

² Timothy 3:14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

We Believe: The Bible

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Last week we began this sermon series with the subject of revelation – God refuses to leave us clueless about God’s identity, nature, and plan for us and for the world. God’s most complete revelation is in Jesus Christ. And, of course, the primary vehicle we have been given to understand that revelation is through this book – the Bible. As Daniel Migliore so beautifully writes, “*The light of God that shines in Jesus Christ is transmitted, first of all, through the prism of the [Bible].*”¹

John Calvin says the Bible is like putting on prescription glasses, in order to see God more clearly. He says, “*Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles, will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.*”²

How do I know that God is Creator of all things? The Bible tells me so.

How do I know that Jesus is God in the flesh? The Bible tells me so.

How do I know that Jesus has made me right with God? The Bible tells me so.

How do I know that Jesus is the light of the world? You say it:...

How do I know Jesus loves me? ...

How do I know that Jesus has charged me with spreading the good news? ...

That’s right, and that’s the catch, isn’t it? The Bible says we are to spread this news to those who most need to hear it.

Nineteenth century Danish theologian, Søren Kierkegaard, made this outrageous truth claim: “*The matter is quite simple. The Bible is very easy to understand. But we Christians are a bunch of scheming swindlers. We pretend to be unable to understand it because we know very well that the minute we understand, we are obliged to act accordingly.*”³ He hits the hammer smack on the thumbnail, doesn’t he? Sure, there are parts of the Bible that are confusing or mysterious, but the basic ideas of Scripture are simple and clear:

1. Jesus loves us,
2. he has saved us from destruction,
3. and he charges us to go into the world to help him rescue others headed for destruction;
4. to feed the hungry,
5. welcome the refugee,
6. forgive those who wrong us,
7. demand justice for those whose voices are ignored,
8. display his love to the world by our love for each other,
9. to live lives of personal moral responsibility,
10. and to invite everyone to become Jesus’ disciples.

Kierkegaard was right: it is much easier to pretend not to understand these simple, clear concepts so that we don’t have to actually do them.

Before I went to seminary, I knew very little of what was in the Bible. I grew up back when Vacation Bible School was Vacation *Bible* School. In first grade we memorized Scripture verses for two weeks each summer. But, all that changed in the late ‘60’s and ‘70’s, when most mainline churches stopped doing that. We were on the “cutting edge” of educational theory, which said memorizing things isn’t helpful. With only a very few exceptions, not only did we stop memorizing Scripture, we pretty much stopped learning Scripture, and the Bible literacy curve has continued to trend down since then.

Seminaries are struggling with students who know embarrassingly little about the book on which the entire Christian religion is based. Seminary professors have a very difficult time teaching their students

¹ Migliore, Daniel L. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, third ed., Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Kindle Edition. 2014, p. 41.

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.6.1.

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Soren Kierkegaard*, Plough Publishing House, 2002

how to *interpret* the Bible when they don't even know the stories they're supposed to learn how to interpret.

And whose fault is this? It is our fault – we local congregations who are failing to teach the holy texts to our children; and parents who complain when churches do try to teach it, because their kids come home saying it's too much like school, and so Vacation Bible School now puts the emphasis on *Vacation* instead of *Bible*.

In Judaism, the kids not only learn their Scripture, but they learn the original language in which it was written before they go through their version of confirmation. Every religion in the world makes sure their children learn the texts on which their faith is based, but we have decided this is optional for our kids. Why is this the case?

One reason: learning is not often exciting. Sometimes there are those “Aha!” moments of discovery and understanding, but mostly learning is repetitious and not exciting. Ask the kids who performed at the talent show Wednesday night how exciting it is to practice dance moves over and over until they are automatic; or how exciting it is when Avery Plummer practices his Ju Jitsu moves and keeps hitting himself with the numchuks, or Meredith Harron practicing Ave Maria until she hits those notes just right. Or ask kids who are playing a sport how much fun it is to get out in the summer heat to practice the same plays over and over. It is not exciting; often boring; but the end result is worth it, when the dance becomes a work of art, the song touches people's hearts, the play works perfectly and your team scores.

This is what I discovered about the Bible when I was lucky enough to *have* to learn it in order to preach sermons from it each week. I discovered that it is a very large collection of ancient texts, but, if you keep at it, a little chunk at a time, something amazing happens. Understanding occurs, faith grows, spiritual gifts find fertile soil in which to grow and express themselves, and relationships grow deeper. Amazing things happen when you read the Bible, not just as an interesting historical document, not just as a little daily verse in a one-page devotional, but, as the Word of God; the spectacles that show us the true God.

Let me say something directly to those of you who are being confirmed today. Kristen, Victoria, Nate, Mary Katherine, Emily Ann, and Katie Mac, this group of people surrounding you today loves you, and has given you many wonderful things through the years, but none of them is more valuable than the book your Covenant Partner gave you a little while ago. It is not just a book, it is *The Book*. It contains stories that will plant seeds in you that you don't even know were planted until sometime in the future when they will bear fruit in your life in some surprising and wonderful way. It contains messages that are like a well that is deeper than you can ever imagine, and the deeper you go, the more wonderful the taste of the living water you will drink. Just when you think you understand everything that can be understood about a passage, this amazing book will surprise you with newer, fresher, more wonderful truth. This is like a pair of glasses that, when you put them on, enable you to see God.

One last thing about this mysteriously deep work of holy literature. When you read it, you won't understand it all. Some stuff will confuse you. Some stuff will turn you off. But, if you perform this one little trick, all of that won't matter. It's a secret, so don't tell anyone! If you like seafood, you'll understand this idea perfectly. People who like lobster, crab, shrimp, oysters, fish with scales and bones, they are willing to go to amazing lengths to get at the delicious food inside. They put on silly bibs and use hammers to break lobster shells and pull the meat out. They break hard crab shells with a hammer and suck the meat out of the legs. They peel the shell off a shrimp; even pull fish bones out of their mouths and keep eating the good stuff. When you get to a part of the Bible that seems more like shell than meat to you, set it aside and keep looking for the meat. It is there. I promise you. I found it. It was hard work, but I found it, and, when you find that delicious morsel of understanding, when you hear the voice of God talking straight to you, when you feel the Spirit's presence, when you truly understand that Jesus loves you, you'll find a sense of nourishment that makes you even hungrier. It is an acquired taste, but, once you get it, you'll crave it.

Dig in. This book will nourish your faith for the rest of your life.