

Date: January 29, 2023

Series: *This is...*

Title: *...the Bible*

Text: 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20-21

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I want to read three passages of Scripture this morning---and they are on the screen and your apps. Follow along as I read---and let's all stand in respect for God's Word.

2 Timothy 3:15-17

**15 – From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.**

**16 - All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,**

**17 – so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

Hebrews 4:12

**12 – For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow—it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.**

2 Peter 1:20-21

**20 – Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.**

**21 – For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

In my Chronological Bible Reading Group we are currently reading the book of Job. One thing Job's story teaches us is that SUFFERING is an unavoidable part of life in this fallen world of ours. All people who live on this planet---good and bad---endure painful, difficult times. As Jesus said, **"The rain falls on the just and the unjust."** (Matthew 5:45)

With that in mind, let me ask you a question.

When times of suffering come your way---when you go through the inevitable trials and tribulations of life---what do you lean on for strength?

Let me get more specific.

Let's say the trial you are facing concerns a decision you must make at work---a decision that deals with questionable ethics. You don't want to do the wrong thing but you're not sure what the right thing is. You know what everyone else does, but you are not sure if that is what you should do. You need something to help you decide exactly which action to take, something to help you discern which course would be right and which would be wrong. You need an ethical compass to help you find your way. If something like this were to happen, where would you turn for guidance?

Let me give you another scenario.

You've worked very hard to prepare yourself for your career and you have done very well in it. But thanks to the ever-changing job market you discover that position is to be eliminated. Your expertise is in fact now obsolete. It appears that within a few months, you may lose everything.

The awful reality of financial bankruptcy suddenly looms like a massive shadow. Where do you turn? How do you stay on your feet?

One more: The phone rings in the middle of the night. It's a police officer. He tries to be tactful but tells you that someone you love very much has been in a horrible automobile accident. The victim---your loved one---suffered a tragic

death. The officer asks you to come down and identify the body. What would you do in the hours that follow? How would you handle the grief? What would give you the courage to accept this and go on?

Of course, as Christians we know that in times of suffering like this we would turn to God. Our experience has shown us that as Psalm 46 says, ***“He is an ever-present help in times of trouble.”*** But we know this because we have read this and other wonderful truths like it in God’s Word---His BOOK---the Bible. Our own struggles with trials and tribulations have taught us that this Book of books is one of God’s most precious gifts to us. It is an absolutely trustworthy and reliable handbook for life. In its pages God has given us specific guidance that helps us know what to do when we face ethical decisions. It also gives us the comfort and strength we need when we endure times of hardship. It even tells us how to prepare ourselves to face death itself. We know by experience that the Bible directs us to the only One Who can give us the shelter we need as we go through life’s storms. So, like the Apostle Peter we would say, ***“Lord to Whom [else] shall we go? [Only] You have the WORDS of life.”*** (John 6:68)

In short, we know this book---the BIBLE---GOD’S WORD---is our source of authority in life. Well---why? Why do we give the Bible this absolute authority?

**(1) It is INSPIRED.**

In other words—we teach and preach and sing the words of this book—because we know they are not man’s words. This knowledge is why I ask you to stand whenever we read our text for the day. It’s why after I read I say: *“This is the Word of the LORD!”* And what do you say? *“Thanks be to God!”*

Okay---how do we know this book is inspired?

One proof is its incredible UNITY.

Okay---test time. How many books are there in the Bible? Right 66!

Okay---how many authors did God inspire to write those 66 books? How many say 25---do I hear 30---40---45? Those of you in the last group of bidders are correct---45!

The REALLY interesting thing is these 45 people could not be more different. God used kings, poets, prophets, a physician, farmers, shepherds, and a fisherman. As I have often said, in His amazing grace, God even inspired a TAX COLLECTOR to put His words on paper. I mean, the variety in this group is truly amazing.

Here’s another question. How long did it take these 45 guys to write those 66 books? Back to the bidding. How long? Let’s start at 100---500---1000---1500! SOLD! Right---it took 15 centuries---which means most of these guys did not know each other.

Okay enough bidding. These men wrote their books in all kinds of places---from Babylon to Rome---one even wrote while exiled on an island. NONE of them knew that what they were writing would be combined into a single book. Yet, when put together, their writings tell a complete story—and that’s basically what this book is—the story of our Creator--and His plan to restore His sinful, rebellious creation—and bring it—US—back to Himself.

Think of it this way. 45 different people who live their lives across the millennia are each told to prepare one piece of a map. They work independent of each other. And then 1500 years later all the pieces are gathered—and miraculously, not only do they all fit together perfectly—they also form an ABSOLUTELY accurate map. Each piece has a road on it---and when put together the roads line up. Not even the programmers of GOOGLE maps could do that!

The only reasonable explanation for the amazing unity of the end product is the fact that these 66 books have a common Author —GOD through His Holy Spirit. He inspired the writing of every word in all those places over all those centuries.

Now—as you know, committee meetings are not my favorite things—and don’t misunderstand me. It’s not because they aren’t an important part of what we do as a church. They certainly are. In fact, right now we need a lot of people to volunteer to serve on committees here at Redland. If we don’t find these volunteers---important work for the Kingdom of God won’t get done. So, committees are important. And—my dislike of committee meetings is not because I don’t enjoy your company—I certainly do.

It’s just that it can be very difficult to get a group of people to agree about anything—especially if there is any degree of variety in the committee’s make-up. Wordsmithing in a committee—well it can be agonizing. And I’m not alone in my feelings about committees. Lots of people feel that way—which is why there are so many negative sayings about committees.

Here are a few examples.

- John Chervokas put it this way: *“It’s always a constant consolation to me to realize that although God created man and woman---there is no recorded testimony that He created committees. For this alone we worship Him.”*
- D.L. Moody said, *“If there had been a committee appointed, Noah’s ark would never have been built.”*

And---I don’t know who said this but it makes me chuckle:

- *“Football is a mistake. It combines two of the worst things about American life: violence punctuated by committee meetings.”*

The point is---committees often have a hard job DOING their job. It took our by-law’s revision committee nearly two years of meetings to finish. I share all this to point out that the fact that this committee of 45 vastly different people, writing across 15 centuries, could compose a book like the Bible---a book that tells a complete story—the story---the plan---the MAP God laid out to show us how He planned to get us back to Him---is itself proof that it is inspired. No committee could do that unless God was running the meeting!

I like how D. L. Moody put it. He said, *“I know the Bible is inspired because it inspires me.”*

And that leads to the greatest proof of its inspiration. You see, if you are a Christian, the same Holy Spirit Who inspired each of those 66 men to write each and every word—will guide you in your understanding of each and every word.

Like you, I have favorite authors: Chip Ingram, Joseph Stowell, Lee Strobel, Philip Yancey, Russell Moore. At times I have been blessed to hear them speak---and when they were finished, I’ve stood in long lines to talk about their latest book and get them to autograph it. Well, whoever your favorite author is, think how wonderful it would be NOT to have to go to a conference and wait in line to ask him a question about his books. Gary, imagine having Bernard Cornwell on speed dial so that you just push a button and say, *“Hey Bernard—can you tell me the advantages of a rifle over a musket in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries? And while I have you---WHEN is your next Sharpe novel coming out!!!?”*

Well, if you are a Christian, in a very real sense you DO have the Author of the Bible on speed dial---but you don’t even have to push a button. You see when you asked Jesus to forgive you of your sin and come into your life and take over---He did. His Spirit---lives inside you 24-7. This is what our Lord was saying in John 16:13, ***“When the Holy Spirit comes, He will guide you into all truth.”*** He did come on Pentecost Sunday---and since then every person who asked Jesus to come in---has experienced their own Pentecost.

This is one reason we refer to the Bible as a LIVING WORD—because we have the Spirit of our Living Lord—in us, guiding us as we read it---telling us how to apply its principles and precepts to our daily lives.

Here’s a second reason we give the Bible authority in our lives.

## **(2) It is TRUSTWORTHY.**

And—let’s face it, we NEED truth we can trust. We need something we can rely on because so many things in this fallen world are NOT trustworthy.

- Lately we've learned we can't trust bitcoin.
- Over the years, we've learned you can't always trust politicians. I mean, the sad truth is, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* is a story that has happened over and over again in the halls of our government.
- Anyone who has ever bought a car---new or used---should know you can't trust car salesmen. They act nice---and may BE nice---but their goal is to get as much of your money as they can.
- You can't trust Facebook or Instagram profiles.
- We can't trust fortune cookies or lottery cards.

The sad fact is truly trustworthy things are rare. Think of it.

- We can't trust our own feelings because they change too easily.
- We can't trust traditions because we forget their purpose too easily.
- We can't trust our intellect—because we forget everything too easily. Plus, the more we know—the more we know we don't know.
- We can't trust the news---no matter what network we watch.
- And there are tons of PODCASTS you cannot trust.

So, we are in desperate NEED for truth we can trust—UNCHANGING truth that we can build our lives on—and that's one reason God gave us His inspired Word. As it says in Psalm 19:7, ***"The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple."*** And as 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 7:28 says, ***"You are God—and Your Words are Truth."***

Anyone who has built their lives on God's Word knows that as Jesus put it, ***"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."*** (Luke 6:47ff)

Decades ago, I went with our youth on my first *World Changers* mission trip. This is a ministry where hundreds of teens come to an impoverished part of the world---and are divided into crews---to do some sort of construction in Jesus' name. That year my crew was assigned the job of putting a new roof on the home of a needy family in South Carolina. Of course, I knew NOTHING about roofing---neither did most of the teens on our crew. But we had a CREW CHIEF who knew everything there was to know about roofing.

- He told us how to scrap the old shingles off---and how to see if any plywood needed replacing.
- He told us how to put on the tar paper and how and where to nail the shingles.

He used two tools to teach us how to put on that roof.

- A level---which shows you how to be exactly straight so the tar paper and shingles line up.
- And a chalk line device. We'd use the level, which had a yard stick on it to plot two parallel dots on either side of the roof.
- Then we'd take this chalk deal that had string inside soaked in powder and we'd stretch the string between the two dots and pop it---leaving a straight blue line for us to follow.

When we were done---the roof looked perfect---just like a job done by a pro.

Well, God's Word is our *"level and chalk line"* in life. It is absolutely trustworthy unchanging truth that we can rely on.

Here's something else about the Bible that gives it authority.

### **(3) It is BELIEVABLE.**

Experience has shown that our faith in this book is well-placed. I say this for three basic reasons.

- First, contrary to what many have said over the years, the Bible has turned out to be good HISTORY.**

To show you what I mean, let me take you through a little exercise. I'll give you a few brief examples of historical statements and you tell me if they are good or bad history.

- *World War I was a bitter four-year conflict fought from 1890 to 1894.*

Good history or bad history? Right—this statement is bad history! Why? What's wrong? Right! The DATES! World War I was fought between 1914 and 1918. Good history pays attention to DATES and gets them right. Bad history doesn't.

Here's another one:

- *World War II was a bloody conflict between Allied and Axis forces fought on the battlefields of Mexico from 1939 to 1945.*

Now, are the DATES right? Yes. What's wrong? Right! The PLACE. The geography is wrong.

WW II was not fought in Mexico, but rather in Europe, the South Pacific, and a few other places. Good history gets GEOGRAPHY right. It pays attention to it.

Here's another:

- *The late Margaret Thatcher, premier of the Soviet Union, will always be remembered as the leader who engineered the unraveling of the USSR.*

Okay "class" why is this third statement bad history? Right! It's the wrong PERSON. It was Gorbachev, not Thatcher and good history gets the PEOPLE right.

Okay, here is one more:

- *Michael Jordan played basketball for over a decade for the Chicago Bulls in the '80s and '90s, but his play was rather lackluster.*

Now, are the DATES right? Yes. Is the PLACE right? Yes. You know the PERSON is right. Well, what is wrong? Of course, THE ESSENCE OF THE STATEMENT is wrong. The story line is wrong.

Michael didn't lack luster when he played for the Bulls. I wish I had just a fraction of his luster! Maybe then I could sell my own shoes---Air Adams?

Well, bad history, among other descriptions, could be defined as any account of an actual event that plays loose with DATES, PLACES, PEOPLE or STORYLINES. And unfortunately, there is a lot of bad history out there. For example, every once in a while, a new book will pop up and claim that there was no Holocaust in World War II, that the whole thing was made up for propaganda purposes---and when they do people cry out that the history in this book is flawed because we know the dates. We know the people. We know names of murderers and those who were murdered. We know where it happened and we know the storyline.

I am re-watching *Band of Brothers* while I run on my treadmill these days---and I think the producers did a GREAT job in showing the SHOCK on the face of that first soldier from Easy Company---to come across Ohrdruf---one of many concentration camps run by the Nazis. It was more shocking than any of the brutality he'd seen since D-Day. He was dumbfounded and didn't know what to do so he turned around and RAN back to tell his commanding officer.

The Holocaust cannot be refuted because it is well-documented. We still have people alive today who survived those demonic camps. It's a horrible thing that happened---and we have GOOD history to prove it.

Well, when you study the Bible and you compare it to accepted history---you discover that the events surrounding the teachings of the Bible have all been VERY well established historically. In fact, today, there is wide documentation and corroboration and cross-checking that show the Bible to be not bad history, and not just good history---hear me on this---the Bible has been proven to be OUTSTANDING history. The Bible passes with flying colors when it comes to things like dates, geography, people, and the storylines that it references.

A prime example of this is found in the book of Acts. Even secular historians admit that Luke's history book is amazingly accurate when it comes to dates, geography, people, and actual historical events. And Acts is not alone in this. In fact, and I must confess a certain prideful pleasure in this but the truth is---over and over and over again information in the Bible that secular historians once disputed as fables or myths---has turned out to be absolutely true.

For example, for many years, secular scholars scoffed at the notion that Moses could have written the first five books of the Bible. Historians claimed that in the days of Moses, people were preliterate. They said, *"This is an obvious situation where the Bible is bad history."* Many years later, however, archaeological digs uncovered tablets, scrolls, and writing instruments that clearly show that a good portion of Moses' entire culture was literate---in fact, quite intelligent and sophisticated. Researchers discovered that mankind had been writing four hundred years before Moses even came on the scene. And remember, Moses was HIGHLY educated thanks to that Egyptian princess who rescued him from the Nile.

There was a time when historians said the names of the kings of Israel that the Bible lists were legend at best because there was no proof that these kings ever really lived---much less ruled.

But over the years as archaeologists have dug and dusted their finds, they have discovered concrete proof of the existence of every one of the forty-seven kings---in the exact places the Bible said they had reigned. It turned out to be good history after all!

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was once thought to be mythological, until evidence was uncovered that these cities were situated just as the Old Testament says. Archaeologist Clifford Wislow wrote that he found, *"...permanent evidence of the great conflagration that took place [in Sodom and Gomorrah] in the long distant past."*

Here's another one. The Bible makes about three dozen references to the Hittites and critics used to charge that there was no evidence that such people ever existed. But in recent years archaeologists digging in modern Turkey have discovered the records of this wicked and long-dead nation.

In his best-selling book, *The Bible As History* Werner Keller writes, *"In view of the overwhelming mass of authentic and well-attested evidence now available---as I thought of the skeptical criticism which from the eighteenth century onward would fain have demolished the Bible altogether, there kept hammering in my brain this once sentence: 'The Bible is right after all.'*

The indisputable fact is archeology has ALWAYS confirmed the historical accuracy of God's book. And, we don't have archaeological evidence like this for any other religious book from the ancient world.

Now, please understand my spirit in what I'm about to say. I'm not trying to demean or degrade people who follow the Mormon faith, but did you know that the Book of Mormon---which millions of well-intentioned people put their full faith and confidence in, fails the history test flat? In fact, when the Smithsonian Institute studied the Book of Mormon, they issued an official statement declaring it to be, *"devoid of any historical reliability whatsoever."* In other words, when the Book of Mormon mentions a river or mountain range that existed in a certain civilization---well, there is no record of that river or mountain or city or people group---not one shred of historical evidence that would tether it to reality, not one.

Well, that's not a concern with the Bible. The Bible is believable because passes the HISTORICITY test with flying colors.

**b. We've also found the Bible to believable because it contains good SCIENCE.**

Don't misunderstand me. The Bible is not primarily a book of science but whenever it addresses scientific issues it is absolutely accurate. For decades science and the Bible were thought to contradict each other. I remember my Old Testament professor in seminary talking about this, saying this was not true. He said, *"Truth does not contradict truth."* In other words, he taught us that if scientists, using their God-given brains, discovered something to be true, it would not contradict God's Word---because as I said a few minutes ago, this written word is truth.

Today's research scientists are discovering my seminary prof was correct. Those who are genuinely searching for truth are realizing that God's Word is truth, even scientific truth. For example, the majority of scientists are finally admitting that their research shows that an outside power of some kind was necessary to kick-start the forming of this universe. They are finally admitting that the old equation: space + time + chance = the possibility of the start of the universe is flawed---it doesn't add up! They are admitting that you'd have to wait a long, long time—forever actually—for nothing plus nothing plus nothing to produce anything. Even some committed atheistic scientists are saying that at some point maybe, just maybe, something or Someone ignited the activity that resulted in the universe taking form. The creation account in Genesis is no longer considered as preposterous as it once was. Here's another reason we give the Bible the authority it deserves.

#### **(4) It is POWERFUL.**

When people apply the teachings of the Bible to their lives, they change. They are transformed into better people, Godly people. It's amazing to behold!

This week I read that the prisons in the Canadian province of Quebec enforce a ban on smoking. With no cigarettes, the inmates have resorted to creative solutions. In place of tobacco, some use a mixture of tea leaves and residue from the nicotine gum provided to help smokers kick the addiction. The concoction is rolled up in a page from the Bible. The Bible is used because those pages reportedly burn slower than normal paper. An inmate named Robert told reporters, *"I smoked Matthew. I smoked Mark. I smoked Luke. When I got to John, I read about how God loves me. Now I don't smoke, because now I am a Christian."* Robert learned that the secret of this book's power is that fact that it tells us how to come to know God personally---how to have Him actually walk through life with us much as He did the first human beings. And nothing is more powerful than that!

In his book, *More Jesus, Less Religion*, Steve Arterburn writes:

*"Some time ago, I read about the work of a Wycliffe Bible translator in a remote village in Papua New Guinea. When the opening chapters of Genesis were first translated into the native language, the attitude toward women in the tribe changed overnight. They had not realized or understood that the woman had been specially formed out of the side of the man. Without even hearing this concept developed, these people immediately grasped the ideas of equality between the sexes and began adjusting their behavior. The people heard. They believed. They obeyed. They changed. Just like that. That change doesn't mean everyone in the tribe immediately came to faith in Christ, however. While they immediately recognized the respect God has for both men and women, the members of this tribe had their own hard-to-abandon gods and superstitions. One of their practices was to spit on the wounds of the sick. Their medicine men were known as the spitters, and they did not want someone like Jesus to take away their status in the village. However, the attitude changed as more of the Bible was translated into the tribe's dialect. When translators read the passage where Jesus cured a blind man in a most unusual way, the medicine men pricked up their ears.*

*The Master spit on the ground, made a paste of mud, put it on the man's eyelids, told him to wash it off—and the man was healed. When these tribesmen heard this story in their own language, they saw that Jesus was not against them, but for them. They found one of their own, a Savior who was also a spitter! And they came to the Lord because of this connection."*

If I had to summarize my belief about the nature of this Book of books, I would say it is basically an invitation from God to us, an invitation from Creator to Creation. In these pages is God's written offer to know Him personally, to walk with Him daily. And, like all invitations God's Word calls for our response. This morning you may need to respond by bowing your head silently and committing to center your life around the teachings of the Bible. You may want to come forward and join this church pledging to help us as we obey God's Word and work to fulfill the great commission it contains. Or you may want to walk forward and publicly accept God's invitation to a personal relationship, deciding to become a Christian and follow Jesus as Savior and Lord.