

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Paradoxology | Truth in Contradiction

TITLE: The Bible Paradox

SCRIPTURE: 2 Peter 1:16-21

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PASTOR: Jim Thompson

Following Jesus is not always easy. Most Christians want their faith journey to be simple and clear—either/or, black/white, yes/no. However, life with God is often found in both/and tensions or paradoxes. The essence of a paradox is bringing together two seemingly contradictory statements, and the Bible is full of them. God is one; God is three. Jesus is God; Jesus is man. To save your life, you should lose it. To be mature, you should become like a child. And following Jesus into tensions like these is where faith is meant to flourish. Embracing seeming contradictions like these leads to doxology—a life of intentional worship.

Paradoxology is a made up word. It's made up of two words, *paradox* and *doxology*. Paradox is truth in contradiction, and doxology is a life of worship and praise to God. And paradoxology is the idea that we don't have to be fearful of the tensions and seeming contradictions that we face in life and in faith. Rather, if we move toward some of these paradoxes, it will set us on a trajectory of greater love for God, his people, and his world. And as we embrace the tensions we see in the Bible, we will more fully embrace the life God has for us in Jesus.

Today's paradox, however, is not about a tension in the Bible, but it's about the tension THAT IS the Bible. Think about it: Is the Bible God's word? Or is it man's word? Well, yes. It's both. But how?

Often, conservative Christians tend to accent this idea of Scripture as God's Word. Is it? Yes, but some put so much emphasis here that they dare not mention the human nature of Scripture because that would undermine the divine nature of Scripture. And carrying these ideas too far can make people hold to extreme and unhelpful views about the Bible.

But then, on the other side of the spectrum, more liberal Christians tend to emphasize the human authorship of the Bible. They get put off by how the conservative approach seems to undermine that the Bible was written by real people with real struggles. But some on this side go so far that they say things like, "The Bible isn't God's word, but it contains God's word."

So, how do we bring balance to this? The Bible certainly isn't just a magic-book that is strangely and mystically divine. And it's also far more than just another historical piece of literature like Homer or Confucius. How does the Bible function as both God's word AND man's word? And what does that mean for us? Peter hints at these ideas in 2 Peter 1:16-21.

Peter says that even though he had amazing experiences with Jesus, Scripture itself assures us that Jesus is what makes God's story make sense. Peter says that Scripture is a concrete and enduring testimony to God and his purposes.

"No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but *men spoke* from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1:21).

When Peter says this, he is affirming that Scripture isn't human ingenuity or mankind's great idea. Rather, it is God prodding, guiding, using, and speaking through people because of the Holy Spirit. And God used different people's different personalities. He didn't override their personalities, but instead used them for his purposes.

So, how is the Bible God's word and man's word? Well, it seems that Peter would say that the Bible is God's word *through* man's word. But Peter is saying something more in this chapter. N. T. Wright says it well:

"Peter holds to two things: the ancient scriptures and the newly revealed Son of God. Until we see him, we don't understand where they were going. Until we understand them, we don't see the point of who he was and what he did."

This is how Peter understands the story of Scripture: God reigns, and he wanted his reign to be extended *through* people. But people rebelled and chose to do their own thing. So what did God do? He made promises and spoke *to* and *through* people about a time when he would when he would decisively act to undo the injustice and sin that we brought into his world. And the record of this action is what we call the Bible, and the action itself is called the gospel. And any attempts to define the Bible and it's story that don't get to Jesus fall short. In 2 Peter 1...

The Bible is a divine-human gift about the supreme divine-human gift, Jesus, for those awaiting the day when divinity and humanity are perfectly one again.

So, what should do about this? How should we respond to these things?

First, God still speaks through the Bible, so listen to his voice.

For many of us, Scripture seems like such a chore, like such hard work. But think about the result - hearing from God! Him speaking to us, us knowing him more intimately, and obeying him more freely. It may not be easy, but it's definitely worth it. And if our hearts and minds are constantly fueled by God's agenda and not our own, it will transform the way we think about others. If Scripture fills your mind, it will change your worry to prayer, your fear to faith, your selfishness to service, and your despair to hope. So, God still speaks through the Bible, and we should listen to his voice.

Second, God still speaks through people, so be open to the Spirit.

Obviously, Scripture is unique in the way that God spoke through people. But it's not merely unique, it's also *exemplary*, and it's a reminder that God still uses normal people. How the Spirit speaks through people today isn't *in contrast to* nor *should it be added to* the Bible, but should point people to Bible's basic message about Jesus. So, how might God want to speak through you to others? Through encouragement? Warning? Peacemaking? Listening? It should humble us, scare us, and excite us that God still speaks through people. What might that look like in our own lives?

For Discussion:

1. In your own words, how is the Bible both God's words and man's words?
2. Personally, what stood out to you most from this message?
3. What are your biggest challenges when it comes to consistently reading the Bible?
4. Who is someone you know whose life is saturated by Scripture?
5. How is Jesus the Hero of the Bible's story?
6. When is the last time you sensed God speaking to you through Scripture?
7. When is the last time you sensed God using you to speak to someone else?