

SOM Week 14 Overview

Readings

- Hebrews 1-6
- *Spiritual Leadership by J. Oswald Sanders* (Chapter 9-15, Pg 77-150)

Topical Teaching

Importance of the Word and Reliability of Scripture - Pastor Joel Salve

This morning the teaching portion is going to be more of a lecture than it would be a sermon, as the goal of this session is to give you information about scripture to bolster your confidence in it being the word of God.

- Think Apologetics. 1 Peter 3:15 “and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;”

So i’m going to try to break this teaching into two sections, Importance of the Word, and Reliability of Scripture.

- Both of these could be their own sessions but for the sake of time I’m gonna try to squeeze both of them in here.

Importance of the Word.

- Something you might have noticed as long as you have been attending this church, is that the goal whenever the doors are open is to teach/exposit the word of God. You will most likely hear “Open/turn in your bibles to...” and whether it is Sunday morning, Wednesday Night, Women’s studies, Men’s studies, youth group, the goal is the same. The teaching and exposition of the word of God.
 - Why is that? Why not talk about current events or politics, or time magazine or vogue. Why not take teachings from other cultures or religions that have some morality and talk about that? Why not talk about opinions or tell stories that have some wisdom in them?
 - Because none of those things can transform a person's life. None of those have the power to give faith, to cut deep, to take root, and to make one alive. Only the word of God can do that.
- We have the example of Jesus Christ again and again before us, that He constantly “taught the people” and we see Him on the road to Emmaus that He “Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scripture the things concerning himself”
 - We see Paul teaching at the school of Tyranus and then telling the Ephesian elders at Miletus, that he “kept back nothing that was profitable from them, but showed them and taught publicly from house to house, that he did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God.. and commends them to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance”
- Isaiah 55:10-11 ““For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed

to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.”

- Jeremiah 23:28-29 “The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What *is* the chaff to the wheat?” says the LORD. “*Is* not My word like a fire?” says the LORD, “And like a hammer *that* breaks the rock in pieces?”
- Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.”
- Psalm 119:9,11 “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word... Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.
- Psalm 119:105 “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path”
 - And I can go on and on bringing up scriptures to make the point that the word of God is powerful. The word of God accomplishes the purpose of God, it does not return void. It is a lamp and a light, and on and on.
 - But I like the parable that Jesus told in Luke 8:5-15.
 - The seed is the word of God. It takes root, and grows into something beautiful. Our responsibility? To simply sow the word of God and to be good soil to receive the word of God. Whether through conversations, our actions, our lifestyles, and constantly look for those opportunities to share the word.
 - Whenever I am in the sauna I am constantly looking for an opportunity to sow the word of God. I know they probably won't remember what I have to say, But His word does not return void and it will keep poking and prodding them.
- So what is the point I am trying to make as I say that the word of God is important? That the word of God is not just important, but it is the foundation stone on which you build your life.
- Jesus said in Matthew 7:24-25 ““Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: **25** and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.”
 - The word of God is what should shape your worldview and outlook, the word of God is how you know who God is and how He relates to people, the word of God is authoritative in every part of our life from our kitchen, to our jobs, to our fields, to our families.
 - The sad truth is that most professing Christians do not spend time with the word of God, it is not important enough to get up an hour earlier, or stay up an hour later.
 - There are more pressing and important things than simply reading from a prehistoric book that I don't understand. And if that is you, you are missing out on so many blessings that God has for you.

- We are going over mark 4 with the high school last night, and we came to the part in Mark 4:26-27 “and He said, the kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how.”
- Acts 20:32 “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”
 - Just an example of the word of God and how it grows without us knowing how. We don't understand the supernatural power and work that happens when we give ourselves to the word of God and how it works in our life supernaturally. It inspires faith(faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God), it washes us(washing of the water of the word), it gives us hope and encouragement.

Reliability of the bible

- As we move on into the next segment, you might be asking Joel, why do we have to go over this? I believe that the bible is the word of God. thats good! And we do that through faith, but i would argue that your faith need not be blind.
 - There are plenty of resources that give material evidence for our belief that the bible is the word of God, by the historicity, and validating the authenticity of its contents.
- I love talking to people about the bible and Jesus and my faith, and it usually ends up happening in the sauna, but even if this is not for you specifically, it might give you the tools you need in the conversations you will have to convince someone of the evidence of Jesus Christ
 - I remember talking to one guy, im not going to say his name. And he is an atheist who we moved to an agnostic. But he was going back and forth with me about the reliability of scripture and how its not historically reliable and that it is probably all made up.
 - To which I replied, you know all the apostles were persecuted and all but one died brutal deaths, and not one of them recanted. Yeah yeah but thats not good enough, if they came up with it they went down to their graves with it.
 - And then i said, okay, then how do you explain Paul the apostle, who was the biggest opponent of christianity, how did he become the apostle to make one of the biggest dents in mission work and spreading the gospel? What happened to him. How do you explain that. To which there was no answer
 - To that end, its good to have things to bring up when you are talking with people, being able to have the facts and and know the arguments that they will bring up, and be able to have a conversation and give a reason or answer for the hope that you have.

- That's where we get the word apologetics, from the Greek apologia, to give a formal reason, answer, or defense in a courtroom

So let's look at it for a couple minutes.

- Bible-byblos, la biblia, essentially means "the book or books"- split into two sections, the old testament and the new testament, 66 books written over 1600 years on three continents, by 40 different authors in 3 different languages.

Some of the arguments I hear are "the bible is not the same book, it has been changed over 2,000 years, it can't be trusted", "how do we know it is true and Jesus's disciples didn't make things up or change them" and on and on.

- So here are two questions we are going to try to answer this morning.
 - Is what we have the same thing that was written down 2,000 years ago?
 - And if it was, is it true?
 - If you don't know, I believe that answer is a resounding yes. Yes it is the same words and book that God inspired, and preserved for thousands of years. "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away."
- So how do we determine or find out if this is still authentic and the same thing that was written down thousands of years ago and if it was true?
- Scholars determine historicity (historical authenticity) through several historical tests.
 - Early testimony (all NT books were written before AD 100, most if not all were written before AD 70)
 - Eyewitness testimony (Peter, John, Paul, Luke)
 - Testimony from multiple independent eyewitness sources
 - Are the eyewitnesses trustworthy (they all were persecuted for their faith)
 - Corroborating evidence from archaeology or other writers
 - Critics used to say that Pontius Pilate was a fictional character made up to be a villain, until archeologists discovered a stone with the inscription "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judaea"
 - "Classical scholar and historian Colin Hemer chronicles Luke's accuracy in the book of Acts verse by verse. With painstaking detail, Hemer identifies 84 facts in the last 16 chapters of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research.
 - There have been at least thirty characters in the NT who have been confirmed as historical by archaeology or non-Christian sources
 - Enemy attestation- if an enemy or critic admits something happened, then it is almost certainly true
 1. Thallus (c. 52 CE)

Thallus was a non-Christian historian whose work is lost but was quoted by later writers. He is one of the earliest "hostile" witnesses.

- The Confirmation: He attempted to explain away the darkness that occurred during the crucifixion (recorded in the Gospels) as a natural solar eclipse.
- Historical Value: By trying to debunk the "miraculous" nature of the darkness, he unintentionally confirmed that the crucifixion actually happened and that a strange darkness was a known event people were talking about in the mid-1st century.

2. Mara Bar-Serapion (c. 73 CE)

A Stoic philosopher from Syria writing to his son. He wasn't a Christian and didn't seem to have a high opinion of the Jews of his time.

- The Confirmation: He asks, "*What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished.*"
- Historical Value: He confirms that Jesus was viewed as a "wise King" and that he was executed by the Jewish leadership shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

3. Cornelius Tacitus (c. 56–117 CE)

Tacitus was a Roman historian who absolutely loathed Christians, calling them "a class hated for their abominations" and their faith a "mischievous superstition."

- The Confirmation: In his *Annals*, he records that "Christus" (Christ) was executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius.
- Historical Value: This is "Gold Standard" enemy attestation. Tacitus had access to Roman records and had no reason to make up a founder for a group he despised. He confirms the name, the executioner, the timing, and the rapid spread of the movement from Judea to Rome.

4. Pliny the Younger (c. 112 CE)

A Roman governor in Bithynia (modern Turkey) who was actually executing Christians for refusing to worship the Emperor. He wrote to Emperor Trajan asking for advice.

- The Confirmation: He notes that Christians met on a fixed day before dawn and "sang responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god."
- Historical Value: This confirms that the earliest Christians (within 80 years of Jesus) were already worshipping Jesus as divine, rather than that belief developing centuries later as some skeptics suggest.

5. Lucian of Samosata (c. 125–180 CE)

A Greek satirist who mocked Christians for being gullible.

- The Confirmation: He called Jesus "the man who was crucified in Palestine" because he introduced "this new cult into the world."
- Historical Value: Even in his mockery, he reinforces the historical reality of the crucifixion and the central role Jesus played in starting the faith.

- Testimony contain details that are embarrassing to the authors

I just did a quick search in gemini, is the authenticity of old testament widely accepted?

- Gemini's response was
 - If by "authentic" you mean "Are the words we read today the same as they were thousands of years ago?", the answer is a resounding yes.
 - The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 was a pivotal moment. These manuscripts date from roughly 250 BCE to 100 CE. When compared to the Masoretic Text (the traditional Hebrew text finalized around 1000 CE), the consistency was remarkable. This proved that the transmission of the text by scribes over a millennium was incredibly accurate."

- I know that most of us have probably never heard of the masoretic text, and while we might have heard of the dead sea scrolls, we might not understand the significance.

Masoretic texts

- Between the 7th and 10th century AD. a group of jews took it upon themselves to preserve the ancient Hebrew bible. Their fear was as the jewish community was scattered across the globe, that the oral tradition of how to pronounce the words would be lost or changed.
 - So they left the consonants and added vowels in the form of dashes and dots above and below and inside the letters.
- An example is the word Salt. In the Hebrew text it would be written out SLT. The masorenes added an "A" in the form of a dash or dot, so that a thousand years later we would know that the word was salt not silt or slot.
- What is incredible is the discovery of the dead sea scrolls
 - If you have a KJV, NKJV, ESV, NIV, or NASB, the old testament was primarily translated from the leningrad codex, which is the oldest complete manuscript of the hebrew bible, a copy of the masoretic text
- So at the very least your old testament is accurate to the beginning of the 11th century but it gets even better than that.
 - Before the discovery of the dead sea scrolls, critics argued that it was impossible to copy a massive library of books for a 1000 years without error
 - That the masorettes(the jewish scribes who wrote the masoretic texts) intentionally revised the old testament, they added their own changes
 - And other arguments kept coming up

Dead sea scrolls

- In 1947, a Bedouin shepherd boy was looking for a lost goat near the northwest shore of the Dead Sea (at a site called Qumran). He threw a rock into a cave, heard the sound of breaking pottery, and climbed in to find several clay jars containing ancient leather scrolls.
- Over the next decade, archaeologists and Bedouins found a total of 11 caves containing roughly 900 manuscripts and tens of thousands of fragments.

The scrolls date from roughly 3rd century BCE to 1st century CE. They are usually divided into three categories:

- Biblical Manuscripts (approx. 40%): Fragments of every book in the Hebrew Bible—except for the Book of Esther. The most famous is the *Great Isaiah Scroll*, which is nearly 24 feet long and contains almost the entire book of Isaiah.
- Apocryphal Texts: Books like *Enoch*, *Jubilees*, and *Tobit* that were popular at the time but were ultimately not included in the finalized Hebrew Bible.
- Before 1947, the oldest Hebrew Bible we had was the Leningrad Codex (copy of masoretic text)(1008 CE). Skeptics often argued that over a thousand years of hand-copying, the text must have changed drastically—like a giant game of "Telephone."
- The Dead Sea Scrolls proved them wrong. When scholars compared the Isaiah scroll from 100 BCE to the Masoretic Isaiah from 1000 CE, they were virtually identical. The words had been preserved with stunning accuracy for a millennium.

- Scholars say that the old testament that we have after comparing the masoretic texts and the dead sea scrolls is between 95-99% accurate, with 5% being spelling and grammatical variations
- Gemini says “the old testament is arguably the most preserved piece of ancient literature in history. We have 99% certainty that the Hebrew bible we read today is the same as it was in the time of Jesus.”
 - Okay thats the old testament, what about the new testament?

When we speak of the New Testament documents, we are not talking about one writing, but about 27 writings. The New Testament documents are 27 different documents that were written on 27 different scrolls by nine different writers over a 20-50 year period.

- The problem is that we do not have the original written documents of the NT. we only have copies of original writings, called manuscripts. Does that stop us from knowing what the original said?
 - “Not at all. In fact, all significant literature from the ancient world is reconstructed into its original form by comparing the manuscripts that survive. To reconstruct the original, it helps to have a large number of manuscripts(copies) written not long after the original. More manuscripts and earlier manuscripts provide more trustworthy testimony and enable a more accurate reconstruction.”
 - How do the New Testament documents fare in this regard? Extremely well and far better than anything else from the ancient world. In fact, the NT documents have more manuscripts, earlier manuscripts, and more abundantly supported manuscripts than the best ten pieces of classical literature combined.
 - At last count there are nearly 5,800 hand written greek manuscripts of the NT. and some 20,000 manuscripts in other languages.
 - The next closest is homer with 1,800 manuscripts
- So what does that mean and why do I care. When scholars study these manuscripts over 25,000 of them, they are measuring textual integrity- the degree to which the copies we have match the original words by the author.
 - By this standard, the new testament is widely considered the most accurately preserved work of antiquity.
 - Most textual critics(scholars who study ancient handwriting) agree that the new testament is 99.5% textually pure
 - Which means if you compare the thousands of greek manuscripts they agree 99.5% of the text
 - What's the .5%? Well an example would be “we write so your joy may be complete, we write so that our joy may be complete”

Okay so both the old and new testament are highly accurate and reliable by historical standards, they are considered the most accurately preserved work in antiquity. Is it true? I understand that this is what was written down by the apostle, but did they fudge it?

- And as we close here's the simple answer, absolutely not. These guys died for what they wrote and for what they believed.

- But Joel, a lot of people die for a lot of things, sure but not if they know it's false. People die for things they believe is true, the apostles would have known for sure if Jesus had risen from the dead or not, because if he hadn't they were the ones who were perpetuating this lie, and one of them would have caved and renounced it.
 - But no one did. They died gruesome deaths proclaiming and testifying of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- 1 John 1:3 "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you,"
- 2 Peter 1:16 "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty."

Conclusion

- Ha i didnt even talk about how the bible is prophetic.
- Anyways, this was not exhaustive, There are other great things to go over like Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, Textus Receptus, the latin Vulgate, the greek septugiant and on and on, i'd encourage you all to study this out more on your own because it is good to show yourself approved and not believe anything I am saying, but you can go down fun rabbit holes about how we got our translations and which one you think is more accurate than the other and all of that.
 - What is my point after all of that information, this book that we have is not just like any other book, it has been inspired, written, and preserved by God for you and I. Its only right and fitting that we give ourselves to studying and proclaiming it because the word of God has the power to change a persons life