

What exactly is the Bible?

HPC 4/8/2024 @ 10:30am

Readings: John 10v31-36 & Matthew 5v17-20; Matthew 12v38-42 & 19v1-6

Introduction

When we moved to our last parish in Woking, we signed up

with Virgin Media for TV, Broadband and phone.

They installed everything and said it was working fine.

But it wasn't.

So, Virgin sent an engineer out to sort it.

He said the installers had installed it wrongly.

It couldn't have worked, despite what they'd said, but he'd sorted it and all was working fine now.

But it wasn't.

I can't remember how many times that happened - I think 5.

Each engineer calling the previous one a liar and promising that **they** were telling me the truth.

Quite apart from the frustration, it was also strangely unnerving.

To keep being told that everyone else had lied to me.

And don't get me started on politicians, like this week's spat between the new and previous chancellors!

You long to be told the truth, don't you?

Did that formerly respected person actually abuse a child?

Will this politician keep his or her word?

Will the Post Office Horizon IT enquiry finally tell the truth?

What about that person who said 'I love you'?

You speak openly to your friends, family and colleagues and desperately hope they will do the same and tell you the truth.

And there's the Bible, with its claims about life & death issues; and its claims to be your maker's instructions about how to live your life to the full;

And it's vital that you know if the Bible is speaking the truth.

This has long been, a Bible-believing, Bible-teaching church.

But what does that mean?

When I thought that the Lord might be directing me to full-time church leadership, I realised just how vital it was for me to know if the Bible is true.

Which the Church of England's founding documents, and all its current regulations and statements, teach.

But which the majority of the bishops **don't** believe or teach.

So for around a year I spent an hour or so most mornings studying it intently, so I could be sure.

Because I did that, whenever I've preached, studied the bible in small groups or one to one;

When I've brought the Bible to the grieving, dying, lonely, depressed, frightened, I've known I brought them the truth.

But what about you?

Do you know that?

Or are you worried that the Bible isn't reliable, for all sorts of reasons, because of all sorts of things you've thought, heard, watched or read?

This Sunday, Rory wants me to show you something quite simple.

To show you Jesus' attitude to the Scriptures.

Which is why we had 4 short Bible readings from Jesus.

Jesus knew the bible to be true because it is the word of God - John 10v31-36

I've just got one point today, which I'm going to prove from those 4 passages.

Fancy that! One point! Well, well!

And here's my point: Jesus knew the bible to be true **because** it's the word of God.

Turn with me to John 10v31 in your blue Bibles on p. 1077.

Jesus is in one of his arguments with the Jews in Jerusalem, and at v30 has just said he is fully divine, fully God.

At which his religious listeners start picking up boulders to stone him to death.

Jesus asks why.

And at v33 they say 'for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.'

OK, now look how Jesus responds.

v34: 'Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'?"'

You should see a little number linked to a footnote that tells you he's pointing them to Psalm 82v6.

Or you will if you've been to the opticians recently!

Yes, Jesus really did know his Bible that well!

That challenges me; I hope it does you too!

You can read Psalm 82 and get your head round his argument.

For now, just see what he says next about this Psalm.

v35: 'If he called them 'gods', to whom the word of God came - and the Scripture cannot be broken...'

Let's leave it there.

Jesus assumes two things.

Firstly, 'to whom the word of God came'.

He's saying that Psalm 82 is God himself speaking to people.

Now, when you speak to someone, they will hear the 'words of you', though that's a slightly strange way to put it!

But they are your words, which you chose and decided to say to that person to communicate your thoughts to them, yes?

Same with the Word of God; Jesus simply means they are

God's words, which God chose and decided to say, in order to communicate his thoughts to us.

‘But Tony, I hear you cry, I’ve just flipped back to Psalm 82 – instead of paying attention! — and it says it was written by a guy called Asaph, not God!’

Yes I know; great isn’t it!!!

Jesus says this Psalm was spoken by God, but written by man. Because they are **God’s** words ‘the Scripture cannot be broken’. Cannot be set aside, ignored or changed.

Jesus often says words like ‘Is it not written?’ and then quotes the Scriptures.

He takes the Old Testament as the final authority.

He doesn’t question it, or have to prove it; he ends this debate, as he often does, with Scripture.

But what about the words of the apostles in the New Testament?

Does Jesus say they have the same authority and truth?

That they are also the Word of God?

Listen to what Jesus promised the apostles at the last supper. He said the Holy Spirit ‘will **teach** you [that’s the 11 apostles] all things and will **remind** you [still just the 11 apostles] of everything I have said to you.’ John 14v26

He would make sure that his apostles accurately taught, wrote down and passed on the words of God.

The apostle Paul wrote lots of the New Testament but wasn’t at the last supper, so he didn’t get Jesus’ promise, did he?

Paul tells his story in his letter to the Galatians:

He wrote: ‘the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.’

And in case you’re worried Paul made it all up, he then tells of his visit to the apostles, who checked out everything he taught and confirmed it was the Word of God.

I know the words of countless songs.

Even after 37 years of marriage, Linnie is still staggered at how I can suddenly burst into song!

Perhaps 'appalled' would be a better word.

I have a song for almost any occasion, thought or statement!

Well, in Scripture, God has a word for almost any occasion, thought or statement.

And because he is God, his word will always be authoritative, absolutely true and never to be broken or changed.

Jesus knew the Bible to be true because it is the Word of God.

The challenge here is, do you and I say that?

Because we know and believe it like Jesus did?

Jesus knew the bible to be true because it is the word of God - Matthew 5v17-20

Now turn to our second reading, Matthew 5v17 on p.969.

This is the world's greatest ever sermon.

No, not this one, not mine; Jesus'; the Sermon on the Mount.

V17: Jesus says 'Don't think that I've come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I haven't come to abolish them but to fulfil them.'

'Law and Prophets' is shorthand for the whole Old Testament.

And Jesus says he's abolished none of it, but fulfilled lots of it.

So how does Jesus fulfil the Old Testament?

Well, he fulfils the Old Testament history by being the perfect king that Israel needed, but never got.

He fulfils the temple sacrifices by being the lamb of God who, once and for all time, takes away the sin of the world.

He fulfils over 200 prophecies relating to the coming Messiah in his birth, teaching, miracles, death and resurrection.

And he fulfils God's moral law, like the Ten Commandments, by perfectly keeping every single one of them.

Now, because Jesus didn't abolish but fulfilled Scripture, he says

v19 'Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the **least** of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.'

Whether you're preaching, leading your growth group, teaching Sunday School or Salt youth group, reading the Bible with a non-Christian friend or your children or grandchildren... It's a huge responsibility, Jesus says.

Because it is the truth; because it's the word of God!

Let's just step aside for a minute and talk 'perspective'.

Because some people today, including bishops, are saying 'Don't focus on the details of what the Bible says you can and can't do. Get perspective. Look at the big picture.'

What do you think Jesus makes of those bishops saying that?

Well, on another occasion, Jesus accuses the Jewish Bible teachers of giving God 10% of their herb garden, whilst 'you neglect justice and the love of God'. Luke 11v42

What he doesn't say is 'Get some perspective. Forget the herbs!'

No, he goes on to say 'You should have practised the latter (justice and the love of God), without leaving the former (herbs) undone.'

Jesus demands the smallest detail as well as the big stuff.

We have a friend who spends ages on detailed designs, but

cannot get the bigger picture, so never meets deadlines.

Another friend bought a painting that was an orange splodge.

Until she took us right to the back of the room to view from there and get it into perspective.

We need to see the overview and the detail of God's word.

Jesus said 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' Matthew 4:4

Jesus knew the Bible to be true because it is the Word of God.

So every word of God is relevant and to be obeyed.

Jesus knew the bible to be true because it is the word of God - Matt. 12:38-42

Thirdly, turn to Matthew 12v40 on page 978, and let's really stir things up!

Jesus is speaking: 'For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'

What do you make of that?

Some of you are thinking 'Couldn't it be like saying "Just as Darth Vader gave his life to save Luke Skywalker..."'

Using a made-up, but well-known, story as a metaphor?

Surely Jesus doesn't believe Jonah really did that, does he?

I'm afraid he absolutely and consistently does!

Jesus always treated bible history as fact, not mythological like the men of Gondor or Hogwarts Academy, but real people who really lived and died...

Jonah, Solomon, Noah, Adam, Moses, Elijah.

And real events: Sodom & Gomorrah, manna in the wilderness, the serpent in the wilderness.

Jesus never questioned a single story, miracle or historical claim.

And never said or implied that they are metaphors and myths.

Let me show you that in two simple ways from his comments here on Jonah.

Firstly, he talks of Jonah in v40 and then in v42 goes straight onto the Queen of the South.

The Queen of Sheba, who visited King Solomon.

No-one doubts the Queen of Sheba was a real, historical queen. Surely, if Jesus thought one was a myth and one historical, he'd have said that or not used them both in the same breath?

[Then secondly, remember that in the story,](#) having been burped up on to the beach, Jonah at last did as God told him and went to Ninevah and called on the people there to repent.

So Jesus continues at v41: 'The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.'

[Google 'Ninevah'; we know loads about it and its history.](#)

Jesus is talking of real people who really existed.

And he's saying that at the day of judgement, these real people, who did repent, will testify against the people who met Jesus and didn't repent.

[Here's a quote from Kevin DeYoung,](#) whose excellent book some of us have been reading Sunday evenings:

'Are we to suppose Jesus to say that imaginary persons, who had the imaginary preaching of an imaginary prophet, and who repented in imagination, shall rise up in that day and condemn the actual impenitence of those [around Jesus]?'

He goes on: 'Isn't it more plausible to think Jesus knew Jewish history better than [modern] critics almost 2000 years later?'

[TV historical dramas are all the fashion.](#)

Did you watch The Crown on Netflix?

A bit of history and a bit of licence.

Or if it's some Hollywood war movies, a bit of history and SHEDLOADS of pro-American licence!

But Jesus says the bible is accurate history recorded by God.

Christian, do you believe this, because your Lord clearly does?
Or do you believe TV experts; Social Media; newspaper commentators; or your mates at work or down the pub?

Jesus knew the bible to be true because it is the word of God.

All of it!

Jesus knew the bible to be true because it is the word of God - Matt. 19:1-6

Turn over to page 986, to our final passage, Matthew 19.

I can actually recall the moment I spotted this for the first time.
Blew me away!

V3: 'Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"'
To which Jesus replies by quoting God's creation of marriage recorded in Genesis chapter 2.

v4: "'Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said...'

So God the creator said the next words, according to Jesus.

'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?'"

And your point Tony?

Go back to Genesis chapter 2 and read it later.

God doesn't say these words.

Adam doesn't say them.

Eve doesn't say them and we haven't even met the snake!

No, it's just the anonymous writer of Genesis who says it.

We'd call it an editorial comment.

And yet, Jesus is so clear that the whole Old Testament is the Word of God, that he says that even the narrator's words are God's word; God himself speaking through his written word.

According to Jesus, quoting any part of scripture is quoting God.

2 Timothy 3v16: 'All Scripture is **God**-breathed...'

Mark 12v36: Jesus says: 'David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared...' and Jesus quotes a Psalm.

Hebrews 3v7: 'So, as the **Holy Spirit** says:' [and the writer quotes yet **another** Psalm]...

The author of the scriptures is God the Holy Spirit, using the minds and pens of men.

Remember Jesus' temptations in the wilderness?

Jesus answered all three temptations by saying 'It is written'. That was enough for Jesus.

That should be enough for me and for you!

When I was kid I used to go to Woolworths 'pick and mix'

sweet counter in Godalming High Street.

Fabulous choice!

You took what you wanted; they weighed them; Dad paid!

The danger is that many of us, yes even some of us sitting here today in HPC, do that with the bible.

We love some bits and stick them up round the house or in the office or on our phone.

But other bits we don't like.

So we ignore them; won't read them; disagree with them or we try to find ways to prove they don't apply today.

Jesus said 'Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.' Jn 14:21

Disobeying **any** Scripture, according to **Jesus** — these aren't my words — means you don't love him.

Jesus knew the bible to be true because it is the word of God.

And kept it accordingly.

Jesus knew the bible to be true because it is the word of God, do you?

Let me close by laying before each of us applications from our four passages.

First application: Jesus said 'Is it not written...?'

I know that many of you are reading the Bible regularly and taking it seriously.

I don't know whether or not that's the case for others of you. But I do know that for many, you aren't reading God's word. Or you do it in spurts and then give up.

Because you're put off, because it's sometimes harsh, or too difficult; TV or the internet or Facebook is so much easier. Jesus said 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

Persevere and you will be rewarded by seeing the great and glorious God for who he is!

Yes it requires work, but so does anything worth doing. Don't be lazy, not with the Word of God!

Get these quarterly Explore notes from the Good Book Co.

They will really help you to understand and apply what God says to you each day.

And treat yourself to a copy of the ESV Study Bible which has very helpful explanatory notes on most verses.

Feast on God's word every day; just as Jesus did.

You need it to live!

If you're tempted to say 'I don't like the God I see in this bit', then ask God to help you know him for who he actually is.

And when you don't understand something, or disagree with it, don't cross it out!

Do as I was taught to do - write in pencil 'AFL' for 'awaiting further light' — far humbler, and you'll be amazed how many get rubbed out over time.

Second application: Jesus said 'Anyone who breaks the least of these commandments'.

Jesus obeyed **every** word.

In fact, at the last supper he said that's how he showed his love for God the Father!

Yes, lots of the Bible is comforting, encouraging, assuring.

But do you obey the other bits too?

Do you forgive, turn the other cheek, flee temptation, etc.?

Third application: "For as Jonah was in the belly of a huge fish".

Jesus treated bible history as fact.

That's why he and the apostles so often use these stories and character as examples for us to follow or avoid.

If you decide to judge Scripture and say some things aren't really true, then it's only a short step to doing the same with God's moral commandments.

Or that they don't really apply to me today.

Final application: 'And the creator said...'

To quote any part of scripture is to quote God.

Know that every word is God's and therefore stand firm in your knowledge and trust of the word.

Don't rely on me or Rory or me; don't rely on any preacher or writer; especially don't rely on the God channels or Google! Study for yourself and then stand firm, because you know that, and what, the creator said.

Like Jesus, know the Bible is true because it is the Word of God.

Go to it !!

Let's pray for God's help to do that.

Prayer (do business)