

**Bible Sunday – 27<sup>th</sup> October 2019 – Eynsford & Farningham**  
**Luke 4.16-24**

Today is Bible Sunday...

I could talk to you about a whole range of facts about the Bible, such as how many books it contains, when it was written and who by, but I'm not going to! There are many interesting details about **how** the Bible was written but I believe the most important point to us as Christians today is **why** it was written.

**The Bible is God's word** and records God's revelation of himself to humankind through his people, and above all in his Son, Jesus Christ. If we look at the Bible as a whole, it tells the story of the relationship between God and the world from the dawn of time (in Genesis) until its ending (in the book of Revelation). It is the story of God's love for all his creation.

**So why is God's word so important?**

1. God has spoken to us! It makes sense to listen to what he has to say, doesn't it?
2. God has revealed himself to us so we might know his love, and his plan for our lives.
3. God has given us rules to live an abundant life.

**The Word of God**

- **The Bible is God's living word.** It is the inspired word of God! It has the power to shape and transform our lives!  
It allows us to see, with our eyes **and** our hearts, God's glory. It is the written word of God that bears witness to the living Word of God, Jesus Christ.  
Just as Jesus sends Paul to open people's eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, through the Gospels we too see Jesus who illuminates and restores our lives from sin.  
We are changed through the word of God.  
Hebrews 4.12 reveals God's word as alive and powerful, working in us – 'The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.'

- The Psalms tell us again and again that **the word of God is the truth.**  
(Psalm 12.6) And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times  
Psalm 119 is full of the testimony to the word of God being truthful and righteous:  
verse 105: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path  
verses 129-130: Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them.  
The unfolding of your words brings light; it imparts understanding.  
verse 160: All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.

Absolute truths are so hostile to the current worldview – today it seems like the world is full of fake news, and it has become the norm that lies are presented as truths. Only the word of God is true. We need to seek God's word to find the real meaning and purpose to our lives.

God is always right! And if we care about being right with him, his way is the only way.

In the gospel of John, Jesus tells us he **is** the way, the truth and the life (John 14.6). Knowing Jesus is the ultimate meaning and fulfilment of life on earth and the way to know God's truth.

In him there is nothing false, nothing misleading, nothing uncertain.

When we seek to figure out what is the truth and what is a lie, we can measure it against the words of Jesus, who himself is the truth.

God's words are not only true individually but the sum of all of the Scriptures paints a picture that we can call truth. When we look at the Bible as a whole, the whole picture is pointing to Jesus.

God's word was revealed by Jesus – he is the incarnate Word, as we read in the first verses of John's gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God.

- In our gospel reading this morning... we heard **the revelation of Jesus the Messiah, the living Word of God.**

Jesus goes to the synagogue in Nazareth, his home town, on the Sabbath, as was his custom. He stands to read... the scroll is given to him, he unrolls it. It's Isaiah, where some of the most powerful messianic prophecies are found... very deliberately he finds the place and reads one of those prophecies...

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

Because he has anointed me

To bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

And recovery of sight to the blind,

To let the oppressed go free,

To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

He rolls the scroll up again, gives it to the attendant and sits down –after a pause when all eyes are fixed on him, Jesus speaks – *today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing!*

Those listening would have been expecting Jesus to speak about how they would recognise the Messiah, who would establish justice, peace, prosperity, overthrow the oppression of the Romans.

But Jesus is telling them: I am the Messiah!

When we read the Bible we need to be careful about isolating passages of Scripture from other passages, as this can easily bring us to wrong conclusions about what the Bible teaches. And we have to think carefully about context, both historical and cultural. The Scriptures were written into a world very different from our twenty-first century world. As someone once said: take a text out of its context, we're left with a con!

Home groups are a good place to learn more about God's word, in fellowship with one another and under the guidance of someone teaching. The Bible is a large

collection of books, long and sometimes hard to understand, especially when we're reading them on our own! We currently have six home groups, held on different days of the week and at different times to suit a range of people's lifestyles. If you'd like to join one, you'd be more than welcome – just come and speak to me.

- **The word of God teaches us about the goodness and reliability of God.** He is and always will be faithful. He is trustworthy and ever true to His promise and can be depended on (1 Corinthians 1.9). Whatever circumstances and seasons we might face in life, God's word is sufficient because it pours out his love for us.

The following verses from 1 Peter I think are particularly encouraging:

'All flesh is like grass  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers,  
and the flower falls,  
<sup>25</sup> but the word of the Lord endures for ever.'

- **The word of God makes us distinct as Christians** – the way we live our lives. The Bible is not just a book to read; it is a book to live. Paul's letter to the Colossians encourages them to align themselves with the teachings of Jesus and warns them of listening to the words of the world - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom (Colossians 3.16) We are called to develop a relationship with the scriptures, not just read them as a text. It's not just about gaining knowledge, but about applying what we learn to change our lives. In our home groups this year we have studied a course called 'Fruitfulness on the Frontline,' which has encouraged us to see how God can and does work in and through us in our daily lives – putting our faith into practice – by applying passages of Scripture that we read. God's word is not just about edifying us individually: we are called to share what we learn in our faith with others; to go out and make known his love for all. As we live our lives, we should continue the story of God's love in the world.
- **God speaks to his people through his word so we can respond** –as we read God's word we encounter him, and this encounter is transformative.

When I first came to faith as an adult, I began reading the gospels, and a whole new world opened up to me. I heard God speak directly to me through the life of Jesus – how he met ordinary people and brought light into their lives; his message was simple and straightforward – love one another and be obedient to God the Father. So much fell into place that had been obscure and meaningless for me before.

Bible reading notes are a great way to meditate on God's word on a daily basis. I read mine every morning as I drink my coffee. It helps me focus for the coming day. Each page provides a short Bible passage, explained and applied with a suggested daily prayer or meditation.

If you haven't already, I'd really like to encourage you to sign up for the next Bible reading notes when I order them next month.

**The Word of God tells us God requires us to be obedient.** We hear in 2 Timothy 3.16 'All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.' We need God's guidance to help us keep his commandments, and a regular pattern of prayer and reading God's word can ground us in doing this.

There are so many stumbling blocks and difficulties in this life, we cannot possibly navigate the journey of life on our own, in our own strength. Let's be encouraged by the psalmist in Psalm 119.11 who says 'I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you.'

- **So the word of God can help us to stay spiritually strong** and courageous in times of testing and difficulties.

Paul writes to the Ephesians about protection against spiritual attack and putting on armour - the belt of truth; the armour of righteousness; shoes of peace that come from knowing the Good News; the helmet of salvation; and to take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

(Ephesians 6.17) Interestingly in this list of armour the sword is the only weapon of **offense**. (Matthew 4.4) In Matthew's account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, we see Jesus using his knowledge of Scripture as a sword to resist the devil. He cites Scripture three times to combat the temptations thrown at him, and I think this response "It is written, One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God," is the most revealing about how the word of God can feed and protect us.

### **So what should be our response to God's Word?**

Let's aim to be reading the Scriptures every day! Reading the Bible is not an optional extra that we should do if we can find the time but an essential part of our Christian life and journey. The whole Bible sheds light for us on our lives and the path we should take.

Don't let your Bible just sit on the shelf gathering dust! Read it, pray about it, listen to what God might be saying to you, and allow it to change you.

Let's take note of the following wise words of Bernard of Clairvaux, written in the 12<sup>th</sup> century:

"Think of the word of God in the way you think of your food. When bread is kept in a bin, a thief can steal it or a mouse can find its way in and nibble it. Eventually, of course, it goes stale. In the same way, treasure the word of God because those who keep it are blessed. Feed on it, digest it, allow its goodness to pass into your body so that your affections and whole behaviour is nourished and transformed. Do not forget to eat your bread and your heart will not wither. Fill your soul with God's richness and strength."

Read your Bible if you wish to grow in your faith. Our faith grows as God reveals himself, to us, in the person of Jesus, and in the Bible's testimony.

As Paul said in Romans 10.7 'Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.'

Read your Bible if you want to obey God – God's word should govern our standards of thought and behaviour, no matter what the world is saying. We have the choice to respond according to God's word in every circumstance of life.

Nurture your relationship with God through dedicating time with him and allowing his presence in your life.

Finally, let us thank God for the precious gift of his word and the freedom which we have to read our bibles without threat of persecution. We have easier access to God's word than ever before. Let us remember the people throughout the world for whom our free access to the Bible would be a miracle.

**Let us pray...**

On this Bible Sunday, may we all keep our eyes and ears open to receive God's invitation through his word and respond to his message. We thank you heavenly Father that every word you have spoken is true and that the living Word, Jesus, is the living truth. Amen.