

Basics

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you —unless you believed in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:1–2 ESV)

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 ESV)

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. (Jude 1:5 ESV)

What Does A Christian Believe?

September 13th, 2015

Isaiah 66:2

Luke 24:25-27

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Thank you worship team. This morning we are going to continue with our Basics series in which we have been asking and answering some of the foundational questions about the Christian faith. We began by asking “What Is The Gospel?”; last week we were asking “What Does It Mean To Be Saved?” and this week we are asking “What Does A Christian Believe?”

I want to begin this morning by looking at a very important passage of Scripture. Please open your Bibles to Isaiah 66:1-2. Last week in the message called “What Does It Mean To Be Saved?” we read some verses from this part of the Bible. Isaiah 65 and 66 contain a picture of the new heavens and the new earth. Isaiah 65:17 says:

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. (Isaiah 65:17 ESV)

So we are talking about the eternal kingdom – we are talking about G5 here if I can make a reference to our sermon from two weeks ago. We are talking about the end of all things when saved people are living with God and enjoying him forever. Obviously we want to know what kind of people will be there. God tells us in Isaiah 66:1-2. Let’s listen. He says:

¹ Thus says the LORD: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?”² All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:1–2 ESV)

The people of God in the Old Testament were used to thinking of the temple as the place where God meets with his people, but in the new heavens and the new earth God’s presence will not be limited to a building – what is the house you could build that could contain God? He is bigger than the cosmos – he created the cosmos – and he will fill the cosmos with his presence and he will share that space with his people for all eternity this passage says. We want to know who are those people? Look carefully at the people who will live before the face of God forever:

But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2 ESV)

This is an incredibly important passage. We want to be in this picture don’t we? These are the people who will be with God in eternity, forever. Not everybody is in this picture – we remember that from last week. There are some people outside this picture; people who:

have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.” (Isaiah 66:24 ESV)

We don’t want to be in that picture. So this is life and death urgent. We want to know who these people are who will enjoy the presence of the Lord forever. Let’s look carefully at everything that is said about them. First of all the text says that they are humble. The Hebrew word there is *ani* and it means lowly, it means something very similar to Jesus’ “poor of spirit” in the Beatitudes. The Old Testament scholar J. Alec Motyer says about this word:

The *humble* are, socially, those who are at the bottom of life’s heap, dominated by stronger forces and interests; religiously, they are those who willingly take the lowest place before God.¹

So used in a religious context, as this obviously is here, the word describes people who willingly take the lowest place before God. These are people who have a “big God” and a “small man” theology. That’s the first thing that real Christians believe – they believe that God is big and we

¹J. Alex Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 453.

are small. What does this sound like to you? It sounds like the first two G's of the Gospel. The Gospel begins with a big God and a fallen man. These people are those kind of people. They know their place in the universe. They know that God is the biggest thing and we should revolve around him.

Secondly these people are described as “contrite in spirit”. The Hebrew word for “contrite” there is *nakheh* and it means “crippled” or “disabled”. Used here in a spiritual sense it describes a person who understands how devastated human beings are because of sin. They mourn over the effect of sin, they understand the damage that sin does to the human mind and they know that because of sin they CANNOT STAND BEFORE GOD. These are people who know that they have fallen and that only God can lift them up. These are people who are ready to receive GRACE. Now look at the last thing this passage says about these people; they:

trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2 ESV)

The Hebrew word *chared* here means painstaking trouble and sensitivity. It means to wildly and reverently attentive to a thing. They know that life and death are in the Word of the Lord! They know the value of what they are looking at and they treat it with all the sensitivity and care that it is due.

Reflecting upon these 3 characteristics Motyer writes:

This, then, is what looms large before the Lord's gaze: our lowliness before him in worship, our self-awareness and **our painstaking sensitivity to his word.**²

That line there at the end of that quote is the reason we started with this text. I am not interested in what some people believe, I am not even interested in what some nominal, so called Christians believe – I want to know what real BELIEVERS believe. I want to know what the people who will live before the face of God FOREVER believe. That's what matters to me – that's what matters to anybody who wants to be in this picture for all eternity. This passage tells us what we want to know. It tells us that:

²J. Alex Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 453.

1. A true Christian believes in God's Word

Isaiah gets a glimpse into eternity. He sees people there. They are people with big God theology. They believe that God is large and in charge. They are people with small man theology. They believe that people are sinful, they are fallen, they are not capable of deciding right and wrong for themselves. They are people who know that as sinners they CAN'T stand before God on their own merits. They need grace. These are Gospel people. Old Covenant and New. And they are believing in God's Word. That's almost an understatement isn't it? They are not just BELIEVING in God's Word they are trembling before God's Word. They are attending to God's Word with palpable reverence and awe. They are LOVING God's Word, they are feeding on it and they are DELIGHTED IN IT. Christians do more than "believe God's Word" – for crying out loud, the devil BELIEVES God's Word, Christians LOVE IT, they TRUST IT, they DELIGHT IN IT, they REST IN IT – that's what I mean when I say that a true Christian believes in God's Word – I am using a very robust definition of the word "believe" – just to be clear.

Now we probably need to say a few things about what exactly we mean when we say that Christians believe in GOD'S WORD – what do we mean by that? Generally speaking Christians agree that when we talk about God's Word we mean two different things. First of all we mean:

i. The Bible

The Bible is God's Word. You know that, the Apostle Paul says:

All Scripture is breathed out by God (2 Timothy 3:16 ESV)

It is the breath of God – it is the voice of God! That's why the prophets always introduced their oracles by saying: "Thus saith the Lord!" The prophet Ezekiel was actually restrained from speaking unless he had an oracle from God. Everything he said was the Word of God!³ The Old Testament is the Word of God by the prophets. But the New Testament is the word of God too. The Apostles in the New Testament are the equivalent of the prophets in the Old Testament. Their words too are to be received as the Word of God. The Apostle Paul said to the church in Thessalonica:

³ Ezekiel 3:26-27.

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. (1 Thessalonians 2:13 ESV)

So the Bible – Old Testament and New Testament is to be received by the Christian as the Word of God. J.I. Packer is famous for saying that the Bible is God preaching. More recently Albert Mohler wrote that:

“When the Bible speaks, God speaks⁴”.

The Bible is God’s Word.

However sometimes when we talk about the Word of God we are talking about something distinct from the 66 books of the Bible, sometimes when we are talking about the Word of God we are actually talking about Jesus.

ii. Jesus

The Bible says that Jesus is the Word of God. John 1:1 says:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1 ESV)

He goes on to say that:

¹⁴ the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 ESV)

Alright, so we are talking about Jesus there. Jesus is the Word of God. It is a little bit unusual that the Bible can use one expression to describe two different things but it is not unintentional. What the Bible is saying here is that Jesus is the ultimate expression of God’s Word. Jesus is what God is talking about in His Word. Jesus is what the Bible is all about! Again quoting J. Alec Motyer, this time from his handy little book: “Loving The Old Testament” he says:

⁴ R. Albert Mohler, *Five Views On Biblical Inerrancy*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 58.

“The Old Testament is Jesus predicted; the Gospels are Jesus arrived; the Acts of the Apostles is Jesus preached; the Epistles are Jesus explained; The Revelation is Jesus coming again.”⁵

The Bible is about Jesus! Jesus, apparently, thought so too. On the Road to Emmaus he said to two of his disciples:

²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:26–27 ESV)

“Moses and the prophets were pointing forward to me”, Jesus says. “The Apostles, my authorized prophets are pointing back at me. I am the point of the entire Bible!”

Let me put it this way: Imagine the Bible as being like one of those pop up books for kids. When you read it – carefully, thoroughly and with the help of the Holy Spirit - Jesus emerges from the pages. Jesus is the living Word inside the written Word. Jesus and the Bible are not the same thing, but they can never be separated. They are both the Word of God.

Therefore, going back to Isaiah 66:2 we can say that real believers – the kind that will live forever with the Lord in eternity – are trembling before the Word of God. They are carefully, painstakingly, reverently reading the Bible so as to worship, love and obey Jesus Christ.

Let me put all this together now. Point 2 is not a new point it is a clarification and expansion upon Point 1. I said off the top that a true Christian believes in God’s Word. Having dug a little deeper into that I think we are ready to say that:

2. A true Christian believes in the Jesus of the Bible

Does that make sense? I’m trying to avoid two extremes here. On the one hand I want to be absolutely clear that the ultimate object of our faith is not a book. You don’t become a Christian by believing in the book. You become a Christian by believing in the Jesus of the book. Amen? Ok. But on the other hand I want to be very clear that you don’t become a Christian by believing in the Jesus of your imagination. You have to believe in the Jesus OF THE BOOK. There are all

⁵ Alec Motyer, Loving The Old Testament, (Geanies House: Christian Focus Publishing Ltd., 2015), 19-20.

kinds of “Jesuses” out there that cannot save you and that you should not believe in. Believing in hipster Jesus or American TV Jesus or Therapist Jesus or Boyfriend Jesus will not save you. That Jesus doesn’t exist. That Jesus is an idol – he is deaf, dumb and mute. He’s a lie. You need to believe in the Jesus of the Bible.

That’s the only Jesus that Jesus was thinking about when he prayed for you in the Bible. In John 17 Jesus prayed for his future disciples and he said:

“I do not ask for these only, but also for **those who will believe in me through their word** (John 17:20 ESV)

Jesus prayed for the future believers who would believe in him through the WORD OF THE APOSTLES. That’s the only Jesus we have. That’s the only Jesus that can save us. Christians believe in the Jesus of the Bible.

Now it wouldn’t be much a sermon if we ended there. If you are not applying the text, then you are not preaching the text so I want to conclude our time together on a very practical note. I want to spend some time talking about:

How To Read The Bible As A Christian:

First of all, you need to:

1. Read the Bible Spiritually

I mean that in the sense of “with the help of the Holy Spirit”. In 2 Corinthians 3:14 the Apostle Paul says:

¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:14–18 ESV)

Here Paul says that the Jews who refused to acknowledge Jesus Christ as God’s Messiah remain unable to read the Bible with understanding. They can’t see what seems painfully evident to us.

They can't see Jesus. We wonder sometimes how it is that Jewish people can read the Old Testament and not see Jesus. How can you read Isaiah 52 and 53 about the suffering servant who will be pierced for our transgressions and not see Jesus? How can you read Psalm 110 about a son of David who will also be David's Lord and a Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek and not see Jesus? But they do read those texts and they don't see Jesus because a veil lies over their eyes. If you have already decided that you won't believe in Jesus then you can read the Bible until the cows come home and it won't do you any good. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. The Spirit is given, your mind is unlocked and you are helped to see. Faith comes before understanding. You can't read the Bible without help from the Holy Spirit.

That's what I mean when I tell you to read the Bible Spiritually. I'm telling you to submit to Jesus and to pray for help from the Holy Spirit. Read the Bible Spiritually.

Secondly, you need to:

2. Read the Bible in community

God isn't asking you to be a "self feeder". The Bible assumes that you are part of a feeding community. When Jesus restored Peter to the ministry after his failure and betrayal, he said:

"Feed my sheep." (John 21:17 ESV)

He didn't say: "Teach my sheep how to self feed" he said: "Feed my sheep". God has given us great help in reading the Bible. He has appointed pastors and teachers, Paul says in Ephesians 4:11, and he has given us the church – he says in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, where everything can be done for mutual edification so that all may be built up. Listen, let me promise you, you will read the Bible better at home if you hear the Bible taught at church. The two are meant to go hand in hand. Read the Bible in community.

Thirdly, you need to:

3. Read the Bible Christologically

I realize that's a big word for a series about the Christian BASICS but the word need not intimidate you. To read the Bible Christologically just means to read the Bible through the lens of Jesus Christ. It means to read the Bible as a Christian. As a Christian we believe that the Bible has a certain narrative arc. It is a story that ultimately points to Christ. To pull out our 5 G's graph again, we would say that this part of the Bible over here – mostly in the Old Testament (G1 and G2) explains why Jesus had to come, this part here (G3) in the Gospels explains what Jesus did in his coming and this part over here in the rest of the New Testament (G4 and G5) applies his coming to the entirety of human life and salvation. Jesus is obviously the point of the story. Therefore, to read the Bible as a Christian is to read the Bible for what it says about Jesus Christ. Practically speaking this means that when you read a story in the Old Testament for example you are always asking 3 questions:

- i. What does this story tell me about God?
- ii. What does this story tell me about fallen human beings?
- iii. What does this story tell me about the salvation of God through Jesus Christ?

In a sense we are reading the Bible backwards. The Old Testament is full of questions but on the other side of the cross – we know the answer to those questions. You should never read the Old Testament as if Jesus hadn't come. He has come. The seed of the woman promised in Genesis 3 has come! The seed of Abraham, the son of David has come! Never read the Bible as if you don't know how this story ends. So, practically speaking you read the story of Adam and Eve and you learn a lot about who God is. He is the Creator. He speaks. He is holy. He expects to be obeyed. You learn a lot about fallen human beings. We are willful, we are arrogant. We want to be like God deciding right and wrong for ourselves. But to read that story as a Christian is to anticipate Jesus. It is to know that a new Adam will come. He will do for us what we failed to do for ourselves and he will pay for what we did do in his body on the cross. He will bring us all the way home. If you haven't done that last bit, then you haven't read the Bible as a Christian – you haven't read the Bible christologically.

Fourthly, we need to:

4. Read the Bible reverently

I'm taking this point from our original text, Isaiah 66:2.

this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2 ESV)

That is reverent attention to the text. That is how you read the Bible when you realize the value of what you hold in your hand. I'm going to be honest with you, I don't understand Christians who don't read the Bible. To me that's like a fish who says that he is allergic to water – I don't even get that. I NEED to read the Bible. My wife can tell you that I don't feel right if for some reason I don't get my morning quiet time with God. I wake up early – I like to be the first one out of bed in our house – and I read the Bible in the morning and if something happens and I can't do that I'm like an addict who needs a fix. I'm agitated, I'm figidity, I'm fretful - I am unwell without the Bible. I totally get what David means when he says:

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. (Psalms 42:1 ESV)

God speaks to me through his Word. He ministers to my soul through his Word. This is life and death for me and I'll be honest with you, I can't understand people who say they are Christians but who don't care for Bible reading or Bible preaching. I don't get that. Do you know what you have in your hand? This is the Word of God! This is a message from your Creator telling you the truth about who he is and who you are and how you can come HOME through the person and work of Jesus Christ – how can you not treasure this? How can you not be irritated by every moment you have to spend doing something other than reading this and hearing this explained to you? I don't get that. I don't want to get that. I want to linger over and tremble before the priceless Word of God.

Lastly, if you want to read the Bible like a Christian, you need to:

5. Read it urgently

This is not like reading through War and Peace or making your way through the complete library of Penguin Classics. This is life and death – not just for you, but for everybody. When theologians talk about the doctrine of Scripture, they will talk about authority, clarity, sufficiency and necessity. We won't go through all those words but I need to define one of them. When

theologians talk about the necessity of Scripture what they mean is that no one can come to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ apart from reading or hearing the Bible. You know that right? Natural revelation can only take you so far. You can stare at the stars and learn some things about God. You can study humanity and learn some things about yourself. That's natural revelation but it can't tell you anything about Jesus. And the Bible says that there is:

no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12 ESV)

You can't go to heaven unless you know the name of Jesus and you can't learn the name of Jesus by looking at the stars or gazing at your navel. You need the Bible. That's why Paul said:

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"... ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:14–17 ESV)

That's why our grandparents packed their belongings into coffins and got on boats and travelled 6 months over seas to places like India, Burma and China. That's why when they got there they immediately started translating the Bible and preaching the Bible and distributing tracks explaining the Bible – because they knew that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.

Its no different here; its no different now. As in India – so in Orillia. As in China so in your family. No matter where you are, no matter who you are, faith comes by hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ.

And so real believers are still trembling before the Word of God. They know what they have in their hands. They know who this book is about. They are seeing and savouring Jesus and they are always eager to share. This is what we believe. This is our calling and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.