

Bible Special 06-05-23b

Let's resume our study now. We are taking a look at the characteristics of the Bible, at the characteristics and quality of our Christian faith. You are going to have conversations.

People are going to question you. They're going to, in some cases, attack you or mock you or deride you and say, you're illogical. You really don't know the roots of your Christian faith.

If you knew how Christianity really got started, you wouldn't believe it. You have to be ignorant to believe that. And I am in the process of demonstrating for you that they have to be ignorant to not recognize what God has done in giving us the word of God, giving us the Bible.

Well, there are two things we're going to cover in this second session tonight. One, as I mentioned at the end of the first session, is we're going to look at how we can know not only that the Bible is the word of God, but that our understanding of it is accurate compared to some of the notions that you'll find in other parts of the Christian community. But before we do that, we're going to take a look at one other issue.

And this is, again, an attack on the text of the Bible, specifically the New Testament. And they're going to say, well, okay, you believe in Christ specifically. They don't do too much with the Old Testament.

Most people, even critics of Christianity, don't really know enough to go after the Old Testament. And so they go after the New Testament. They say, well, it's a two-pronged attack.

First of all, they say the books that are in your New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and the letters of Paul and the book of Revelation and so on. These books are just accidental. They just accidentally got there.

It's just a happenstance because of certain things that took place in history. First of all, there weren't any gospels written any time near when Jesus actually lived. They're all made up well after the fact.

Now, we've already talked about the fact that they were written within the living memory, within the time of eyewitnesses to those events. How do we know this? Not only do we have the manuscript evidence that I've talked about, and not only do we have the testimony of the church fathers, but we have the internal testimony of the books themselves. For example, let's just talk about Luke.

No serious scholar questions that Luke wrote, both Luke and Acts. It's a two-volume work. The Greek is the same.

The characteristics are the same. The second volume references the first. And the level of detail, the level of historic understanding is such that we know that Luke wrote them both.

Now, let's start with Acts and work our way back. Acts picks up at the point that Jesus is about to ascend. Acts 1.8, you will receive power after the Spirit has come upon you.

You will be my witnesses. Then Jesus ascends. Then, beginning in Acts chapter 2, you have the day of Pentecost and you have the whole history of the church as it formed.

It talks about Peter and it talks about John. And then it moves on to talk about the apostle Paul. And from about chapter 10 or 11 forward, you have the account of Paul.

And the level of historic detail and the way that it matches up with the letters of Paul really put it beyond dispute that Luke was an eyewitness. There are parts of Acts where Luke begins to say, we did this and we did that. We sailed, we arrived.

And it's clear that he was a companion of the apostle Paul. Why is this important? Why do we care? Because the book of Acts ends, it's all finished and wrapped up and completed, signed, sealed and delivered. And Paul is still alive.

You can imagine that if the book of Acts wasn't finished until after Paul died, Paul's death would have been included, but it isn't. And that tells us, because we know that the apostle Paul died sometime in the sixties, anywhere from 63 to 68 AD. Acts had to be written before that, because very clearly it assumes that Paul is still alive at the end.

You can read the last few verses and Paul is under house arrest, teaching and preaching the word of God in Rome. Well, that puts it before say 65 AD. Now, if that is true and it's reasonable to conclude that it is, then the first volume, which is Luke volume one, the gospel of Luke was written before that.

So at the earliest it had to have been written sometime in the fifties AD. So if I gave you a pop quiz right now, for those of you whose eyes are glazing over and whose attention is wandering, what is the probable date of the writing of the gospel of Luke? What decade? Fifties AD, most probably. Now, while there are a lot of questions, a lot of people try to figure out, well, which gospel was written first? It's called the synoptic problem.

And the most popular view is that Mark, because it's short and because both Matthew and Luke seem to say the same things as Mark, and when Matthew and Luke don't agree, one of them usually agrees with Mark. And when they both disagree with Mark, they don't agree with each other. And there are various reasons.

There are nine real strong reasons why people think that maybe Mark was written first and Matthew and Luke both had a copy that they looked at when they wrote their gospel. Okay. It's a widely popular view.

Let's say it's true. If Luke is written in the fifties, then when does Mark have to have been written? Before the fifties. So let's put it at the tail end and say, well, let's say Mark was written in 50 AD.

When is it that Jesus left? 30 AD. So we begin to have very strong circumstantial and textual evidence from the gospels themselves. If Mark has written down the preaching of Peter, which the early church fathers claim, which is evident, I'll give you just one example.

Why do we think that Mark is basically Peter's recollections? First of all, virtually everything that's in Mark is in and around Jesus Christ. It's somebody who was traveling with him who saw these things. There's one passage in particular that really strongly suggests that Mark is the eyewitness testimony of Peter.

Peter is preaching. Peter is not literate, but Mark is. So Mark writes down what Peter says.

And that has to do with something that is actually sometimes somebody will come to you and say, you know, the gospels don't agree with each other. Matthew and Mark and Luke, they say different things. They don't agree.

And one of the examples they will give is, do you remember just before the crucifixion and Peter says, Oh Lord, though all deny you, I will not deny you. What did Jesus say back? Do you remember? Test your Bible knowledge here. What does Jesus say specifically to Peter about whether or not he will be faithful, though all others should flee and deny him? Peter says, I'll never deny you.

And Jesus says what? Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times. Matthew records this, Luke records this, John records this. It's not often that all four gospels record the same thing.

You often find two gospels that will record a thing. Once in a while, you'll find three, but very seldom do you have all four gospels giving the same event. But this is one of the ones where Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all quoted.

However, Matthew and Luke and John all give it pretty much like we just described. Before the cock crows, you will deny me thrice. Mark, however, has an additional detail.

In the gospel of Mark, if you look, when it quotes the Lord Jesus, Jesus says, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times. Now, who would be most likely to remember a little detail like that other than the man who was in the temple courtyard, who was being questioned by the maidservant and others around the campfire and who actually heard the cock crow and heard the cock crow a second time? Peter. Peter has got those details burned into his brain.

It's the worst day of his life. And he's got it in great detail. This, of course, also causes a little bit of a problem for those who claim that Mark wrote first and Matthew and Luke depended on him, because if they're slavishly following Mark, how come they didn't record that little detail? And there are several other really significant things in Mark that neither Matthew nor Luke record.

So this is a theory. Maybe it's true. Maybe it's not.

There are some decent reasons for thinking Mark may have been written first. Luke claims that he used other Gospels. But why are we even talking about this? Because it is reasonable.

We're not talking about facts here. We're talking about what it is reasonable to believe. Nobody can prove anything because all the eyewitnesses are dead and gone.

But it is reasonable looking at the book of Acts and how it ends and looking at the Luke, which is clearly before Acts, to say it is reasonable to conclude because Luke also at the beginning of his gospel says, I have tried here to set down in order the events surrounding Christ's life. And I have gone and interviewed people who were there. Luke claims this outright.

He says, I have gone and I've been like an investigative reporter. I've talked to people who were there. And what I'm about to give you is the results of my research.

And his research could well have included the gospel of Mark, but it's equally possible that Matthew wrote before Mark did. And there are good reasons for seeing that that could well be the case. But whichever one got written first, if Luke is around 50 AD, how many eyewitnesses do you think are still around who could say, Luke, your research is all screwed up.

I was there and this is bogus. And we're going to start a church that operates on a different assumption. We're just going to follow the holy man who didn't do any miracles or who didn't raise the dead or who never got resurrected.

We're going to start a different sect because your stuff is all screwed up. Now, do we have modern analogs for this? I had a good question on the break about, well, we've had people who have tried to write scripture in more recent days. The first example that springs to mind is Joseph Smith back in the 1800s, writing the Book of Mormon.

He says, well, the angel Moroni came down and he found these tablets under a tree. And Moroni gave him the golden glasses so that when he looked through the glasses, then he could read these tablets and he transcribed them. And this is where the Book of Mormon came from.

Well, how do we know that this is not scripture, that God didn't send some previously unknown angel Moroni to come down and give Joseph Smith the golden glasses so he can read the magic tablets under the mystical tree? What is the characteristic of the first century writings of the apostles? How do we know the apostles are apostles? Jesus told them, you're going to do works like I have done. Acts records the fact that Peter could walk by and if his shadow fell on a sick person, they would get well. Handkerchiefs that the apostles touched could heal someone.

Peter and John, remember they healed in the very early chapters of Acts. The guy comes up begging and they say, well, you know, I haven't got any money, but what I do have, I'll give to you. And he heals the guy on the spot.

Why is that? Was God concerned that there were just too many sick people in Israel and they needed to give out the gift of healing and get them kind of healed up? Just too much sickness,

too much blindness, too much lameness, too, too many deaf people in Israel. This is just, this is a bad thing. Let's just heal a few of them.

Why did God give that gift of healing? It authenticated the apostles and people who saw firsthand eyewitness, these miraculous healings recognized that these men were God's chosen representatives. And when they wrote a book or when they sponsored a book, when Peter had Mark write down his recollections, when Luke wrote down the research and the apostles, like the apostle Paul said, this is a good book to have on hand. This is an accurate thing.

When it was authenticated, when it was blessed, if you will, by an apostle, people said, Hey, this is the word of God because the man of God has said it's scripture. And so they accepted it as such. And it comported, it matched the eyewitness accounts of hundreds of people who were still living.

Now compare that to Joseph Smith. Did Joseph Smith ever raise anybody from the dead? Did Joseph Smith ever heal a man born blind? Did Joseph Smith ever say to a cripple, take up your bed and walk? Were there any signs or any manifestations, any authentications from God that Joseph Smith was an apostle or a prophet or any such thing? No. How did the Christian community receive Joseph Smith when he tried to publish his little Moroni book of Mormon? I don't know why they don't say it's not the book of Moron, but book of Moroni, but they call it the book of Mormon.

And, you know, Nephi and all these other goofball things that are in it. What was the response of the Christian community? He was rejected. He was kicked out.

He had to get in his wagon and go to Utah with his little band of followers because Christians wouldn't allow him to live in their town. They drove him out. They said he was a heretic.

They said he was a ding dong and they made him leave. And he had to go way out in the middle of nowhere where there was no civilization and set up his little little community because the Christians recognized him for the fraud that he was and his book for the weird conglomeration of King James English and imaginative nonsense that it is. Same thing with this woman who has written the book of healing and so on.

Yeah. Mary Baker Patterson Glover, Eddie. How many different times was she married? And, you know, people treat her words as though they're inspired, but it has been rejected.

There is no serious Bible scholar who says, oh, well, in addition to the New Testament canon, we need to get Mary Baker, Eddie, get her book out and put it alongside. It is only followed by those who are of a cult mentality. Never receives.

Same is true, by the way, for a lot of these spurious gospels. You're going to hear a lot. The Da Vinci Code is out.

Gnosticism and weird heretical stuff is being revived. And so you're going to hear about the

gospel of Judas and the gospel of Thomas and the gospel of Peter. And every time somebody wants to write a book and have it sell, it follows the same pattern.

Well, traditional Christianity is messed up. I have found the secret key to tell you what Christianity really is. All you have to do is buy my book for \$19.95 or watch my video for \$24.95 and you'll find out the magic secret of how Christianity really started.

And they always go back to these Gnostic rejected writings. So just think about the evidence as it stands. Start with Acts, go back to Luke, figure Mark is before that.

And all of these are written well within the living memory of people who would have debunked them at the time. That's why it is so important for critics of Christianity to try to push the writing of the books late. They want to push it past 100 AD, past the time that any witnesses could debunk it.

It's critical to their theory, but it won't wash. You can't make it fly. They don't do it to any other ancient writings, but they have to do it to scripture because that's the only way to get their ideas to have any weight.

People don't die for fantasies. People don't say, I've got Aesop's fables and I believe them and I'll die for it. They only die for things they know to be true.

And first century Christians were martyred and went to their deaths, refusing to recant because they knew the truth of their New Testament scriptures. The first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptics because they are so close. They provide a synopsis of the ministry of Christ and they all follow pretty much the same sequence with variations.

They were all, the evidence points to the fact that they were all three composed within 30 years of the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, between 30 and 60 AD. There's really no serious debate about this. Critical scholars, materialists, humanists, atheists, people who don't believe that there's any such thing as a miracle or any such thing as a God will try to make weird arguments that they must be late.

And they do it based on what the Gospels say. And they say, well, people wouldn't have said this in the first century. They would have said this in the second century.

Therefore it's a second century document. Well, it's just utter balderdash. Even liberal scholars who at least are objective, J. A. T. Robinson is not a conservative, was not a conservative.

He wasn't an evangelical in any sense of the word, but he wrote and said that the entire New Testament could have been completed before A.D. 70. And he said the evidence forces them to reevaluate the critical theories that cropped up a while back. Well, what is our second point? The first point is don't let people tell you that the Gospels are late.

And along with that, people will say, well, the Apostle Paul only wrote a couple of his letters and

the rest of them are spurious and late. These people don't know Greek and they don't understand the circumstances of writing. They don't allow for the fact that the Apostle Paul wrote over a period of 20 to 25 years and that his early epistles aren't going to look like his later epistles.

Look at any writer. If you're an English major like me and you've studied the career of an author like Eugene O'Neill or Ernest Hemingway or Steinbeck or anybody that has produced a body of work, their early work is different than their late work. The vocabulary changes, the themes change, the maturity level of it changes.

This is true in the Apostle Paul's work. Circumstances were different. Times of writing were different.

Reasons for writing were different. Therefore, the vocabulary and the style will be different. Well, they say, look, the vocabulary and style is different, so Paul didn't write it.

And it's just balderdash. It's utter nonsense. Nobody in the early church ever said Paul didn't write Ephesians or Colossians or any of these books.

They say, well, Paul didn't write 1st and 2nd Timothy. He didn't write Titus. He didn't write this.

He didn't write that. And it's just all fabrications. It's speculative nonsense.

So don't buy it. Don't let somebody tell you that all of the evidence points to this. Ask them if they know any Greek.

Ask them if they've ever translated. Ask them if they studied what the Germans call the *Sitzenleben*, the circumstances of writing for those books. And they haven't.

They've read this on the web somewhere. Well, how do we know that the understanding we have of Scripture is correct? When you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, one of the first things you recognize is there are things of this earth and there are things that pertain to spiritual truth. It says in Corinthians, you have the carnal mind and you have spiritual truth that the fleshy carnal mind cannot understand.

So right away, we recognize that there is provision that God has made for understanding spiritual truth that isn't available for everyone. It's not available for unbelievers and it is not available for Christians who don't look for it and who don't avail themselves of it. Why do we pray before every Bible study? What do I always remind us of when we start Bible study? It is a ministry of God's Holy Spirit to lead us into truth, right? Now, you can't get a scientific method for finding the truth.

You can't say, well, if I have enough footnotes or if I cross-reference or if I use enough lexicons, I will find the truth. Spiritual truth is not discerned by the methods of materialistic science. Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned.

Now, Jesus said, people of a spiritual mind are going to be in the minority. Narrow is the way and straight is the gate that leads to life and few there be that find it. What does that tell you? Most Bible interpretations are going to be wrong.

Why? Most people who interpret the Bible are not using the spiritual tools that God has given. That's what the Bible says. If you find yourself in the majority on finer points of interpretation, many times you're going to find that that is wrong.

We do not look to how many people believe a thing. We don't look to scientific methods of induction or deduction. This is where faith becomes a part of our Christian life and our understanding.

We only have to ask ourselves two questions. First of all, do I want to know the truth? If you don't want to know what the Bible teaches you're not going to find it out. You're going to be easily led astray. You're going to be like a ship without a rudder. You're going to be blown to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Paul says So the first criteria is to have an accurate understanding of scripture.

You have to want it. Our most recent memory verse is from Proverbs chapter 2 our passage and what does it say if you seek it as silver if you search for it as for hidden treasure if you Incline your ear, and if you apply your heart if you lift up your voice, then you will understand. The number of people who are willing to go through that process of Asking and seeking and knocking is a minority even within the realm of believers. So you shouldn't be surprised that there's going to be disagreement, and there's going to be misunderstanding. There's going to be confusion because most believers don't Really ask and seek and knock it's just a given. So that's part a if you want to be sure you know the truth you have to be sure you really want to know the truth and That you go to God and ask. Jesus said ask and it shall be given. So before you start trying to prove your interpretation Examine ourselves the Bible says to see if we are in the faith. Are you really are you just looking for a justification? Are you looking for something to beat somebody over the head with are you trying to get someone to conform or to? Agree, are you trying to? Show them up or prove them wrong. That's not the approach to the Bible. We go to the Word of God because we love the truth. Jesus said the one who loves me is the one who has my word and keeps it. That's the one that Jesus will come to and make his home with along with the father. That's the one the Holy Spirit can teach. So that's the first qualification the second is Scripture Interprets scripture.

So first of all, you have to be asking and seeking and knocking so that the Holy Spirit can be your teacher. That's the only way you're going to have a right understanding. Secondly scripture interprets scripture. It tells us in the Old Testament that it is line upon line line upon line Precept upon precept precept upon precept here a little and there a little don't take one verse and Build your Bible understanding on it Find all the verses. That's why we study categorically.

That's why we study exegetically. That's why when we come across the concept in a verse We go to other passages that talk about that same subject when we're looking at Satan in Job chapter

1 We go to Isaiah 14. We go to Ezekiel 28. We go to Revelation We go to all the places we go back to Genesis chapter 3 and we look at what does the Bible say about Satan? We don't just draw a conclusion from one passage scripture is the best commentary and the best interpreter of scripture John told the early church you don't need Men to teach you you have the Holy Spirit and you have the Word of God and that is the way you learn So when somebody says well, how do you know that your Interpretation is right and that all these other denominations are wrong.

Do you even need to answer that question? What's the real issue for that person? What do you think of scripture? What's your understanding and what's your interpretation? What do you base it on? Have you? Compared scripture with scripture. Are you talking to a person you can usually quickly tell if somebody is interested or not Can't you? You find out if you have an enthusiasm for the Word of God very quickly if someone shares that enthusiasm or not And if they don't you're you're going to end up wrangling about words to no profit The only really profitable conversations are with those who share an enthusiasm for God's Word and when they ask you these questions You can give them The witness of the Word and God the Holy Spirit will use that to improve their understanding as well Getting into an argument about who's right and who's wrong is really a waste of time because we pursue an understanding of Scripture for our benefit so that we can grow in grace and knowledge of the scripture. So what's the conclusion of my second point? Don't allow yourself to be drawn into fruitless arguments about what does the Bible say or what does the Bible mean? When is it a fruitless argument if you discern that the person you're talking to really isn't interested in the truth they're interested in an argument and You can say if you really want to understand what the Bible says I suggest you ask God The Bible says ask and it shall be given.

You don't need to hear my interpretation ask God Cultivate your faith and God will show you a right understanding and don't enter into those kinds of fruitless arguments well we have one more night where we're going to take a look at the Characteristics and the elements of our Bible and our faith and then we're going to begin our next study I said it was going to be the gospel of John, but actually it might be something else I'll let you know next week what it is. Let's close here in a word of prayer Father we are grateful that You have given us a faith that is reasonable you have given us the ministry of your spirit you have given us the power of your word and you've given us the promise that if we ask if we seek and if we knock you will open the truth to us and allow us to grow in grace and in knowledge and you will transform our minds and Conform us to the image of Christ. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will Find us ready and willing in that regard and that we can Be impressed with the truth of your word in such a way that we can reflect your glory in the glory of the Lord Jesus we ask it in his name.

Amen