

Read what Jesus said in Mark 12:24, John 10:34, Matthew 4:4,7,10.
[Test next week?]

Did Jesus believe? Adam and Eve – Matthew 19:4-5.

Noah and the ark – Luke 17:26-27.

Lot's wife – Luke 10:12, 17:32.

Jonah and the fish – Matthew 12:39-41

Good enough for Jesus to affirm the Scriptures and teach from them as 'truth'. Is it good enough for you? How do you respond to that challenge?

[2025]

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

Delivered Sunday 20 March 2016

Back to Basics:

God's Word Written Down (Part 4 – NT is God's Word)

(from last week)

The Old Testament is the Word of God AND now we confirm that the New Testament is the Word of God.

To begin we refer to three passages from John:

We set the scene. Our Lord Jesus Christ is in the world. He's called the 12 Apostles and He's preparing now to leave the world. Very shortly He will be crucified. This then is what He says to the Apostles, before He leaves them. John 16:12-15.

¹² *I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.* ¹³ *But when he, the Spirit of*

truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.'

Thus the Apostles receive this glorious promise, that the Holy Spirit will come and teach them the truth; teach them what's going to happen in the future; and will direct their eyes toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

It wasn't the first time they had received a similar promise: earlier in chapter 15:26.

²⁶ 'When the Advocate (or helper) comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.'

Here the word testify (or witness in some other translations) has the meaning in the original of 'bearing witness to facts!' Jesus assures them that they will bear witness to the facts, because the Holy Spirit will come and enable them to do so. Note also that these promises are specifically to the Apostles, those “who have been with me from the beginning”. Often when we read about others in the Bible we are encouraged to apply the lesson, or application, or promise to ourselves here and now. And this is very right and proper use of the Scripture. But here we must recognise that the Apostles are unique. They were being given a commission that is not repeated to everyone else.

This special promise had even been given earlier in Chapter 14 of John, verse 26.

²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

So the Apostles are able to record, interpret and teach the great facts of the gospel. They're able to spell out all the implications of what they have heard – even had their memories sharpened. All the practical consequences of the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, they're able to apply to new situations.

They are the Master's unique, special men! Capable of teaching, interpreting and applying the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. **It's the Apostles who wrote the New Testament but it was God, in Christ's, Word.**

Ah? What about Mark? Yes, but we all know that Mark wrote under the superintendence of Peter. What about Luke? We all know that Luke wrote under the superintendence of Paul. What about Paul? Paul was an Apostle, 'called out of due time' (1 Corinthians 15:8), but called none the less by Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus and recognised very quickly as such by the Church including the other Apostles.

It was the Apostles who were given the task of teaching the Christian Church, It is the Apostles who are the foundation of the Church. (Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14) And it is the Apostles who after Jesus Christ has gone have the very authority of Christ. He said to them, “As the Father sent me so I send You!” (Matt 10:40; John 20:21) And also, (Matt 28:18-20) ¹⁸“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age“. He sent them!

That's why in the New Testament you'll see verse after verse, the words of the Old Testament prophets and the words of the Apostle are put on the same level. (1 Peter 1:11-12; 2 Peter 3:2)

And when Peter writes about Paul he calls Paul's writing: Scripture. (2 Peter 3:16)

The teaching of the Apostles has the same authority as Scripture. So John is able to say, (2 John 1:10) *"¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them."* Paul is able to say, (Gal 1:6-9) *"⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – ⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! ⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!"*

So, where the apostolic teaching is rejected, there can be no true Christian fellowship. (2 Thess 3:14; 1 Tim 6:3-5; 1 Cor 14:37-38)

So in the New Testament we find that the teaching of the Apostles IS the Word of God (1 Thess 2:13) *¹³ And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.* and elsewhere that it is the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ, (2 Thess 3:6-12)

⁶ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.'

¹¹ We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹² Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat.

and also it is the Word of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor 2:13) *¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.*

That was the view of great Christian leaders who lived on after the Apostles died. Clement of Rome, was a great Christian leader. He wrote in the year 96, "Christ is from God and the Apostles are from Christ". That was his position! Ignatius, we don't know exactly when, (but we know he was put to death as a Christian in 115) wrote in his letter to the Romans: "I do not command you like Peter and Paul did, they were Apostles". And another quote: this one from Serapion of Antioch (180), "We accept the Apostles as the Lord Himself."

And as you read those writings from the end of the 1st Century – people who still knew the Apostles; and into the 2nd Century and up to the end of the end of the 2nd Century, people who had known people who knew the Apostles, they quote the Old Testament and call it Scripture of course, but they equally quote the New Testament books and call them? Scripture also! They call the Old Testament the Word of God and they call the writing which we call the New Testament the word of God.

So it is that here a Church is making a collection of writings and here's another Church making a collection of writings. Some make their collection quicker than

others. Some get there much quicker. But by the end of 400 years everybody has agreed, without any Council being called, because they can tell as they read various writings, such as by Polycarp, that that's not Scripture, although it's wonderfully uplifting. But when they read the writings of Paul, they realise that's much more. It's Scripture! They can tell when they read the writings of Ignatius that that's marvellous stuff, but when they read the writings of Peter they know that that is really Scripture.

The Holy Spirit works little by little in the Christian conscience, because the Holy Spirit is His own witness and the Christian faith has never depended on any outside props. Scripture is its own witness. Little by little, gradually, but certainly, some quickly some slowly, arrive at having the same 27 books and considering them to be the Scripture. And it's only when they've all arrived at that conclusion, that a Council is ever held. Not to decide which books to put in and which writings to leave out. But to write down, at last, the list that everybody has already been accepting for some time. That was the Council of Carthage at the end of the 4th Century.

Scripture is its own witness [ASIDE We can't really believe God written Scripture with an unregenerate heart! Even the ability to recognise the Word of God for what it is, is itself a 'gift of grace'. Fallen man can do nothing to will any spiritual good related to salvation! WCF 9:3]

So as a 'born again' Christian you know that when you read a fine Christian book it does you good. BUT when you read Scripture you then know that you are in the presence of the voice of God. This is the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. You're not just left to the mercy of your own heart. A changed heart that can now 'hear' God, through the Spirit, rather than only your own fallen will as was the case before that change – conversion.

Christians for Century after Century have thus recognised the voice of God in 27 books, not in a 28th or a 29th. It is 'God breathed' SCRIPTURE.

And so we come back to Paul's entreaty to the younger Timothy, that has been used throughout this series: 2 Tim 3:16-17

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

[1933]

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

Delivered Sunday 27 March 2016

EASTER SUNDAY
He Is Risen!

Mark 16:7b

“He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”

Our Worship Service today has been joyous and upbeat – deliberately so. We rejoice – as we should – in recalling and reaffirming the Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. That resurrection that once for all shows God's acknowledgement and acceptance of the atonement of Jesus for all our sins (and for those of all believers, past, present and future). God's confirmation of our justification through faith in Christ. Is this not the best news! THE absolute good news. Rejoice!

On the basis of God's revelation through scripture, we are convinced and convicted of our sin. Of how far we fall short of the perfect righteousness of God and how remote our lives are from those originally prepared for us before the 'fall' at Eden. He has made known through the 'Law and the Prophets', that in accord with His perfect justice, left to ourselves, our only 'wage of our sin' is death.

But because of His mercy and love and by His grace, he has provided, from before time began, a plan, a covenant of redemption. He came among us in human form, as the man Jesus; who lived a perfect, righteous human life (as we were meant to be able to do); suffered an obscene, humiliating and agonising death as the substitutionary, sacrificial, atoning death on the cross; and was raised to life, by the Father, as the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Affirming, once and for all, the redemption from sin for all believers. *All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.* (1 Cor 1:2)

How great Thou art!

The risen Christ is the 'second Adam', the 'first born of the dead'. The one from whom our model and hope of our own resurrection at the last day is derived.

Concerning our resurrection, Paul preached the following Sermon to the people at Corinth, where some erstwhile believers did not accept the resurrection of the body: (1 Cor 15:12-19)

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then

found to be false witnesses about God, [Jehovah's false witnesses] for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

Sproul¹, in commenting on this last verse, says that enemies of the Christian Church should not be angry with us, rather pity us, for if, in their understanding of the purpose and value of life, our future hope, based on the resurrection of Christ is false, and our resurrection to glory with God is a myth, then we have forfeit much of the fun of this, once-only, brief existence. Post-modern man, shares much of his philosophy with the Greek Epicureans: who say, "Nature and reason show us that pleasure is the sole good and that pain is the sole evil. Eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die! " Most of those around us reveal this goal for living.

Paul in this one of three approaches to the purpose, truth and value of the resurrection uses a method which effectively says: if the resurrection is false everything else we believe and trust in is false.

In the 70's of the eighteenth century (that is the 1770s) a champion of modern atheism, Immanuel Kant, grudgingly used a similar technique to argue that mankind should live 'as if there were a God'. In brief he argued that by pure reason one could not prove or derive the existence of a God. A point of view that was taken up with vigour by subsequent philosophers. However he did conclude that from a practical point of view, for the survival of civilisation, the following could be argued:

- civil behaviour depends on there being people who act ethically, have a sense of duty and are constrained by pangs of conscience;
- for enough people to act ethically there must be an expectation of justice;
- since the world demonstrates that there is a lack of justice. The wicked often prosper. There must be an existence beyond the grave;
- there, there must be a judge, who has the attributes of:
 - perfect righteousness;
 - omniscience (knows all circumstances and events);
 - absolute power and authority, to be able to enforce justice.

That is, a God. And a life hereafter.

¹ R C Sproul from an audio sermon titled: The Resurrection of Jesus Christ. <http://healtheland.wordpress.com/2007/12/16/rc-sproul-the-resurrection-of-jesus-christ/>

Paul, however used further arguments. Like Plato he uses analogy with the sowing of seeds. They are buried to death as it were and through the design of God are brought to new life. Different in form and function from the seed itself.²

Thirdly, Paul, right at the beginning of the Chapter, uses the greatest resource available, through the guidance of the Spirit, to Christians, Scripture. (1 Cor 15:1-11)

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

Note how Paul follows the steps in his narration with the words “according to the Scriptures”. The prophecies found in the scriptures. Then gives a roll call of witnesses. There's Peter and the rest of the twelve, 500 at once, many of whom were still alive as Paul was writing to Corinth. And finally Paul himself. What other event in ancient history is so supported by eye-witnesses? Did they just find an empty tomb, and surmise, against all common experience that Jesus had risen from the dead. No! He appeared to them. They saw Him. One, Thomas, had to see Him for himself, and then fell to his knees with, “My Lord and my God!”

2 Paul goes on to say: (1 Cor 15:42-49)

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. (NIV)

Many today describe the resurrection of Jesus as a myth.³

Faced with the testimony of Scripture (more written evidence than any other significant event of 2000 years ago); the witnesses cited by Paul; not to mention the lives converted throughout the centuries by the power of the resurrection, what is it that generates the automatic assumption that it all must be a 'myth'?⁴

Consider the creation of all life. By God alone. The only one with the power of life in and of Himself. The eternally, self existing God. Whose justice and decrees say that the result of sin and disobedience of His holy laws is death. This is our universal experience. We all die and the dead stay dead. This same God also decrees that by His Grace, those who, by the drawing of His Spirit, come to saving faith in the atonement of Jesus, are justified, as demonstrated by the Resurrection of Jesus, and are preserved to their own resurrection in eternal glory. What is so hard to imagine? The creator of all life can raise those He chooses to life through Christ! To say He couldn't is the impossibility.

Let us give our final word to Paul, who in preaching to the sages of Athens, introduced the true and only living God and His Son Jesus Christ, saying,

"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him [that is the 'man he has appointed'] from the dead." (Acts 17:29-31)

God has set the time, the clock is ticking. God does not merely invite people to come to Jesus (as we do), He commands them! He commands all people everywhere to repent. Will you!

Pray God this will be so, for all the saints present today. Amen [1857]

3 A journalist reported that someone had claimed to have found the bones of Jesus. He went on to say that most archaeologists had poured scorn on the report. So far so good, perhaps this journalist was one of the 'good guys'. Then in an endeavour to convey that a large proportion of the American population believe in Jesus' resurrection, he couldn't resist putting it this way. “78% of Americans believe in *the myth of the resurrection of Jesus.*” Despite his early promise his true colours show through!

4 The modern science worshipping population, have only seen people who die, stay dead. Scientific data gathering has no counter examples. No need then to devise a plausible explanation that will do for now until more data is discovered, requiring a new analogy, model, theory: to, in turn be overturned in the future. (Imagine a time before radio waves had been 'discovered', what would science have been able to say, or theorise about, when considering the notion of long distance communication occurring practically instantaneously. Never shown, not possible, therefore a myth!) To be precise modern science has only seen sinful people (under God's immutable sentence of death), stay dead! But was it much different for the witnesses in Israel and Galilee, and the subsequent believers. Their common experience was the same as ours, once you die you stay dead. Yet they saw the Risen Jesus. They believed. Their lives were changed. Did they say that some percentage of the population believed in the *myth of the resurrection of Jesus*. No they and multitudes of believers ever since have made this the basis of their preaching, faith and works.

To the New Testament writers it was impossible for Christ not to rise. The perfect man, with no sin had not earned the sentence of death. Even His temporary death on the Cross was impossible except that He took on the imputation of our sin. Once this was accomplished and God accepted the offering, Jesus had to be raised. God's visible sign of the person of Jesus and our salvation through Him.