

Fil-Am Community Church
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SERMON 3: THE WORD

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” **John**

20:31

Some books are fiction, like *Tom Sawyer* or *Great Expectations* or *Gone with the Wind*. Other books are nonfiction, like *The Diary of Anne Frank* or *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. And some are best classified as fables and fantasies, like C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* or J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

Fact, fiction, fable ... but which of those is the Bible?

Some people believe it's fact; they believe **EVERYTHING** it says, even the supposedly “outrageous” stuff, like a prophet being swallowed by a large fish or a man walking on water. Others think it's fiction—or mostly so—a collection of stuff people made up over the years, the way Walt Disney made up Mickey Mouse. And a good many people think there's some truth in there, but it's in the form of fable or myth; it's not meant to be believed the way you believe a traffic report or a wedding announcement or your mom's food recipe.

So we're here to discuss: which is it? Fact, fiction, or fable?

We are in the midst of a series of studies called *GodQuest*, a multifaceted journey of discovery that we are sharing in our worship, in small groups, in the youth program, and in our individual lives as well.

The first thing I want to suggest to you based NOT on my primitive imagination but on careful research and thorough investigation is:

1. I can believe that the Bible was recorded faithfully.

There are three things that suggest—they cannot prove, but they do suggest—that the writings contained in the Bible were accurately recorded.

A. The claim to proximity

Now that's just a fancy way of saying that many of the biblical writers claimed to be eyewitnesses or to have talked to eyewitnesses.

You see, many ancient writings adhered only loosely to the facts of the events they reported. Some highly regarded authors of the ancient world, for example, report events that took place many years before they were born ... in a country they had never visited! And while their writing may be largely factual, historians admit that greater credibility must be granted to writers who were both geographically and chronologically close to the events they report.

The New Testament writers claimed:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim ..”—**1 John 1:1 (NIV)**

“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”—**2 Peter 1:16 (NIV)**

“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem ...” —**Acts 10:39 (NIV)**

And those are just a few of many.

But some people have said there was no way that Peter and Paul and others could have been the authors of the Bible books that bear their names because, they say, those books were written long after their lifetimes. But no less a scholar than Dr. John A. T. Robinson, lecturer at Trinity College, Cambridge, one of England's most distinguished scholars, accepted that view. But as “little more than a theological joke,” he says, he decided to investigate the arguments on the dating of biblical books, a field largely dormant since the turn of the century. And the results stunned him and caused him to conclude that the New Testament is the work of the apostles themselves or of contemporaries.

B. The invitation to investigation

The New Testament writers in particular not only said, “Look, we saw this” or “We heard that,” but they were also so confident as to say, in effect, “Check it out,” “Ask around,” and “You know it as well as I do!”

You see, A liar will insist on the truth of what he’s saying, but **only a fool** will invite you to investigate what he knows can be quickly proven false.

C. The scarcity of apparent contradictions

Now, I know many people believe that the Bible is just chock-full of errors and contradictions. And to be fair, there are *apparent* discrepancies. There are some passages in the Bible that make us scratch our heads. But that the writings of forty vastly different human beings—shepherds, soldiers, prophets, poets, kings, scholars, statesmen, musicians, masters, servants, tax collectors, and tent makers—could be assembled into one book yet retain such unity and such scarcity of apparent contradictions is one of the reasons to believe that the Bible was faithfully recorded.

But wait--there’s more. We’re just getting warmed up. Aside from that fact that the Bible was recorded faithfully,

2. I can be confident that the Bible was relayed accurately.

You see, even if the Bible was crystal clear when it was recorded, that was a long time ago! What we read today are printed copies based on ancient

handwritten copies of yet other copies of the original. So who's to say that a copier didn't omit stuff? What if things were changed? Is there reason to believe that the manuscripts available to us today are accurate transmissions of the originals?

The **GodQuest** book and group studies we're enjoying together go into much greater detail than we have time for right now, but let me just say that **no book or document of the ancient world can be as verified accurate as the Bible can.**

One of the most astounding proofs of this was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Research tells us this:

“The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947. Until that time, the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Scriptures dated to about AD 900, roughly thirteen hundred years after the last Old Testament prophet wrote. But the Dead Sea Scrolls were dated to about 125 BC. So the Dead Sea Scrolls were about a thousand years older than the manuscripts scholars and translators had been using up to that time. ... But get this: once the Dead Sea Scrolls were translated and compared with modern versions, the Hebrew Bible proved to be identical, word-for-word, in more than 95 percent of the text, and what differences they did find were mainly spelling variations. What that discovery did was to show that after a thousand years of copying, the text as it appeared in modern Bibles was almost exactly the same, letter for letter and mark for mark, as it had been three thousand years ago!”

So, we have every reason to believe that the Bible was recorded faithfully, and we may be supremely confident that it was relayed accurately.

So, I can believe that the Bible was recorded faithfully. I can also be confident that the Bible was relayed accurately. And finally,

3. I can be grateful that the Bible has been reinforced externally.

Any fair-minded person examining the reliability of an historical document will want to know if *other* historical material confirms or denies what that document says. In other words, is what the Bible says verified in other sources? And the answer is **YES**.

For example, the New Testament alone is so extensively quoted in the ancient manuscripts of nonbiblical authors that all twenty-seven books from Matthew through Revelation could be reconstructed virtually word for word from those sources.

Not only Christian but also non-Christian historians like the first-century Roman historian Tacitus and the Jewish historian Josephus confirm the substance of Scriptural accounts.

In addition, **archaeology has repeatedly confirmed the accuracy of the Bible**. Over and over again through the centuries, presumptive conclusions

about inaccuracies and contradictions in the Bible have been discredited when archaeology has confirmed the biblical account.

To choose just one example, Sir William Ramsay, a geographer and archaeologist, was a student in the German historical school of the mid-nineteenth century. As a result, he was firmly convinced that the book of Acts was a product of the mid-second century AD, long after the eyewitnesses were dead and gone. In his research to make a topographical study of Asia Minor, however, he was compelled to consider the writings of Luke and ended up completely reversing his beliefs about Acts due to the overwhelming evidence uncovered in his research.

This sort of thing has happened over and over through the years, to the point where Nelson Glueck, the renowned Jewish archaeologist and former president of Hebrew University in Cincinnati, wrote, *“It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.”*

So, there is every reason to believe that the Bible has been recorded faithfully, relayed accurately, and reinforced externally.

BUT folks, **NONE OF THAT MATTERS IF ...** it is not responded to appropriately, because the Bible was intended to prompt a response. That’s why John, one of Jesus’ earliest followers, explained his reason for writing

what has become our fourth Gospel, the fourth book of the New Testament. He said:

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. —John 20:31 (NIV)

The Bible is an ancient document; there's no question about that. The Bible is a textually accurate work, more so than any other book in history. The Bible is an historically reliable record. But ultimately none of that matters if it doesn't open a door to faith ... for you.

The question is, why should you put your faith in the Bible? The answer is found in **2 Tim. 3:16**:

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

Folks, this is the manual for living. It teaches you many things in life you don't know. It rebukes you or chastises you when you do something wrong. But it doesn't stop there. Because it corrects you, tells you how to do the right thing. And then, so that you can mature, it helps you to figure out right from wrong.

As the skit earlier tells us, the Bible is alive and active. It is not just a literary book that is meant to inform or entertain you. The Bible was given to us by God to transform us.

Let me show you a video clip about a one life that has been transformed by the Bible. What you're going to see is the trailer of a movie called Redemption. It tells the story of the founder of the notorious gang called "Crips" in LA.

Play Video: Redemption

Redemption is the story of Stanley "Tookey" Williams, who at the age of 13, formed a street gang called "Crips". He did that because he found out after moving from Louisiana to LA that he had to be the toughest, meanest person to survive. After forming the gang, he cleaned up his own streets and beat up the opposition. When the opposition started shooting, he killed them.

He spent many years in prison and there, while in death row, one old recluse prisoner introduced him to the Bible and he started to understand the Gospel. He forsook his gang past and embraced Christianity.

He was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize and started writing children's books to deliver teenagers from gangs. I wish I could say that he is now free and doing ministry somewhere. But such is not the case. He was denied clemency despite numerous appeals and was executed by lethal injection in 2005. The fact remains that Williams was transformed by God's Word and showed it by his writing children's books to warn them of the dangers of gangs. I'm sure he is now with Jesus in heaven.

Williams is just one of millions and millions of people whose lives have been transformed by the power of God's Word. And many of you who are sitting here can testify to what God has done in your life because you read his word and you trusted his word and you allowed his word to change you.

But, perhaps, some of you are still on the edge, not able to make a jump because of lingering doubts. Or you are still caught between belief and unbelief, faith and doubt.

Let me tell you one more story before I end this message. I think I shared this before but let me re-tell it because this illustrates perfectly why we can trust God's Word.

We all know who Billy Graham is. He is a great man of God. A really good man. He's now in his 90's I believe and he has lived a life of integrity. He is famously known for his integrity and his preaching prowess of course. When he was young, in his early 30's, a quite unknown evangelist at the time, he went to LA to conduct his first evangelistic rally. Two weeks before he was to start the campaign, an old friend of his, Chuck Templeton, visited him at his hotel. Chuck used to be his co-evangelist at Youth for Christ. In fact, he was more eloquent and articulate than Billy Graham. His star was rising but then, he went away for some time to enroll in Bible school. Unfortunately, it was a liberal Bible school.

On that day he met with Billy, he came to confront him about what he thought were inconsistencies in the Bible. Billy had no answers to the questions of his friend. When Chuck left, Billy walked up on a hill in the back of the hotel. He was confused and became terribly anxious because he wasn't sure he could still speak to thousands of people when he himself was now entertaining doubts about the Bible. But upon seeing a tree stump, he knelt before it and then opened his Bible and put it on top of the tree stump.

Then, he prayed, "Lord, I don't understand everything that's written on your Word and I don't have the answers to Chuck's questions. But, by faith, I trust your Word and I know that it's true." He went away leaving everything in God's hands. And you know what, God blessed his crusade in LA so much so that what was just one week originally turned to three months. He saw people coming to Jesus every night and he saw lives being transformed. There was the case of a foul-mouthed radio broadcaster, like Howard Stern, perhaps, who was converted and afterwards promoted Billy on the radio. It was that crusade that launched his career as an evangelist.

This morning, I have presented many things that hopefully has convinced you that the Bible is truly God's Word. That it is fact, not fiction. And to know and see that many lives are being transformed by the Bible is also fact, not fiction.

If you're here this morning and you're rejecting this book without reading it, **let me urge you to read just 2 percent of it—the whole Gospel of John, twenty-two chapters—before you dismiss it.** It's the fourth book of the New

Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—and if you can read that much without hearing the ring of truth, then at least you won't have made the mistake of reaching a conclusion without investigation.

If you haven't yet taken that step of faith, if you haven't called out to the God who, though His language is heavenly and His every word is eternal, condescended to express Himself within the crude limitations of human language, like a master architect stacking building blocks on the floor with a child so that YOU could know Him, His forgiveness, His love, His bright purpose for your life.

He came in the person of Jesus Christ so that he can offer you forgiveness. You see, the Bible says that all of us are sinners, we are condemned to die, doomed to hell for eternity, separated from God. But Jesus died for you and me to save us from our sins. Then, he rose again to declare that he has conquered sin and death forever. My friend, if you will believe that Jesus died for your sins and accept him in your heart as your Lord and Savior then you will receive the gift of eternal. The Bible says, *"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*

So, I invite you to trust God, trust his Word. Then, obey and follow Jesus. Let us sing as you ponder on these things that I have shared with you this morning.

Let me repeat my invitation. If you want to experience forgiveness of your sins and enjoy eternal life in heaven, accept Jesus in your heart. You can do that right now, if you choose, by **praying silently right where you're sitting** as I pray:

“God, here I am. Thank You for reaching out to me and giving me Your Word. I ask Your forgiveness and accept Your Son’s sacrifice in exchange for all the wrong things I’ve done. I turn my life over to your control and ask you to take charge from now on. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Now, if you’ve prayed that prayer, the Bible says you’re a totally new creation and a brand-new follower of Jesus Christ. I would welcome the opportunity to meet you and pray with you after this service.