

Getting to know your Bible – Part 1

Getting To Know Your Bible

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I could not agree more. The word Calvary technically means skull. However, I think in light of what was accomplished on Mount Calvary, I love you is a pretty good description of its name and its place.

Tonight, I do not have an actual specific text we're going to go to, but let me encourage you if able, we're going to begin in Hebrews chapter 4 tonight, and allow me to kind of give you the game plan for Sunday evenings, at least for the foreseeable future here in this calendar year. I know that most of you, if not all of you are familiar with the fact that as a church body, as a family of faith, we are placing great emphasis and importance on the Bible and the word of God this year and well that we do so. It is the foundation, it is the understanding for that which we believe. In fact, in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, it basically said, if you want to know that you know that you know that Jesus is the answer, it's because the scriptures told us what would happen, and they were fulfilled just as the scriptures spoke. So as we walk through this calendar year, on Sunday evenings, over the course of the next couple of months, I want to walk through a series that I've entitled, "Getting to Know Your Bible." Now, I know most of us are familiar with the book of which you hold in your hands or you have on your phone, but one of the things that we are quickly discovering with the challenge of memorizing God's word is there's a whole lot of the Bible that we're not real familiar with, and so kind of the goal or the desire on these Sunday evenings is to get not just a feel, but a familiarity with the biblical text because I know I say it somewhat sarcastically and jokingly, but there are passages in the Bible, Leviticus, that we don't know very well and yet, it says that all scripture is inspired by God, not just the ones that we know well and that we were taught in Sunday school.

Once we kind of walk through that, I'm gonna do something I've never done in my life and I've always wanted to do, we're going to study the most misunderstood verses in the Bible. You know, there's a lot of Bible verses that we think we know what they mean but they may not mean what we think they mean. You know, in real estate, there's an old adage, it's all about location, location, location, but when it comes to the Bible, it's all about context, context, context. And I hate to say this in advance, I don't want to get you necessarily overly prepared, but there may be some works of art in your house that may not mean what you think they mean on the wall, even though they are scripture.

That being said, in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 12, it says, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The word I want to focus on tonight is the word sharper. That means what you hold in your hands, there is nothing that can be compared to it. It is different than anything that has ever been written; though there may be items that possess a sharpness to them, there is nothing that is sharper than what we know is the word of God. And Michael prayed it very eloquently earlier. 1 Peter chapter 3 verse 15, it says, we as believers should always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is within us. There are over 50 known countries in the world that have made the Bible illegal. So it might be a pretty powerful book.

That being said, this book that we cherish, we love, in the average American home has at least three copies within its wall, I would claim is one that oftentimes we have become ignorant of its contents, revered for its substance, but ignorant of its contents. Tonight, I will confess to you, may feel a little cerebral at times but the reason for doing this is to understand what we hold in our hands, to understand that according to what we just read, you possess an item, you possess a weapon, it mentions it's a sword, right, that is sharper than any other weapon, any other sword known to man. Two little brief areas I want to address tonight. One is what I call the certification of the Bible. How do we know that it really is what we claim that it is? And secondly, the characteristics of its contents.

Let's begin with the certification of the Bible. Now that's a word that we know very familiar in our culture, in our context, and whatever profession or whatever even hobby that you possess, there are levels of certification. You know, one of my hobbies, for those who do not know it, I enjoy driving very fast. Okay, now I have discovered that the safest and the quote most economical way to drive fast is on a track where you're allowed to drive fast. But most people are shocked to find out how many certifications that I possess. I'm actually certified to do some of the stupid that I do, okay? And you're no different, your respective hobbies, your respective career path, there are levels of certification that when you tell somebody, "Don't worry, I got this," there's a piece of paper on the wall that says you actually know what you're doing, okay? And so therefore, when we talk about being certified or having a certification of, it means that which is proof or the validity thereof.

The Bible holds itself to a standard like none other. It claims to be inspired by God, and it claims to be preserved by God. Inspired by God means it is breathed by God, it was spoken by God. In 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16, I know you know this verse well, it says that all scripture, not just the ones we have memorized, not just the ones that we have an affinity for, that all scripture is inspired. And then in 2 Timothy chapter 2, it says that the holy men of old, those men in the Old Testament who many of them had very little access to educational resource means that you and I do, it says that the Holy Spirit spoke unto them and they wrote what God told them to write.

Not only is it inspired, but it's preserved. Now when we use the word preserved, that means that years later, millennia later, it still contains the same nutrients that in days past.

Psalms chapter 12, 6 and 7 says the word of God is purified for this generation forever. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5, heaven and earth are going to pass away, but the word of God will never pass away. And one of my favorite verses in the Bible, Psalm 138 verse 2, says the word of God is actually elevated above the name of God. Now I want you to think about the standard that God has held himself to. He has said that you can trust his word because he spoke it and he has preserved it. And tonight is not the night to go into all the details there, but there is a fascinating historical study of the number of individuals throughout time who literally gave their life and blood to make sure we have a Bible in our hands today. It has been preserved.

So what is the support? This is where we're gonna get a little cerebral for just a moment. And to be quite honest, when I'm about to go through what I'm about to go through, some of you may think, you know, why is this important? The reason this is important, because we live in a world that doubts, we live in a world that questions, and we live in a world that wants to criticize the Bible claim and by the way, I've noticed most of the people who have the greatest criticism for the Bible have never actually read the Bible. Have you ever heard somebody say, "Well, you know what the Bible says....?" I'm like, well, where's that? And they go, "Well, I don't know." A lot of people think they know about the Bible, but they don't.

So let's talk about the authentication of the Bible. In Revelation chapter 19 verse 10, it says that the testimony of Jesus Christ is the spirit of prophecy. What that basically says is if you want to know that the Bible's really true, all you have to do is look at the life of Jesus Christ. For hundreds and thousands of years before what we know as the Christmas story, the prophets of old that we just spoke of claimed where he would be born, how he would be born, and how he would die and how he would live, 48 specific prophecies about his life and by the way, I'm gonna go a little bit deeper in the weeds for a moment, that is why that famous discovery the Dead Sea Scrolls is so important to us because it is dated a hundred years before the time of Christ and contains an entire Old Testament minus what we know is the book of Esther and they think they just found Esther. All that being said, there's not a prophecy of Jesus in the book of Esther. All those things about being born in Bethlehem and being crucified, he could not have been a self-fulfilled prophet. They were spoken hundreds of years in advance.

How about archaeology? Over the course of time, 25,000 archaeological sites have verified the contents of scripture. Now, I don't know where you come from, that's a lot of evidence. 25,000. And recently it's been published that over 50 secular kings that are mentioned in the Bible have now been verified through archaeological and historical research. You know, you think about the Christmas story for just a moment. It talks about in the days of Caesar Augustus and when Cyrenius was the governor of Syria, and then you discover that we didn't just make that up. Cyrenius really was the governor of Syria in those days.

How about its transmission from when God spoke it and inspired it until you and I tonight read it and we study it? We have over 27,000 documents and quote fragments.

Some of them are as small as a post-it note, and some of them are the entire what we call codex or context of the scripture.

This is the one though that really gets me, the interval. You say, what do you mean the interval? Well, as you date the events of what we know as the biblical record, the passion of Jesus Christ, his death and his resurrection, somewhere approximately 30 AD, just somewhere in that area. And we have evidence, I mean, we have documents of the gospels, the letters of the Apostle Paul that are dated within 25 years of that. 25 years. And a lot of times you'll hear people say, "Oh, you know, we don't have anything about what actually happened until a generation later. How can you trust that?" Well, I hate to be rhetorical and somewhat sarcastic, but I had to take English literature growing up. I had to take philosophy and mythology and all these different courses, and one of the books, or books, plural, that I was mandated to read was Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. Anybody else have to suffer through that torture? Oh, yes. A whole lot of words about I don't know a whole lot about. But nonetheless, did you know that when you walk into, you walk into an academic institution today, high school or collegiate level, there is nobody that's going to put an asterisk beside the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* and say, "Well, you know, we don't know exactly what Homer really said." What do they always say? "This is what he wrote." Did you know that the earliest manuscript we have of those two documents is 500 years after Homer wrote them and we got three? That's it. Isn't that fascinating? We got three documents 500 years from Homer, nobody argues. We got 27,000 from 25 years in the Bible, and everybody wants to raise a fuss. You know why? Because they don't like what the Bible says is why they raise a fuss. The canonization by 397, what you and I know is the 66 books of the Bible, it was locked, loaded, and quote, certified. Now don't panic that that's almost a 400 year span. They didn't have text messaging, they didn't have social media, and it took forever to get anything done back in those days.

What about the unity? Your Bible, from cover to cover, God inspired it. God spoke through 40 different individuals over 1,500 years in three languages, and it all comes together. Now, I've got biblical/baptistic proof that that's the hand of God. I want you to imagine tonight that just in this room, we all lined up in a big circle and I went to Bruce, he's going to be the first one, and I told Bruce a sentence. And told Bruce to tell the next person the same sentence. By the time it got back to me, it wouldn't be anything close to what I originally said. We've played that game before. Kids called it the telephone game back in the days. I don't know what they call it now. But the fact that 40 different people over 1,500 years in three different languages all tell the same story? That's a miracle in and of itself.

But here's the final certificate of the Bible: it's transparent. You say, what do you mean it's transparent? You realize that the overwhelming majority of the characters of the Bible, both men and women, we don't just get the highlight film of their life. You know, it's funny that when these individuals, particularly in the sports world or even those that go through the Kennedy Honors and the music world, when they show the highlights of their life, they show the touchdowns and the number one hits, nobody talks about the album nobody bought. Nobody talks about the season that almost ended their career. We

always talk about the greatness and the success and yet Romans chapter 7, probably the most influential believer in Jesus Christ in the entire New Testament, the Apostle Paul says, "I am a wretched man and nobody sins more than I do." You think about it, the Bible begins in the third chapter by two individuals, Adam and Eve, living in a perfect environment, have perfect parents, and they mess it up in a very short amount of time. You got a man by the name of Noah who, great, he gets on the boat, but by the time you get to chapter 9, everything goes sideways. Abraham, David, Solomon. I could go through the whole list. The Bible shows us, transparently shows us their failures and their frailty because its purpose is to show us the goodness and the greatness of God and not of man.

So what are the characteristics of the Bible? I've already alluded to this: the Bible's a very dangerous book. We just read that it is sharper than any two-edged sword. The last time I noticed, you think about a blade for just a moment, a sword in specific or in particular, you can do great damage with a sword. But that same item in a smaller scale is known as a scalpel. You can take a scalpel and you can do some great good with it if you know what you're doing. And the Bible is a very dangerous book because if we don't use this sword properly, we can, quote cause harm outside of much the opposite.

So how is it that people walk kind of down a dangerous path with the Bible? I'll make this real quick. There are those that deny the outside evidence of its words. We've kind of addressed that. There are those that make a stand based on a single statement. I'm shocked at how many people think the Bible, its entire contents, is based on one sentence that they actually know the Bible says. And I addressed this this morning, they take it out of context. I put on the screen John chapter 10 verse 16. This is a very relevant passage for us because Jesus is in a discussion. He's in an argument with those who don't believe that he's the Messiah. They're questioning his identity, his authority to say what he's saying. And Jesus is talking to them collectively as a group and they are Jewish by way of background. And Jesus makes this statement, "I have other sheep that you know not of." Now if you'll read that verse in context, Jesus was saying that the Gentiles, that's the pig-eaten pagans that most of us come from, that we could be forgiven, we could be saved, and we could be a part of the family of God. However, there's a very significant group of people who are based in Utah and love to ride bicycles that base their whole faith on that one verse. They think that verse is talking about them. Do you see how dangerous the Bible can be? It is either a scalpel to heal or a sword to maim and kill.

When we talk about the specifics of the Bible, 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 15 says that you and I are to rightly divide the word of God. We'll deal with this more over the course of the next couple weeks, but I think one of the great travesties, maybe even tragedies, of contemporary Bible study is we try to take anything and everything in the Bible and we force it all into the pretty package or the desire that we have for it. The Bible says to rightly divide. It doesn't say to rightfully cram together. What does that mean? That means that as you walk through the Bible, you'll discover that it has within itself some pretty natural divisions. We have what we know as the Old Testament, we have what we know as the New Testament, and I put this on the outline, we actually have what we call the Inter-Testament. You say, what's the Inter-Testament? You know that one piece of

paper between the Old and the New Testament? That represents 400 years. That's 400 years of the silence of God before he communicated with humanity again by way of scripture. But even within those respective divisions, there are divisions within. In fact, in the Old Testament, you have the law or the Torah, the first five books. You have the writings. You have the prophets. In the New Testament, you have the gospels. You have what we call the specific letters, that's Paul's letter to the church at Colosse, the church at Ephesus. And then we have what we call the general epistles, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Why is that so important? Because when God pulled Moses aside on Mount Sinai to give him those original Ten Commandment tablets, it was a completely different context than in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit showed up in the manner in which he did and you and I have got to rightly divide the word of God because if we don't do so, it again increases the level of dangerousness.

Let's talk about the language of the Bible. One of the things that mystifies me and marvels me is in the book of Acts chapter 2, and again this is one of those passages that oftentimes is misapplied and misunderstood, we have a very non-Baptist event where people speak in tongues. I got news for most of us Baptists, or all of us Baptists, it's listed in the Bible more than once. However, it is qualified by a host of metrics, but nonetheless, when that quote event happens in Acts chapter 2, I put it on the screen, verse 6, you know what it says? That every person heard in their own language. You realize the miracle of the tongues wasn't in the speaking, it was in the hearing, is what it was. Now why is that important? Because one of the great marvels of God is he's always made sure that you and I had the Bible, its context, in our language. The Old Testament was originally written in what we know as Hebrew. There is a part of the book of Daniel that was written in Aramaic, which by the way was the native tongue of Jesus himself. And then lastly, what we know as the New Testament, was written in Greek. I could not help earlier, Bruce, when we were singing, "A Mighty Fortress is our God," penned by the great Reformer Martin Luther, who more than that great hymn is known for taking the scriptures and putting them in the Germanic language so the people of Europe could read the words of God for themselves.

Last but not least, the Bible's a book of instructions. See, we can get in kind of this academic world where we talk about kind of where it came from, how it's been preserved, all these documents and such, we can speak to how it's divided and the languages it utilized and how it's been preserved on today, but in Exodus chapter 24, let me remind you, Exodus 24 mathematically is four chapters after the Ten Commandments and what the Lord does is we have those famous Ten Commandments, then he begins to explore and explain them to the Jewish people. I want you to hear what Exodus 24:12 says, "I have written these things for your instruction." In other words, God did not give us the Bible just so we could put it on a shelf and say, "Man, there's never been a book like that one." He gave us the Bible so that it would instruct us, it would guide us, and it would allow us to know how this thing called life is supposed to be lived.

And I want to give you three very critical words that are not just descriptors of our life, but are actually found in the Bible. The first one is reading. Now you're going to expect me tonight in a context such as this, you're going to expect me to say that you ought to

quote, read the Bible. But you might be surprised in 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 13, the Apostle Paul says, give attendance to reading. I saw a statistic the other day that if the average American spent as much time reading the Bible as they did watching YouTube videos, we would comprise the contents of the Bible, we would read it from beginning to end, are you ready for this? Once a week. Now, by the way, if you want the statistics, did you know the average American watches two and a half hours, two and a half hours of videos every day. Can you imagine, I can imagine two and a half hours of the Bible every day of my life, but you can actually consume the entire contents just by replacing the Bible with YouTube, okay?

But the Bible says give attention to reading but there's reading and then there's studying. When you study something, you give a very specified attention to it. I mentioned 2 Timothy 2 verse 15 earlier, rightly divide the word, but it says study to show yourself approved unto God. You know, one of the things that I learned in my academic career is there's a huge difference in reading the text and studying the text. When you read it, you simply just digest its material. When you study it, you compare, you contrast, you begin to dig down and discover what does this actually mean. One of the most revealing illustrations that took place in my academic life, I was halfway through my doctoral plan, and as you would expect, certain professor in a certain seminar gave us more reading than you could humanly do, okay? In fact, Tracy will tell you there was a period of my life she never saw me without a book in my hand, okay? And so we would come in every Thursday, and we would talk about all these things, and we would write papers, and that was great. I'll never forget one day, before we did our assignment, the professor said, "Okay, stop." He said, "We're gonna take a pop quiz." He said, "Now don't worry, I'm not gonna take an actual grade, but I wanna show something to you." And he went through 10 what you and I call vocabulary words. He named the word, he said, "Write it down and tell me what it means." You know what all of us in that class made that day? A big fat zero. But all 10 of those words were in the reading. We read the words but we didn't study them.

We can read the Bible front to back every year. You spend two and a half hours a day, you can do it in a week. But just because we read it doesn't mean we quote, studied it. And I know you expect me to close with this to memorize it. There's one thing to have it on the shelf. There's one thing to be able to parse it and divide it and show what it means. Psalm 119 verse 11 says, "I have hidden the word of God in my heart," listen to this, "so that I might not sin against thee." Reading, studying, and memorizing the Bible isn't so that we can win money on Jeopardy. It's not so we can influence and impress our friends at social gatherings. The purpose is so that we do not sin against God.

As I close tonight, now do you know why Satan wants this book to be illegal? Now do you understand why he wants to tease you with videos instead of reading? Now do you understand why he wants to distract us and make us so busy that we don't have time for it? Because I mentioned it this morning, a mentor of mine shared this with me years ago, and I want to close with this. I don't know who originated this statement. I know it wasn't me, but it's really good. This book can keep me from sin, but sin will keep me from this book.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Tonight, as we come to our time of response, I know that it has been a message on the veracity and the importance of God's word in our life but at the same time, the ultimate point is so that we would digest it and know it and not sin against God. Maybe tonight, even in this context, maybe you're that one there's been a history of fervor and maybe even favoritism toward the scriptures and God, but there's never been a time where you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Tonight can be that night. Tonight can be that night where you confess to God that you're a sinner in need of saving, and that blood on a hill called Mount Calvary that we sang about earlier can be applied to our lives, our souls, and our eternity. Maybe tonight's the night that you need to call out to be saved. Or maybe tonight you've been a believer for years, I would say in this room maybe some of you for decades. We love the Bible. We love to talk about the Bible. We love to defend the Bible. But the question of tonight is how much of the Bible do we have in us? And maybe tonight's not a night where we need to step out and step forward and make a public decision, maybe tonight's a night where we need to go back to our homes and our respective lives and make a more important decision, to turn off the electronics and to open the book, to quit making excuses about we're too busy and spend time reading, studying, and memorizing. Maybe tonight's not about walking an aisle forward, maybe it's more about walking the aisle backwards when we leave.

Lord Jesus, as we come to the close of tonight's service, God, thank you for the hymns of faith that you have preserved for many, many years and for the contents of your word that you've done for millennia. God, tonight I pray that we would be, as James said, not just hearers of the word, but doers. May we read it, may we study it, and may we memorize it. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.