

What About the Bible?
That's A Great Question Series: Week 2
10/29/17

Welcome/Intro/Vision

This is week 2 of a 5-week series called "That's a Great Question"

Where each week we're tackling some of the top questions that we get from people who are exploring faith, considering faith, or questioning faith

Our hope is that for those of us who are Jesus-followers, we might learn respectful, gentle, thoughtful ways of fielding and affirming people's great questions that come our way

But more importantly, we want to be a place where people who are on a journey of faith can ask their great questions and know that they'll be respected and taken seriously

And hopefully get some answers that will help remove obstacles to you engaging with a genuine life of faith

Here's our series outline: Last week, we talked about "What about Christians behaving badly?" what do we do with the fact that many of us know people who are Christian or claim to be Christian who do horrible things or who just drive us crazy

If that's one obstacle towards faith for you, you should go on-line and listen to last week's message.

NEXT week, we'll be asking the question: "What about all the bad stuff?" How can there be a good God who is all-powerful when there's so much pain and brokenness in our world and in many of our lives?

And as Reminder: week 5, we're going to open things up to your questions

Throughout the course of the series, we're going to invite you to submit YOUR questions and for week 5 we'll tackle the questions that come up the most frequently that you give to us

In your bulletin is this tear-off comment card, write your questions, feel free to do some ballot-box stuffing by getting your friends and family to write your question in as well, and we'll tackle those week 5.

This week, we're tackling the question "What About the Bible?"

I did some research on some **Bible facts** this week and found a number of interesting things about it

First off, it is far and away the **number one best-selling book of all-time**, one estimate had **6 billion Bibles sold up to the mid-1990's**, so add another 20 or so years of sales onto that.

It's not only the best selling book of all time, it is the best selling book in the world every single year, year after year

There are about **50 Bibles sold somewhere in the world every single minute.**

And, in the irony of all ironies, **the Bible is also the single most SHOPLIFTED book in the world, every year, year after year, and for all time!**

And perhaps those opposing realities are a nice segue into the larger conversation: few things are as polarizing as the Bible

It is the most beloved and trusted book of all time **AND** it is the most DISPUTED book of all time

No written document has wielded so much power over so many people.

More people have claimed to understand their purpose, the world, life, and most important God while reading this book than any other book

AND, by the same token, there are millions and millions who have rejected it—some with a great deal of prejudice and anger!

They think the whole thing is full of hocus-pocus, magic, and superstition, an utterly useless relic from an ancient age before people knew anything about important stuff like physics and biology and Pokemon Go.

We've got people here who at some point in their lives rejected the Bible angrily, walked away from all of it

But they've re-engaged their faith journey for a variety of reasons and some of them have been here for a while, trying to figure out what to do with this book that just drives them crazy

Still there are others who have seen others or have themselves been the victim of someone in power using the Bible in ways that were manipulative or oppressive or just angry

We talked last week about Christians behaving badly, this is one of the many ways that Christians have behaved badly

To bully people using the Bible

And in between some those extremes, you've got many people who are read it and they like some parts of it but don't like others

And so they kind of pick and choose which parts they want to pay attention to and which parts they want to dismiss

Many folks in our context have talked to me about their struggles with the Old Testament—there's so much there that's hard to read, more violence, more law and rigidity, more eye for an eye stuff

the New Testament seems to be much more loving and gracious, easier to appreciate and accept

The Bible is polarizing and disputed, it is big, old, complicated, and not always easy to understand—how many of you have ever tried to read the Bible and just gotten lost or confused and given up?

And yet, what I want to suggest to you is that even with all the challenges and in the midst of all the objections and disputations that the Bible is a reliable guide to all the things in life that actually matter:

the Bible is a reliable guide to God: God's character, God's activity, and God's purposes ultimately for the world

And it's a reliable guide to how the world works—what we're made for, why we're here, where and how the whole thing goes wrong—all of the core things about the world

And ultimately it tells us what God has done about it.

And if we're willing to walk in its ways, work with it, inhabit it, let it steer and guide us, let it sink into our hearts and minds, it ultimately leads us to real, lasting, joy.

This is the testimony and experience of literally billions of people throughout history and around the world today, including mine

and so I want to invite you into a fresh consideration of the Bible

Now there's a bunch of different ways this question gets asked and there are at least a dozen different approaches we could take to answer each of those questions

And we're not going to talk about more nerdy stuff like how many copies of each manuscript we have and how reliable they all are

Or the history of how certain books made the cut for the Bible and why others were left out—all of that is important, we just don't have time to go down every possible avenue of conversations about the Bible

That's a big part of the reason why we've stocked out book table with four different books that all make a case for Christianity from different angles

Different personalities and different brains will find different conversations more interesting and more compelling

so I invite you to check out those books on the book table or drop me an email or write down your angle on the question on the tear-off and drop it in the offering basket in a minute

This morning, I want to talk about why we can and should trust the Bible by telling you a little bit about a very difficult time in my own life when I was struggling with all sorts of things, including an intense stretch where I struggled to trust the Bible or to trust Jesus

and in the midst of that dark time in my life, it was the Bible that pulled me out of the pit of doubt and cynicism and despair as it pointed me back to Jesus, who then pointed me back to the Bible all over again.

The New Testament book of Luke starts off Luke's biography of Jesus with a compelling purpose statement, here's Luke 1:1:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

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.

A number of years ago I was stuck in a season where I was on the edge of a nervous breakdown
Anxiety was over-running all my thoughts, hounding me at every turn—I was anxious and fearful about everything and it cast a pall over everything, there was no joy or hope or rest anywhere

I sought out some counseling, which was helpful—I think a great counselor in the right season is probably something that all of us can benefit from at some point or maybe multiple points in our lives

But in this season, as I was anxious about everything and all felt dark and heavy, one of the most difficult things I was wrestling with was this whole Christianity thing

The voices in my anxious head were so skeptical about everything, that doubt just started eating away at everything, especially faith: I struggled to pray, struggled to read the Bible, struggled to be at church

Whenever I tried to rehearse how God had met me in the past, my anxious and cynical internal voices would find some other explanation for how those things had happened

When I tried to read the Bible, I just couldn't believe any of it, at every turn and in every verse there was something that sounded crazy or that the cynical and anxious voice in me just scoffed at

And it was a season of my life when some circumstances had shifted, some of my friendships had drifted, nobody's fault or anything that happened specifically, but I was pretty isolated and alone

And so I was on the verge, in the midst of this season of anxiety and doubt and probably a little bit of depression mixed in, of chucking the whole thing

But what kept me anchored to Jesus when everything else was eaten away was what Luke is talking about here.

Something happened 2000 years ago in and around Jerusalem that has sent shockwaves throughout all the rest of history

The fact that there are around 2 billion people gathered together on this Sunday morning all over the globe, in almost every country, almost every language, almost every people group to sing about and talk about and pray to this man Jesus whose name and teachings by all rights and accounts should never have made it out of the first century is mind-boggling

There have been thousands and thousands and thousands, maybe millions of traveling teachers throughout history.

Somehow THIS one, Jesus, did something so utterly unique that it has captivated people all over the globe for 2,000 years

Luke is writing a few years after the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

And the movement that's going to send shockwaves throughout the whole world is just picking up steam, but it's already making a dent in the ancient middle east and across the Mediterranean sea

And this man Theophilus has become a Jesus follower and has likely been someone who has bankrolled Luke's research project to answer the question: what happened?

How did this thing that's starting to spread like wildfire across the region get started?

This isn't an introduction to a new mythological figure, the ancient world had lots of myths and they knew how to write those, there's nothing mythological about what Luke is setting out to do

This isn't about merely a collection of wisdom sayings and teachings from a great teacher, the ancient Grecian world had lots of those collections from sages that didn't have nearly the biographical details that Luke's story is going to have

Luke is asserting here that he's recording history, a real man who lived at a specific time in a specific region who did specific historically accurate, very earthy things

And what he did somehow inaugurated something completely and entirely new, from God, to all humanity, to change the course of human history forever

What on earth was it that was so revolutionary, that had so much power, that it propelled this poor peasant from a very small town in ancient Israel to the single most influential human being in history?

This is the historical reality that even in my season of anxiety and cynicism and doubt, I kept coming back to and that I couldn't shake

That's the explanation that Luke is saying he's going to give us. And the story of Jesus builds and builds and builds until we get towards the end of his life and the end of Luke's biography

And in Luke 24, Luke makes the single most audacious and bold claim ever made in history—this is the reason, from Luke's perspective and all the rest of the Bible's perspective

As to WHY Christianity spread from a small little group of Jews to the global phenomenon that it was already starting to become in the first years after Jesus's death

Here's the piece of history that Luke writes:

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them,

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’”

So there I was, in the middle of my anxiety-driven season of serious doubt and cynicism, pretty alone and wondering if this whole thing was just a sham

And I realized it all came down to this statement spoken by the angels in this passage and then repeated throughout the rest of the Bible as the event in history that has changed everything: ***“he is not here, he is risen!”***

This is the single most disputed statement in all of history. More books have been written to support this claim and more books have been written to discredit and dispute this claim than any other statement in all of history

But what was compelling about it for me was that the people who claimed to witness this event all then lived lives as if it were utterly and indisputably true—proclaimed it over and over and over again

And no one ever produced a dead body to dispute it!

Even when they were flogged, thrown in jail, and many of them executed for this claim, they refused to abandon it, they held onto it steadfastly, many of them under extreme duress, even unto execution for it

Something happened, 2,000 years ago that changed history. Christians say that it's this resurrection event. All of Christianity hangs on this claim.

Either it is the truest thing in the cosmos and the best possible news any of us has ever heard

OR it's the biggest lie ever propagated in all of history and all 2.2 billion of us on the planet who call themselves Christians should pack this whole thing up and just go do something much more true with our lives.

That was the choice that I came down to, when all else was fading away, in my season of intense wrestling and doubt

And in the end, I believed and trusted that this part of the biography of Jesus best explained what happened in history

Why did those first followers of Jesus go from uneducated, ordinary people to super-heroes who died martyr's deaths? Because the resurrection actually happened.

Why and how did Christianity become what it became?

Because the resurrection of Jesus actually happened and with it was released an unprecedented spiritual energy that propelled it from the margins of a really small, conquered nation, to the movement that has most shaped human history.

Once I made peace with that and started there, what I found was as Jesus rose from the dead, he brought all the rest of the Bible with him

And in fact Luke records a wonderful little story of what happened just after the interaction between the angels and the women on the day of his resurrection

where Jesus does just this—when he is resurrected, he brings the Bible with him:

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹ "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be

sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.

And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

If you look at Young Adult best selling books over the past couple of years, you see a whole lot of other-worldly stories involving fantastic beasts and wizards and witches—why do you think that is?

Harry Potter effect! When Harry Potter made JK Rowling one of the richest people in the world, that series brought the whole fantasy genre with it, elevated it, put it front and center

Jesus does that with the Bible, especially the Old Testament, which many of us struggle with and sometimes want to just discount altogether

But here on the morning of his resurrection, Jesus walks these two people through the whole of the Old Testament and declares that this whole thing is his story

He is the main actor, the continuation and fulfillment of this history.

In Jesus's mind, there is no dichotomy between the Old Testament and what he's done in his own sacrificial death and resurrection.

There's no angry God of the Old Testament and nice God of the New Testament

It is the same God who is at work all throughout to bring redemption, salvation, renewal, and reconciliation to a people whom he loves

Jesus loved the Old Testament, calls us to love it with him and through him—and as one of my favorite pastors says, anyone who can predict and pull off their own death AND resurrection, we'll go with that guy!

The Old Testament is the story that Jesus is fulfilling, the rest of the New Testament is the story and explanation and application of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection.

The rest of the new testament is working out the fact of the resurrection:

If God has raised someone from the dead, what exactly does that mean? If God is doing something new and good for all of humanity through this one act, how do the rest of us get in on it, get to participate in it, how might we benefit from it?

And so, in my wrestling and my doubts, as I came back to trusting in the historical reality of Jesus's resurrection

I found myself being invited to re-look at the whole rest of the Bible as the key to understanding what that resurrection was all about, what it meant, why it happened, and what difference it was intended to make

And as I re-trusted the Bible, I found in a fresh way that it explained and made sense of the rest of the world

Have you ever noticed that human beings who are all essentially

Are capable at the same time of doing wonderful, heroic, sacrificial, beautiful things AND at the same time are capable of being absolutely horrific and terrible to one another?

Have you ever noticed that YOU, the same person, are both capable of being incredibly brave and beautiful and courageous and creative and wonderful

AND at the same time can be a selfish, miserable, horrible human being, sometimes on the same day, sometimes within a few minutes of each other?

As I read the Scripture account where it says that human beings are made in God's image, what a tremendous way to describe human beings! I found in that a great explanation for our potential for greatness

And as I read the Scripture account where it says that the image that's implanted in each of us has been corrupted by sin—the greed, selfishness, pride, lust, jealousy, and other drives that can make us such wretched creatures—that describes how we can go so very wrong

Made in God's image, corrupted by sin, that covers the bases of who we are, why we're capable of so much good and so much bad, sometimes at the same time

And as I re-engaged the arc of the Scriptures as God walked alongside people in the Old Testament: he gives them promises and blessings and invites them into a relationship with him

But they chase after other gods and break their promises and oaths

And I resonated with how hard it is for me to live up to my OWN standards, much less God's standards

And how much of the brokenness and pain the world really could be described and summarized by the definition of sin that I had learned many years earlier: sin is 'broken relationship'

We have a broken relationship with God and with each other, and so any really permanent healing or fix for our beautiful but broken world was going to have to involve deep forgiveness and reconciliation

And so the story that Luke writes of a God who puts on flesh and introduces an infinite source of grace and forgiveness and power through this death and resurrection that we've been talking about

that resonated as the answer for the deepest brokenness in the world—including INSIDE of me

And then as I looked at the New Testament commands as the Scriptures worked out the implications and how-to's of life with Christ, in Christ, and following Christ

that ultimately invited me to a life of faith, hope, and love

And I realized that in that moment, mostly I was living my life anxious and fearful and cynical and it was getting me nowhere, I wasn't happy, I didn't enjoy my life, there was nothing really good or life-giving that was coming out of it

And I realized that if I did, indeed, live my whole life and conduct all my relationships and answered every email and dealt with every set-back or disappointment or opportunity out of a posture of faith, hope, and love INSTEAD of anxiety or cynicism

I would be a whole lot better off and everyone and everything around me would be a whole lot better off

The call to a life of faith, hope, and love, following the teachings of Jesus and living in step with his Spirit, that was life-giving and way better than the place I was in!

And so slowly but surely, as I turned towards God instead of away, as I leaned into some new prayer exercises that helped me to reduce the noise and clutter in my soul, and as I continued to meet with a godly counselor

Over time, I moved out of my anxious season, and was able to again embrace a life of following and trusting Jesus fully and completely

But the place that it all boiled down to was the Scriptures, and the history they tell of a man named Jesus who was raised from the dead, and who brought the Scriptures with him as he did so

This morning, as we close, **a Take-WITH** for all of us this morning, whether you've been a church person your whole life or this is your first time ever kicking the tires of faith:

What would it look like to give the Bible a new level of primacy this week in your daily life?

The authority and power of the Bible isn't so much explained as it is caught.

As you read these pages, as you give it time and space and room to capture your imagination and instruct you on the road of life

It begins to garner more and more authority in your life because you've test-driven it and seen it to be a faithful and reliable guide to navigating this world.

So I want to invite you for one week to take your next step, whatever that is, towards giving the Scriptures a new level of primacy for the next 7 days

If you've never cracked a Bible open before in your life, this is your week to read it for yourself and see for yourself about Jesus

If this would be your **first time reading the Bible** try the biography of Jesus written by **Luke**, you've already gotten started AND BONUS: the Christmas story is next—Christmas comes early for you this week if you

If you gave it 7-10 minutes a day for the next 7 days, you'd finish Mark by next Sunday. Start with a very short prayer, asking God if he exists to help you read this with eyes to see if he's up to anything

Then read for a few minutes and look for anything that strikes you about Jesus, any questions that get generated, any insights that Jesus has about life, about God, about the spiritual life

Maybe write those in the margin of your Bible or in a journal. Then pray about whatever stood out to you and ask God to bring any truths to mind throughout the day

If you're **already engaged in Scripture occasionally, what would it look like to do that exercise regularly for just the next 7 days** to read Mark or maybe some other book of the Bible that you've already started?

If you've already got a daily habit of being in the Bible, what if you tried your hand this week at **memorizing a very short favorite verse**? Everyone thinks they're bad at memorizing Scripture because they are...until you actually try it!

If you gave one short, favorite verse 7-10 minutes every day for the next 7 days, you'd have it memorized by next Sunday.

What would it look like to give the Bible a new level of primacy this week in your daily life?

Jesus, the one who predicted his own death and resurrection, trusted and used and believed in the Scriptures as the source of his own story and his own understanding of God, humanity, what's gone wrong, and what was required of him to make it all right again

And this morning, he invites you and I to trust in those same Scriptures to help us to understand our own role in his great work of making all things new.