Is the Bible Really God's Word?

Selected Texts

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Introduction

This morning, my aim is to answer the following question: Is the Bible really God's Word? This is the first sermon in a new sermon series entitled, "Five Big Questions about the Bible." This morning's question is foundational to all the other questions in our new series. As we work through one question each week over the course of the next few weeks, my prayer is that God will use this study in a few different ways:

> First, if you are someone who is skeptical of or curious about the Bible, I am praying that God would use these messages to answer some of your questions about Christianity. However, for what it is worth, I also want to fully acknowledge that no one is saved by having all of their questions answered. We are not saved by having answers to our questions. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. For years, I had all the answers about theological questions, yet I did not love Christ. It was not until I was 17 years old that God opened my eyes to see and receive His grace in Jesus to me by the work of the Holy Spirit. So, if you are a skeptic that is hear today or watching this online, I want you to know that you are welcome here. We are glad that you are hear or tuning in. We are not mad at you. We love you and are praying for you. We want God to move in your life. I hope that these studies are helpful to you, and I welcome your feedback or questions or rebuttals. But please do not think that the essence of being a Christian is having a bunch of answers to controversial questions. The essence of the Christian life is knowing and love Christ, the One who came to save us.
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> The second way that I am praying that God will use this study is by equipping Christians with a deeper understanding and appreciation for God's Word. While I just said that the essence of Christianity is not "having a bunch of answers to controversial questions," knowing God through His Word is an indispensable aspect of our relationship with God. As we will see over the next few weeks, we come to know God more fully and deeply through His Word, which is vital for our relationship with Him. To value, to cherish our Bibles is to value and cherish God's very word to each of us. Thus, by learning more about the Bible, we are laying a foundation for a vibrant relationship with our God who loves us enough to communicate with us.
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> The final way that I am praying that God will use this study is by not only equipping Christians with a deeper understanding and appreciation for God's Word for themselves, but that as they are being equipped, they will grow in their confidence to talk about God's Word with others. So, for instance, you may have a friend or a family member, maybe a child, who is skeptical of the Bible, and they tend to ask you questions that you do not feel comfortable or confident enough to answer yourself, my hope is that through this series, God would equip you to have those conversation in a compelling and winsome manner that glorifies Him and does good to those with whom you are speaking. As I have already mentioned, answering questions does not save souls, but God does use our intellect to tear down objections that are raised against the truth of the gospel.

> You might say that you are being equipped to do "pre-evangelism," which is the preparatory work that sometimes takes place before we share the gospel with others. In this regard, learning how to answer questions that people have about the Christian faith (in this case, about the Bible), we are like a surgical assistant that is preparing a patient for surgery so that when the surgeon arrives, everything will be in place for the work. Except in our case, we are surgical assistants to the Great Physician who makes our preparatory work fruitful in His timing and by His power.
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> So, whether you are a skeptic, a Christian, or a Christian who is regularly speaking with people who question or reject your understanding of the Bible, I believe this message along with the series as a whole will be beneficial to you.

With that stated, we move back to our question: Is the Bible really God's Word? To answer this question, I believe we only have one real option. We have to identify an authoritative source that can answer our question. As I will present this morning, I believe that there is only one true source that can provide us with an answer, that source is Jesus of Nazareth. If, however, we are going to turn to Jesus as the source of our answer on our proposed question, we have to begin by asking another question: Can we trust what Jesus said about the Bible?

So, here is how we are going to proceed this morning. First, we are going to consider "The Testimony about Jesus," which will establish Jesus as a trustworthy source for discerning the Word of God. For the sake of making my presentation case this morning, I am not going to require you to trust everything that we can know about Jesus from Scripture. While I have no qualms about accepting everything that the Bible teaches about Jesus, since I recognize that some do not believe as I do, I'm simply asking for you to accept the testimonies of eyewitness who knew and experienced Jesus' ministry. As we will consider in a few moments, even some of the most skeptical professors (the type that you see on the History Channel around Easter) accept that some aspects of the Gospels are based on trustworthy accounts from the first century. Only the most radical and unserious person would suggest that Jesus didn't actually exist. There are multiple, non-Christian sources from the first century that speak of Jesus' existence, ministry, death, and claimed resurrection. After we have considered Jesus as a person who can be trusted, we will then briefly consider the claims of Jesus regarding the Bible as God's Word.

So, to recap: We will start with the testimony about Jesus then move to the claims of Jesus regarding the Bible as God's Word.

Exposition

I. The Testimony about Jesus

The gospels were based on the testimonies of eyewitnesses who participated in and experienced Jesus' ministry on earth.

Why is it significant that the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) were based on the testimonies of eyewitness who participating in and experienced Jesus' ministry on earth? Here is why: it means that gospels were written within living memory of the events that that testified to. The gospels are not documents written hundreds of years after the events that they speak about. Either the authors themselves or the sources that they drew upon were intimately aware of and involved in the ministry of Jesus. They lived through the ministry of Jesus. As the book of Acts describes the requirements for the apostle that would replace Judas, the person had to have "been with the disciples from the beginning" in order to be able to testify of what they saw and heard in and through Jesus' ministry (Acts 1:21-26).

To use an example from our own history here in Houston, many of the people watching this or listening to this sermon this morning lived through Hurricane Harvey, which made landfall in August 2017. You lived through the disaster. You remember working the shelter here at Copperfield Church. I know you do, because you've described it to me. And I trust your testimonies about it. You lived through it.

Now, you may be saying to yourself, but the testimonies from Hurricane Harvey are different than the testimonies in the gospels. But are they? Sure, we have pictures and videos to confirm the testimonies of survivors of Hurricane Harvey, but there was corroborative evidence in the first century as well. That is why the Gospels often identify people.

Think with me for a second. In the gospel of Mark, in at least two different instances, the author names, he identifies people in the story. In one case, it is Mark 5:21-43, where Mark tells us the story of how Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. Now, while you might not be able to go and speak with Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, don't you think that it was possible for people in the first century from that region to go and verify with Jairus the status of his daughter's life? Why does Mark mention Jairus by name? Matthew doesn't. Could it be that Mark, who likely wrote the earliest gospel account based upon Peter's testimony, could it be that he wanted to provide his readers with a way to support his claims?

Or what about Blind Bartimaeus, mentioned in Mark 10:46-52? Why does Mark mention Bartimaeus, a name that means, "Son of Timaeus?" Is it not partly so that those who questioned the truthfulness of Jesus' ministry could not go to Jericho and ask, "Did Jesus really heal the blind man who used to sit beside the roadside begging?" If you had lived in the first century and heard about Jesus through the gospel of Mark, you could have travelled to Jericho from Jerusalem and asked the people about the work that Jesus did in their midst. If Jesus did not truly raise Jairus' daughter and heal Bartimaeus, do you think people would have been willing to follow him at the risk of death or persecution?

At this point, you might say, "Yes, well, what about the claims of Jesus' resurrection?" That is the one that I really just cannot get over. Was there any verification for that miraculous work?" Well, if we set aside the fact that the gospels themselves are written by or sourced by individuals that met the resurrected Jesus, we can turn our attention to the apostle Paul's comments about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:6, where he tells us that Jesus appeared to "more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time." At this point, you may say, "Yea, but those people had a vested interest in keeping the testimony of Jesus alive. Why should we trust them?" Well, for one, the only thing that testifying to Jesus' resurrection got you for the first 300 years of Christianity was persecution. To confess Christ was to be ostracized by your community and persecuted by your government. There was nothing to gain in terms of a temporal security by telling a lie about Jesus. Also, again, these are eyewitnesses. They saw and experienced these things. It takes a lot of arrogance to dismiss without investigation the testimony of people who received their sight back after being blind for decades or to disregard the witness of a father who received his daughter back from the dead. To disregard such testimonies as "nonsense" takes a lot of arrogance and confidence in oneself.

Given the survival and growth of the church in a context of heavy persecution after Jesus and given the fact that the claims of Christianity could easily have been falsified if Jesus didn't actually rise from the dead, the most plausible explanation for the stories that are recounted in the gospels and the expansion of the church after Jesus is that Jesus truly lived, died, and rose again, appearing to hundreds of people before ascending to heaven. If someone were going to reject the testimonies of the first-century people, they would have to good, equally verifiable reasons. Yet such reasons do not exist. One might object at this point and say, "Well, the claim that someone rose from the dead seems like a reason to not trust these testimonies from the first-century. That type of thing just doesn't happen."

To this I would say, "You know you are right that this sort of thing just doesn't happen. It is completely contrary to our everyday experiences. But if it did happen, the person that it happened to would probably be worth my attention, right? And if hundreds of people claimed that it happened at the threat of loss of life and limb, maybe it would be something I should not immediately rule out. Maybe I should investigate such a claim. Maybe instead of assuming that because I didn't see it happen, it must not have happened, I consider what it would mean if all of those eyewitness testimonies were true. Maybe it is not that I don't believe that it could be true but rather I don't want it to be true because if it's true, everything in my life will have to change."

For 2000 years, people have failed over and over again to present evidence that proves that Jesus did not truly live, die, and rise again. We have no good reasons for disregarding these eyewitness testimonies about Jesus. Not wanting it to be true is not a good reason. Refusing to at least consider and trust eyewitness accounts is a disastrous and untenable way to live in this world.

Philosopher Paul Ricouer made this exact point regarding testimonies and memories in the context of human communities. He wrote, "First, trust the word of others, then doubt if there are good reasons for doing so." I believe this is a good and wise rule to govern our investigation into whether or not Jesus is a trustworthy source in answering our question: Is the Bible really God's Word? Unless a good reason is offered for not trusting what the eyewitness accounts of the gospels tell us about Jesus, we should trust what they say.

Having, thus, established the trustworthiness of Jesus based upon the eyewitness testimonies of dozens of first-century people, we can now move to consider the claims of Jesus, specifically as they relate to the Bible as God's Word.

II. The <u>Claims</u> of <u>Jesus</u>

I believe there are two major points to be made about Jesus' claims regarding the Bible as God's Word.

Jesus <u>affirmed</u> the Old Testament as God's Word.

We see Jesus affirming the Old Testament as God's Word in at least three ways:

Jesus treated the OT as true.

I could give example after example of Jesus' treating the Old Testament as true, but for the sake of time, I will simply list four people who Jesus mentioned in His teaching, which demonstrates that He understood them to be historical people: Abel (Luke 11:51), Abraham (John 8:56); Moses (Matthew 8:4); and Jonah (Matthew 12:39-41). In each case, Jesus assumes that these are historical people to whom the Old Testament speaks truthfully.

The second way that Jesus affirmed the Old Testament as God's Word is this that *Jesus appealed to the OT as authoritative*.

When Jesus had conflict with the Pharisees and Scribes (Matthew 23:2, 3; John 5:39-47) and the Sadducees (Matthew 22:31, 32), he appeals to the Old Testament. Such an appeal demonstrates that Jesus held that the Old Testament was not only true but also authoritative.

Finally, *Jesus regarded the OT as inspired (God-Breathed).*

To speak of the Old Testament as "inspired" is to speak of it as originating with God Himself. The language of "inspired" can be misleading, given that we sometimes use it to describe an artistic impulse, like "the sunset inspired my painting," but that is not what I have in mind here. To speak of "inspiration" is to speak of Scripture as being "breathed out by God." Scripture has its origin in God himself. Jesus taught this. We can see this in passages like Matthew 19:4-5, which quotes from Genesis 2:24. In Matthew 19:4-5, Jesus attributes the words of the author of Genesis to "the Creator." The intention here is not to undermine the role that Moses played but rather to show that it is possible to speak both of "Scripture speaking" and "God speaking" in a way that is synonymous. As New Testament scholar, John Wenham put it, "What Scripture says is the Word of God – God is its author."

Thus, Jesus affirmed that Old Testament as God's Word. But what about the New Testament? Here is the second major point to be made under the heading of the **Claims of Jesus**:

Jesus <u>authorized</u> the New Testament as God's Word.

Obviously, Jesus does not quote from the New Testament (it was not written yet), but He does authorize is as God's Word in at least three ways.

First, *Jesus appointed apostles as recognized teachers.* We see this is in passages like John 20:21 and Matthew 28:18-20. His apostles would be responsible for passing on to others what they had received from Him as they make disciples of people all over the world. As the New Covenant was established through Jesus' work, just as the Old Covenant had written documents associated with it (the Old Testament), so also, the New Covenant would have written documents associated with it, which leads me to the second point.

Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to teach the truth. The truth of the gospel would be preserved and advanced by the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the apostles. We see this spoken of in passages like Matthew 10:19-20 and John 16:12-13. There was an expectation that "there was more to be said" after Jesus ascended and sent the Holy Spirit from the Father. The Holy Spirit would make known what Jesus intended.

Lastly, the apostles understood their ministry as advancing the teaching of Jesus as God's Word. In order to understand this point, you have to consider how apostles like Paul, Peter, and John considered their ministry. All three understood their work as being in continuity with the work of the Old Testament writings, equipping the New Covenant people with an identity and an ethic that differentiated them from the world while seeking to be witnesses to the work of God in Christ to reconcile the world to Himself. You can see this in passages likes Romans 16:25-26, 1 Peter 1:23-24, and 1 John 1:1-4, where the apostles spoke of their work as not only a testimony to Christ but as a work that accorded well with God's work through the Old Testament saints.

<u>Conclusion</u>

If we take the testimonies about Jesus and the claims of Jesus together, here is how we come to an answer for our question, "Is the Bible really God's Word?"

> **First, the eyewitness testimonies about Jesus establish Him as a trustworthy source for discerning the Word of God.**

Second, the trustworthy claims of Jesus affirm the Old Testament and authorize the New Testament as the Word of God.

If a person trusts Jesus, then they must also trust what He taught about the Bible.

If a person does not trust Jesus, then they are obligated to explain why they reject the eyewitness testimonies regarding His life and teaching.

In other words, the question, "Is the Bible really God's Word?," is ultimately a question about whether or not one trusts Jesus. Either Jesus is who He and the eyewitnesses claim He is, and we are obligated to believe what He taught about the nature of the Bible as God's Word, or Jesus is a fraud, unworthy of our trust.

If you would pronounce such a judgment against Jesus this morning, saying in your heart, "He is not worthy of my trust. I believe he's a fraud. I don't believe what he or those eyewitnesses say about him," I would simply close this morning by asking you, **"What good reason do you have for not yet placing your trust in Jesus?"**

Not wanting something to be true is not the same as something not being true. Just because **you do not want** to place your trust in Jesus does not mean that **you do not need** to place your trust in Jesus. So, again, I ask, "What good reason do you have this morning for not yet placing your trust in Jesus?" Is it because you believe that you have plenty of time? Is it because you don't believe that you really need a savior from your sin? Is it because you believe you can do it on your own? Is it because you do not want to have to live in submission to Him as your Lord and Savior? None of these are good reasons. As God has told us in His Word, today is the Day of Salvation. Today is the day to be forgiven, made whole, and reconciled to God. Do not wait. Do not waste time looking for reasons not to trust Him today. There are no good reasons to not trust Jesus.