

## I. Introduction

A. I hope that today finds you doing well. It is encouraging to watch the brief videos that highlight the various global and local ways you are serving – to see the church being the church during this global moment. To see the CCVH campus – which we have not been able to meet in yet; to see the work going on in HW and Bangkok. Thank you. We will move through this. My prayer is that because of this more people will come to faith in Christ and we will all be a bit more like Christ.

B. On Oct. 31, 1517, a young monk who was serving as a professor of New Testament, nailed a list of 95 problems he saw with the church to the door of the castle in Wittenberg, Germany – which at the time was sort of like posting your blog. His hope was that academics would gather for a conference. What happened was that he set in motion what we now know as the Protestant Reformation.

C. 500 years later, back in 2017, a friend and I went to Wittenberg, Germany to visit the places Luther had worked. And one of those places was a castle where – very COVID like – Luther quarantined for a year.

D. You see, in 1518, while returning from a major religious confab – that was sort of a consultation, but a bit more a trial in which Luther was being accused of heresy, which was called the Diet of Worms – clearly one of the more unfortunate translation misses of all times. While returning from this event, Luther was kidnapped.

E. He and his followers were concerned that he would be killed before he could make it back to the safety of his home. As it turned out, those who captured him did so not to kill him, but to protect him.

F. They were working for the Duke of Saxony and they were under orders to deliver him to this castle in Wartburg, Germany where he hid for a year.

G. The politics and intrigue of that time is pretty amazing. But not on point for the sermon today. I have gone here in order to ask you:

1. What do you think Luther did during his year of hiding, his year of “sheltering-in-place?” Hold a lot of Zoom meetings? Binge watch Netflix? Gain weight?
2. What did the architect of the leading social, cultural, economic and religious upheaval in the history of the West do during this year when he was forced inside?
3. What would you do? Or, here is the real question: what are you doing?” It’s sort of a set up. Sorry. I realize it’s a bit different. But the parallels are too significant to pass up.

H. What Luther did was to translate the Bible into German so people could read it for themselves. He reasoned that the most important thing he could do was to get God’s word into the hands of God’s people.

II. Today I want to talk about the Bible.

- A. I am doing that because I think it is the right topic for this series – Life with God in Unsettled Times. Last week I suggested that one of the ways to live well with God today – to have peace during this moment – is to focus on what is promised next. I argued we need a more biblical, a more compelling view of heaven. Next week the focus will be on prayer. Today I want to talk about the Bible. I think part of setting up life with God is Bible reading and prayer.
- B. I also do it because I have been hearing from people who want to grow closer to God right now and I have decided that part of what they need to do is read the Bible. But, “I’m not really sure how to do it. I start but don’t get very far. I don’t get much out of it.”
- C. So I want give you some handles to “get something out of it.”

III. If you have been around very much you have heard me:

- A. Talk about the Bible - what it is, how we got it, why we can trust it.
- B. You have also heard me explaining passage in the Bible.
- C. Today I want to do something a bit different. I want to try to give you some handles that I think will help you read it on your own.

IV. I am not sure if this is a sermon or not. We are all trying to figure out this moment.

- A. And for me, part of that is about trying to figure out whether to use a preaching voice or a teaching voice or a conversation over a cup of coffee voice.
- B. I am not going to figure that out long term, but today I’d like to pass a long a few things I might say if we were meeting at a coffee shop and you had just signed up to be a Christ follower. I am giving you your first Bible.
- C. I’d say: you need to plug into a church – and that means a small group where someone is going to help you learn the basics. (You can sign up for that today and do that online). What I am going to say doesn’t replace the need for that. Hopefully it helps motivate you to do that. And my part focuses on the Book.

V. There is a lot that could be said:

- A. It is the bestselling book of all time; it has been published in more languages than anything else ever written,<sup>1</sup> and more books have been written about this book than any other.
- B. It’s actually not a book as much as it is a collection of books – 66 in all. 37 in the Old Testament (also called the Hebrew Bible). And 27 in the New Testament.
- C. It was compiled over 1,500 years. Written in three languages and in three continents.
- D. It focuses on the Jews and it covers all the big topics.
- E. Many of you have heard all of this before, along with my note that the Bible tells a story. It is not a collection of morality lessons. It’s not a mixture of inspirational tales, something like a religious version of Aesop’s Fables. It is the story of God’s efforts to rescue and redeem us.
- F. Today I am going to say five other things

VI. The Bible is a key way God has revealed himself to us.

A. The only things we know about God are those things he has chosen to tell us. He does this via two forms of revelation: General and Special or Natural and Supernatural.

B. General is called general because it conveys general information to everyone. It refers to the awareness of God's existence and the basic understanding of his character which can be gleaned from history, creation and our conscience. This information is not only available to everyone. In fact, the argument is that there are things we cannot know.

1. David is referring to General Revelation in Psalm 19 when he writes:
  - a) The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
  - b) Day after day they pour forth their speech; night after night they display knowledge.
  - c) There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.
  - d) Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.
2. That is general revelation. It is good as far as it goes, but there are limits. The first problem is that there just isn't enough there for us to put it all together. There is enough to know God exists. But, we can't go much beyond that.
  - a) We can't get to the notion of the Trinity by studying astronomy. We can't unpack the atonement by looking at the circulatory system of a frog. It just isn't there.
3. General revelation is great as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. That is why we need more.

C. And we get far more – we get Special or Supernatural Revelation, which has two big parts.

1. The first is Jesus Christ. He is the Word of God incarnate and the highest and best revelation of God. Jesus is God in the flesh. If you want to know what God is like, we can learn a lot by looking at Jesus. This is the big point in Hebrews 1
2. But Christ's incarnate life on earth only lasted a little over 30 years. And we weren't there to see it. So we have the Word of God written. God has revealed himself and a lot of other information in a book called the Bible.

D. And the suggestion from a passage like Hebrew 4 is that the Bible is not just a dead letter, it is a living work.

1. It is active and sharper than any two-edged sword – it reads us, sometimes cutting us up.

E. Point 1 – the Bible is a key way God speaks to us and in particular, reveals himself to us.

## VII. The Bible claims to be unique and authoritative

A. Hebrews 4 is just one of many passages in which the Bible claims to be special. Which is why, it is not just the best-selling book and all of that. It is also the most controversial collection of words in print.

B. The Bible has been banned, burned and mocked more often than any other work. In fact, there is no close second.

C. How is this possible? How could a book advocating care for the poor and love for your neighbor generate such a fuss?

D. Well, the short answer is, it says a lot more than that! On its pages of Scripture you'll find statements about the nature of God and about the human condition. You'll find directives concerning marriage, war, government and childrearing alongside advice about money, meaning, lust and fidelity. The Bible even weighs in on how to treat your parents and whether or not you should sue your neighbor. Just about every controversial topic you can imagine is addressed at some point or the other.

E. But promoting views about controversial topics is not what makes the Bible so controversial itself. Lots of books advocate far more disruptive views than the Bible does.

F. The reason this book is more controversial than any other collection of words is because of what it claims about itself. The Bible claims to be the living, active and supernatural revelation of God. It further claims to be the divinely inspired and final source of truth, to enjoy the authority of God, and to be the clear and absolutely necessary guide for salvation and spiritual growth.

1. The Bible not only claims to reveal God. It claims to record the Words of God. We see this by all of the quotations attributed directly to God. We see it by all the claims of the prophets to be speaking for God. In the Old Testament there are over 3000 times where we find the statement, "Thus says the Lord."

2. The claim isn't that the Bible is inspired but that the word of God is expired. This is the gist of the passage in 2 Timothy, where Paul writes, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."<sup>2</sup>

3. The Bible Claims to be a Necessary Guide to our Spiritual Life.

4. The Bible Claims to be Truth: It claims to be the ultimate earthly standard against which other claims to truth are measured.

5. It claims an authority over our lives.

G. Now some of you may want to say – this is all too circular.

1. Good catch. But different sermon. In the end we have four sources of authority: reason, experience, tradition and revelation.

2. You can't prove any of them without making some sort of circular claim. You step out by faith. Send me an email if you want to go into that more.

H. It is worth noting, alongside the Bible's claims to be unique and powerful, this is many people's experience.

1. I am often overwhelmed at how forcefully it can hit me.

2. C.S. Lewis used to say you defend the Bible the same way you defend a caged lion.

- a) And do you know how you defend a caged lion?

- b) You open the cage and let the lion defend itself.

3. But some of you say, "But that is not my experience. I would love to meet with God in a powerful, encouraging, life-changing way every morning. But when I read the Book, I just fall asleep. I do not get anything out of it.

4. So, I want to give you a few coaching points on the Bible. Some guidelines for understanding it and using it.

I. Moving on: 1) the Bible is the way God reveals himself; 2) the Bible claims to be unique and authoritative

VIII. Three: It is likely going to take you some time to get into it.

A. To understand all that you are reading and to appreciate it as much as you will if you study to present yourself a workman approved unto God.

B. It doesn't for everyone but it does for most and it did for me.

C. It's an old book. It's a complicated story that is not laid out in chronological fashion. It employs a number of genre. It can be a bit like everything else.

D. Learning to read, learning a foreign language, learning to play an instrument – they all take some effort.

E. I have been at it for forty years and it feels like I am just getting started – it just keeps unpacking itself.

F. While I am here let me say, make it as easy as you can.

1. Before you read, pray and ask God for help

2. Use an easy translation

3. Get someone to help you.

4. Use an app. Have it read to you in the car. I don't care.

IX. Remember, it is “just a book.”

A. Now, let me explain myself. I do believe that the Bible is not just a book. It is unique. It's divine. It is living and active. I believe that in the end, when all truth is known, we will see that the Bible – all 66 books, in their original autographs and properly interpreted – is always true in all it claims.

B. I believe the Bible is special in all the ways I have been suggesting. But, at the same time, it is just a book. You should not worship it. And you should not think it is magic.

C. But my big point here is, nouns are still nouns. Verbs are still verbs. You have to read it in context. Indeed, the first goal of Bible study is figuring out what the original writer intended the original reader to understand.

D. People do all kinds of crazy things with the Bible that they would never do with another book. Don't go there.

X. Finally, the fifth thing I would say is, change your day to give Bible reading a prominent place.

A. You need to read the Bible. Over and over. It's not optional. You cannot grow if you do not read.

B. I used to ask people for twenty minutes a day: 10 + 10. Ten minutes of Bible reading and ten minutes of prayer. I probably shouldn't have stopped. I know it worked for some.

1. Olsen's story

C. I stopped because I started to feel like it wasn't enough for me.

- D. But, let's start there. Ended up in Africa.
- E. But read it and memorize it.
  - 1. Jesus memorized the Bible
    - a) Temptation
    - b) Cross
- F. Find something that works for you but do it every day – or at least five days a week
- G. Some days it will be hard and some days it will be wonderful.
- H. My drill is:
  - 1. Up early
  - 2. Read a Psalm or two – often using some commentary or book to help me understand.
  - 3. Then read a chapter of a Gospel
  - 4. Then sit
  - 5. Then journal
  - 6. Then read a few devotionals and do some more in-depth Bible Study.Look, I get it. I'm weird and this is my job.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Wycliffe some portion of the Bible will be translated into over 5500 of the 6,802 known languages in the world by the year 2025.

<sup>2</sup> The word that is translated as “scripture” in this passage is the Greek word “graphe.” It is used 51 times in the New Testament. In every occasion it refers to the Old Testament writings.