

The Park Road Pulpit

Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church

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The B-I-B-L-E - Yes, That's the Book for Me
Psalm 119.97-105
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In the CDC Chapel each week, just before we tell the Bible story for the day, we line up 5 children - each holding a large black letter - spelling the word Bible. For some of the children, it has become the first word they know how to “read.” I think that’s exciting. And before we tell the Bible story we sing the classic song “The B-I-B-L-E.” When we started the CDC Chapel several years ago, the staff discussed the format for each service. Repetition is important for little ones, you know. So the order and the songs remain the same each week, and what better song to sing to introduce the Bible story for the day than “The B-I-B-L-E?” But we got a little stuck on the original words. You know how it used to go: “The B-I-B-L-E, yes that’s the book for me. I stand alone on the word of God. The B-I-B-L-E.” Catchy tune, but I’m not really sure how true it is. Do we really stand alone on the word of God? Aren’t there other revelations, other sources of Truth, other places – in addition to the Bible – that we look to to know/understand who God is and how God works? Would we not agree that it is not the Bible, alone, that informs us about God?

Don’t hear me discounting the importance of the Bible. I am not. I believe in the Bible. I read the Bible. I love the Bible. I teach the Bible to my children and to yours. I start every single sermon I’ve ever preached with the Bible. The Bible is Truth. But for many years, the Bible has been used as a weapon more than as a gift - especially in the Baptist world. We are in a series on Baptist distinctives. I think this is an interesting topic

in a Baptist church that consists of so many non-Baptists. Just for fun, by a show of hands, how many people in the room were raised Baptist? (Notice my hand did not go up!) I would say that this particular Baptist church is Baptist to the core - because of the freedoms that we enjoy. Last week Russ spoke about “Individual Freedom.” Today I want to talk about “Bible Freedom.” From the beginning, “Baptists have mostly opposed sources of authority outside the Bible. Early Baptist leaders challenged the authority of popes and councils as Protestants against Catholic.” (pamphlet) In their fierce fight for individual freedom, Baptists rested on the authority of Scripture (as opposed to the authority of the pope or the bishop or the priest). You may have seen or heard this before – it’s bumper sticker theology at its finest: *The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it.* And the old children’s song about the Bible supports this mentality as well. This three sentence statement has become the mantra of many Baptists. But what is interesting is that “the earliest Baptist confessions of faith began with God; later confessions tended to begin with the Bible . . . in response to all other authorities, Baptists throughout their history have affirmed the Lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture. They have regarded these twin affirmations as complementary, not contradictory. Jesus Christ is Lord. Scripture is authoritative for faith and practice. [Jesus said in John’s gospel (John 5.39)], “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf.” Baptists and the Bible simply go hand-in-hand.

But what is it that Baptists have believed about the Bible for all of these years? Unfortunately the Baptists that we hear so much about in the news have stopped talking about God first and turned to the Bible as their number one topic of conversation. And they have added words like “inerrant” and “infallible.” They have taken this book and

tried to make it a science book or a history book. They have beat people down with the Good Book. They've used this Good Book to exclude instead of include. And the Bible has become for Baptists as a source of conflict and chaos and, and often, meanness.

To remain on the number one best seller list year after year after year, the Bible remains very illusive to us. We don't really know what it says, and yet it is foundational in our faith. While I will admit that I do not stand, **alone**, on the Word of God, I do stand firmly upon in, and better than that, it fills me up. That's why I think it's important that we teach it to our children – that they know it deep within. If I've heard it once I've heard it 1000 times (I've probably even said it myself a time or two or 100): Well, somewhere in the Bible it says . . . And whatever it says, that we don't know where it says it, is usually something that we want or need the Bible to say. I hate it when people know that I am a minister and mistake me for a walking concordance. Not too long ago, at the baseball field, another mother came up to me and said, "You are a minister. Tell me where it says in the Bible "God helps those who help themselves." I responded, "Well, I'm not familiar with that verse, and I'm pretty sure the Bible doesn't say it." She was horrified. "Of course it says it. I know it says it. I needed it in my women's Bible study last night, but couldn't find it," she insisted. "I'll be glad to look it up for you - or you can 'Google' it on the internet yourself, but I don't think you are going to find it," I stood my ground. She just knew that Jesus had said that somewhere. What she needed was a reason not to help someone who wasn't working. What she needed was justification for her judgmental conviction that the poor were not her problem if they were poor by choice. And this pushed all my buttons, so I continued, calmly and pastorally of course, "When you think about it, given all that we know about Jesus, it just doesn't sound at all like

anything he would say, does it?" She didn't have a response for that. I felt better. We had both done the regrettable - used the Bible in a way that the Bible was never intended to be used – to proof-text or to belittle.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. The Bible shows us the way by telling us the stories of the people of God. By telling us about the first church and those early missionary journeys. But until you've had a Bible shaken in your face while being rebuked, I'm just not sure you've really lived. *Women keep silent in the church.* I've always wished it had been two men arguing in that church that needed Paul's reprimand. How different things in the Church would be if that had been the case. But my guess is that there were two women in the Church that needed to *keep silent*. But did Paul really mean that all women for all time should keep silent in the church. And if that's the case does that include Sunday School since Sunday School is never discussed in the Bible? It says it plain as day – women keep silent – that, and I shouldn't cut my hair or adorn myself with jewels. The Bible gives a lot of instruction about how to treat our slaves and how to prepare our food and how to make our clothes and how to properly stone folks who have broken the Law. But the day of my official Bible-waved-in-my-face rebuking in the basement of a church in Montana, I lashed back at that pastor that he couldn't tell me what God was doing in my life - I didn't care what the Bible said. And there it was again - we had both done the regrettable - used the Bible in a way that the Bible was never intended to be used – to rebuke, to shake in the face of a Child of God, to be the focus of argument.

One church historian has explained Baptists and the Bible this way: "Baptists, for the most part, have not shifted their views about the inspiration and authority of Scripture

during the past 150 years, but the challenges addressed have changed dramatically. Some new questions have appeared: Does Scripture authorize missionary societies, Sunday schools, and theological seminaries? Should musical instruments be used in worship, and should the Lord's Supper be observed every Sunday? Should communion be restricted to members of the local church only, and should wine and unleavened bread be required? Does Scripture condemn or approve slavery? Such questions frequently brought debate and fragmentation. Some forbade only what Scripture expressly forbade and others approved only what Scripture expressly approved. At times, Baptists accused one another of being unfaithful to biblical revelation, and the number of Baptist denomination multiplied [mostly over the interpretation of Scripture]. Frequently, debates have focused not only on what one should believe in the Bible but also on what one should believe about the Bible." (pamphlet)

I want to highly recommend a book to you concerning the Bible: The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart, by the esteemed Peter Gomes, minister of The Memorial Church at Harvard. (One of, if not the, best preacher I've ever heard.) In the preface of his book he says of why he wrote the book, "[it] is an argument in favor of taking the Bible seriously, and it is addressed in part at least to those who either trivialize it or idolize it, and who thereby miss its dynamic, living, and transforming quality. It is an argument addressed as well to those who are in search of spiritual and moral grounding in their chaotic lives, and who may have heard of the Bible but know little and want to know more. It is also an argument that condemns the lazy, simpleminded approach that many are tempted to take when considering the serious matter of Bible study and interpretation. Finally, it is also an invitation to enter into the Bible and to let it enter into

us, all of us, and most particularly into those who have been excluded from the faith of the Bible by the use of the Bible . . . This book began a very long time ago with the conviction that intelligent people seemed to know less and less about the Bible, and that religious people revered it and would defend it to the death but seldom read it with any industry or imagination. The fact that we preach regularly from the Bible to congregations that know so little about it means that we have a fundamental task of reeducation before we can relate the Bible to the world in which we live. This task is further complicated by the fact that the Bible has become an American cultural icon with enormous influence, both symbolic and substantial.” (page xi-xiii) “The Bible is not a book but a collection of books, in fact, a library of books. Sixty-six separate books have been collected from the writings of ancient Hebrews and early Christians, and by a rational editorial process have been brought together over a period of centuries to form the book we now know as the Bible.” (page 13) And that whole process I believe was rooted and grounded in God.

I hear people saying all the time – I don’t know the Bible/I want to study the Bible – but I’m afraid they don’t really mean that. The Bible is complex and overwhelming and it is creative and full – **IT IS NOT EASY**. If you read this book, you will find your story in it. You will meet God in it. You will disagree with it, and you will love it. It should provide as many questions as it does answers, and then we trust that our faith will find strength in both. It’s known informally as “The Good Book” – it is that for me.

So, the staff took the liberty – that good ‘ole Baptist freedom which is our best distinctive – and changed the words to the childhood Bible song. Every Wed at 10:00 in

the morning, this sanctuary is filled with the sound of young voices singing with joy – and their words speak Truth – better truth than the old song - “The B-I-B-L-E. Yes, that’s the book for me. As special book about the love of God. The B-I-B-L-E.” May it be so.