

What Christians Believe about the Bible

Exodus 34:1-7, 27-28, Jeremiah 36:1-3

Friends, you might be surprised to hear that our series for this month is going to be focused on an overview of the most controversial piece of literature this world has ever seen!

This piece of literature been praised as divine, it has been vilified as evil, it is responsible for the most radical transformation you can imagine in people lives.

Some fear it as a revolutionary agent; some are inspired by it to question the status quo and bring change. Governments, nations and empires, have been shaped by it. Its teachings have caused wars and brought peace.

And... it is this controversial piece of literature which defines who are and what we do here... at Valleyview. Pretty Amazing

So by now you've probably guessed that I'm speaking about *the bible* –especially since you've seen that the title of our series is called - *A Road trip through the Bible*

But as we start this series I want to impress upon you the significance of what we are undertaking.

Because the bible so easily becomes a mundane part of our Christian experience, something that we take for granted and neglect, right?

I forget that pastors in other parts of the world risk their lives each time they get up and preach from the bible

We forget believers in other parts of the world risk their lives when they gather together to read and study the bible.

Brother Andrew – a Dutch Christian who founded Open Doors Ministries in Europe constantly risked his life during the Cold War by traveling into Communist countries to bring bibles to the underground church.

Dr. Livingstone, of the “Dr. Livingstone I presume” fame – had taken some 73 books with him when he started out on his famous trip to Africa. After he had gone 300 miles, Livingstone had to throw away some of the books because of

the fatigue of those carrying his baggage. As he continued on his journey his library grew less and less, until he had but one book left--his Bible

In 1969 there was a man in Kansas City USA, who just after becoming a new Christian was badly injured in an explosion, causing his face to be disfigured, the loss of his sight and also the loss of his hands. But in spite of these handicaps this new Christian was intent on being able to read the scriptures for himself and subsequently figured out that he could learn how to read a Braille bible with his tongue!

Friends, hearing stories like this makes us wonder what we might do if we didn't have such easy and free access to the bible.

It challenges us to make better use of the free and easy access that we enjoy to the bible

And it makes us ask the question why? Why is the bible so important to Christians?

What is it about that Christians believe about the bible that would make people risk their lives, throw all other books away, go to such great lengths to read it for oneself.

Well friends, that's the first stop on our road trip – we're going to pull over at the Road side stop of "What Christians believe about the bible"

Now you may have noticed that there are some objects on the tables you are sitting at. We're going to do a learning exercise together this morning.

What I would like for you to do is this

First - introduce yourself to the other people sitting at your table, take 30 sec and do that.

Next - pick one person to be the note-taker with the pencil and paper, everyone done? Good

Now take the product on the table and in the next 30 sec I want you to write down as many "claims" as you can which this product makes about itself from its packaging – or even perhaps something you may have heard about it from a commercial on TV or radio.

Ok - go! Great, lets share what our product was and what it told us about itself.

So friends, now that we have all these statement about these products how do we know they are true? Well we have to investigate them and put them to the test.

For example if we have a bottle of Febreeze - the label and the commercials say that Febreeze gets rids of odors, and we have odors that we want to get rid of. So we try it out and if it works then we know its claim to be true - and we'll buy it again.

Friends, every day we are hearing claims that products or people make and we are putting them to the test to see if they are true – but are we doing this with the bible?

Maybe we didn't even know that the bible makes claims about itself? But it does –

So take the bibles that are on your tables and we're going to look up those claims.

Can you look up the following verses?

- **2 Timothy 3:16** - *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,*
- **2 Peter 1:21** - *For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

So the first claim that the Bible makes about itself is to be the inspired Word of God.

These verses say that scripture is God-breathed, and that prophecy does not originate from humans but from God and is given to humans via the Holy Spirit.

Now we need to be clear that the reference to “scripture” in the 2 Timothy passage means the “Old Testament”, because when Paul wrote this letter, the writings which make up the New Testament had not been compiled or completed yet.

But, we can take this reference to “scripture” to include the New Testament writings as well – that they are also God-breathed because the New Testament is based on the old Testament. What Jesus Christ did, and what the apostles preached and wrote about, this was all predicted in the Old Testament. The New Testament is the story of how it came true. We will learn more about how this works as we go along on our trip.

So what does it mean that scripture is inspired by God? Well this has to do more about the questions of “Why it was written” and the “Where did it originate from” rather than the question of “How exactly does inspiration happen?”

We have the scriptures because God has initiated speaking to us, it was His revealing of himself to human beings and acting in their lives, and His instruction which prompted them to record and write down what God was saying and doing.

God-breathed means God is the source. He started the conversation with us. God has the first word and God wants us

to know about our creator and the world he created. That’s the Why and Where.

Now there’s quite a bit of mystery in how this process occurred, and as scientifically minded people we need to be careful that we don’t make **“the mechanics of how”** - the determining factor as to whether we believe or don’t believe that the source of the bible is God.

If you’ve ever written a poem, or a paper, or a song and it went really well we’ll sometimes say I don’t know how I did it...it just came to me, I was inspired, other times there is a specific formula that you might follow to create something – but either way you are still the author right? You are still the source!

So, however God communicated and worked with human beings via the Holy Spirit– whether it was supernatural and obvious or not – we still believe the source was God and thus the bible is God’s word.

Friends take a moment to let that sink in – we have the very words of God available to us! Amazing.

And this is an important claim because it affects, as do all the other claims we'll be looking at, how you read and study the bible.

If you don't believe it

- You won't find the bible all that important, or necessary to read
- You'll be skeptical, suspicious or hostile to what it says
- You might even want to disprove that God inspired it

But if you do believe it

- You'll want to read it to find out about God, its source
- You'll be more inclined to trust what it says
- It will be important to you to be able to understand it

So let's see what claim number two is. Let's look up the following verses

- 2 Samuel 22:31 *"As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless.*
- Proverbs 30:5 *"Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.*

So let's see how well you're paying attention, are these verses claiming...

- a) God's has perfect pronunciation and grammar?
- b) If you are in the military, take a bible because it will make a good shield?
- c) We can completely trust what the bible says?

So Claim #2- The Bible claims to be the infallible Word of God.

Friends, these verses tell us that God's word is flawless, meaning it is perfect, its sound, it contains no faults. We often summarize this all together and say it is infallible.

The implication is that it won't fail you, so in that sense it is like a shield which protects you from harm, and if your shield fails on you, you're in big trouble.

But the bible claims that it will never let us down. What this means is that the Bible is our completely reliable and trustworthy guide for our faith and our lives.

Now the Presbyterian Church in particular has made a big deal about saying that Scripture is the only rule for our faith and life. And friends I'm here to tell you that we can stake our lives here and now, and forever after on what the bible says because it is flawless.

Now, the claim to be infallible needs to be understood with-in the context of the other claims that scripture makes about itself.

The reason it is infallible is because its source is God, but the question we should be asking is what it is infallible in regards to – what is the purpose of the scriptures? This leads us to the next claim. Let's look at what the scriptures claim about its purpose.

Please look up the following verses

- Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

- 2 Timothy 3:15 *and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

So Claim #3 is that The Bible's purpose is about salvation through Christ

Many people today are willing to accept the bible as a historical document, or an ethical treatise, a collection of moral teachings or a source for theology or as a source of inspiration for your spiritual life. But the bible doesn't claim to be any of those things.

No the bible claims to be the Word of God which gets into your life and it judges you – not ruthlessly, but thoroughly and impartially.

It strips away the lies; the ways in which we have deceived ourselves; the pretenses we keep so that we appear decent and good, and the defenses we erect to protect this.

The purpose and power of scripture is to show you the truth about yourself, who you really are, and in this task the bible is infallible and completely reliable, the scriptures will not, and cannot, lie to you about yourself.

Friends if people reject the bible most time its not because it contradicts itself, but because it contradicts us.

People are made wise for salvation when they can see the truth about themselves. They see they are in need of a savior, and they see Jesus Christ revealed in scripture as the only one they can trust for that salvation.

Perhaps this claim more than any other the scripture makes about itself is the one which most of us struggle with, because quite frankly we don't want something in our lives which does what the scriptures are supposed to do.

We can accept that the Bible is from God, we might believe that it's infallible, but that its sole purpose is to speak the truth to us about ourselves and expose us for who we are, and where we are in relationship to God, and that is not easy to accept.

But folks if you really want to experience the true Christian life we really need to allow the bible to speak to us in this way and let it point us to what we need, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Right?

Ok, So now that we've discovered what the bible's claims about itself are

- 1- It is God's inspired Word
- 2- It is God's infallible Word
- 3- It is about Salvation through Christ

We need to do what we do everyday with other products and put these claims to the test.

Now some claims are fairly easy to prove or disprove. For example, my youngest sister got married in the fall of 2008 and prior to the wedding I had never met her fiancé. She claimed that her fiancé was taller and bigger than me. Now that was an easy claim to check out. I met him and yes he was bigger and taller than me.

However she also told me at the time that her fiancé claimed to love her and wanted to take care of her and is promising to spend the rest of his life with her. Well that's not going to be so easy to prove or disprove.

A significant claim like that will take time to tell to see if it is true or not, and two years later so far its proving to be true and I'm trusting that it will continue.

Friends it's like that with the claims which the bible makes as well. We have to see if these claims prove true out over time.

So what will you do? You could leave here this morning and ignore what the Bible's claims about itself like you would ignore a product demonstration at Wal-Mart.

Don't do that, think about what the bible is claiming about itself because if it is true, you have access to the most amazing book the world has ever know. So read it and put the claims to the test find out if they are true!

Read the bible to find out about its source – God,

Read it because you can depend on it to be faithful and true, it is infallible

Read it because it will show you the truth about yourself and it will lead you to Jesus Christ.

Friends, I have a poem to conclude with by Amos Wells

*I supposed I knew my Bible, Reading piecemeal, hit or miss,
Now a bit of John or Matthew, Now a snatch of Genesis,
Certain chapters of Isaiah, Certain Psalms (the twenty-third),
Twelfth of Romans, first of Proverbs –
Yes, I thought I knew the Word!*

*But I found that thorough reading was a different thing to do,
And the way was unfamiliar When I read the Bible through.
You who like to play at Bible, Dip and dabble, here and there,
Just before you kneel, weary, And yawn through a hurried
prayer;*

*You who treat the Crown of Writings
As you treat no other book,
Just a paragraph, disjointed, Just a crude, impatient look,*

*Try a worthier procedure, Try a broad and steady view;
You will kneel in very rapture When you read the Bible
through.*

Friends, get in and buckle up and get the road trip started!

Amen.