

I wonder, in the history of the world, has there ever been a book as loved—and hated—as the Bible?

There are 66 books in the Bible, 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament. Although exact figures are difficult to ascertain, conservative estimates suggest that more than 6 billion copies have been printed. The original biblical manuscript were written in three languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—but as of today, the entire Bible has been translated into 670 different languages, and at least some portion of the Bible has been translated into 3,312 different languages.

Did you know that every minute, of every day, about 50 Bibles are sold? Did you know that the Bible is the most shop-lifted book in the world?

In spite of the fact that many North Americans are not well-versed in the Bible, unknowingly, we use biblical phrases all the time:

- the truth will set you free
- the blind leading the blind
- servant-leader
- the writing is on the wall
- and the ever popular sports analogy, David vs. Goliath

Under the communist governments of Russia and China, the Bible was outlawed for many years; in places like Somalia, North Korea, and Libya, the Bible is still outlawed and viewed as a dangerous, subversive book.

The French philosopher, Voltaire, in the 1700's, boldly proclaimed, "*one hundred years from now the world will hear no more of the Bible.*" Ironically, fifty years after Voltaire's death, the Geneva Bible Society purchased his house and were printing bibles on what used to be Voltaire's printing press.

When I talk with people who are new to our church, and hear their observations, one of the most frequent remarks has to do with our teaching—you *teach the Bible here*. It's true. North Shore Alliance has a long history of faithfully preaching God's Word. But it struck me recently that while we regularly preach and teach the Bible, and invite everyone to read and study it themselves, we haven't spent a lot of time talking about what the Bible has to say about the Bible.

What kind of book is it, and why is it important? Is it simply a book containing wise, moral, and ethical teaching? How did the Bible come to be? Is it the product of human thinking, or is it the Word of God? Is the Bible still relevant today? Over the next three Sundays, I want to address these questions, using the Bible to shape the way we think about, and relate to, the Bible.

My sermon this morning is centred around two key texts, 2 Timothy 3:14-16 and 2 Peter 1:16-21, and from these texts I'm going to make the following argument: Because the Bible is God-breathed, it has eternal relevance, speaking to all people, in every age. Because the Bible is God's Word, it has authority in our lives—we are called to listen and obey.¹

¹ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, 21.

1. 2 Timothy 3:14-17: At this time I'd like to invite you to turn with me in your Bible to 2 Timothy 3:14-17. As you're turning there, allow me to offer a few brief words about the context. The Apostle Paul is writing to a pastor he has mentored; Timothy is pastoring the church that Paul planted in Ephesus. One of the issues that Paul addresses in the letter is the presence of false teachers and bad theology. So with this in mind, I want to read God's Word to Timothy.

*"14 But as for you [Timothy], continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 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. 16 All Scripture is **God-breathed** and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

I want you to pay special attention to the central word in vs. 16—Paul says that all Scripture is **God-breathed**. It's a strange word, isn't it? At the very least, it sounds strange to our ears; it's certainly not an every-day word. For this reason, some English translations have substituted a word that is well-known in our culture—"All Scripture is *inspired* by God".

The problem with using the word "*inspired*" is that we regularly apply this word to any number of people or situations:

- we might describe a performance as being *inspired*—by which we mean that it was emotionally powerful or moving
- we might describe a painting as being *inspired*—by which we mean that it is beautiful, evocative, or that it touches something

deep within us.

- we might describe someone's teaching or writing as being *inspired*—by which we mean that it struck us as particularly wise, influential, or revealing.

The word "**God-breathed**" means something more. In Genesis 2:7, when God created humanity, we read that He breathed the breath of life into the human creature and it became a **living** being. Humanity didn't create itself; God is the author of life. The language of Genesis 2 is clearly metaphorical; we're not meant to envision God as having two lungs. But this language is vital nonetheless; God's breath is an extension of Himself, of His life.

illus: I've brought an anniversary card with me this morning; it was given to me by my wife a few years ago. How do you think my wife would have reacted if I had opened this card, read her words, and promptly threw it on the ground? Now just for the record, I didn't do that...but if I had, I suspect she might have cried; she certainly would have been hurt and angry.

Why? Isn't it just words? No, it is something much more. These words are an extension of my wife; when I honour her words I honour her—to disregard them is to disregard her. And in a much greater way, the Bible is more than just a collection of words; **it is God-breathed, these are God's words, an extension of who He is.** When we honour His Word we honour Him.

The apostle Paul tells us that the Scripture is both **relational** and **practical**. It is relational in the sense that it is **from God to us**, and, it **is about God, and, about us**. In vs. 15 Paul says that the Scriptures "*are able to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ*

Jesus". In other words, the Scripture guide us into relationship with God.

Because God is infinite, and we are not, He must reveal Himself and relate to us so that we can relate to Him. And God has done this very thing, He has drawn near, He has revealed Himself through His Word, and, through His Son. The Bible contains God's revealed will for humanity, it outlines how to live in relationship with Him, and represent Him to our world.

If knowledge about God was all that He was after, He could have given us a manual filled with headings and bullet points. But if we want to know someone, we need more than bullet points—we need to hear their story. It shouldn't surprise us to discover that the vast majority of the Bible comes to us in the form of narrative—it tells the story of God's interaction with the world. Next week, I'm going to walk through the grand story of the Bible, taking time to look at how the various parts connect to the whole.

The Bible is **relational**, which is to say, it's *from* God to *us*, it's *about* God and *us*, and it's **practical** too. Vs. 16 says, "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*". God's word has always been, and will always be relevant.

illus: But that doesn't mean that the Bible makes plain every mystery of God, or, that it says all there is to say about everything. A well-known Christian author, G.K. Chesterton, was once asked the following question by a journalist: "if you were to be stranded on an island, and you could only bring one book with you, which book would bring?" Because Chesterton was a devoted Christian, the

journalist expected him to say, "The Bible." Instead, quick as whip, Chesterton replied, "Thomas' Guide to Practical Shipbuilding."

The Bible is not comprehensive. If you're stranded on an island, and you'd like to get off, a book on ship building is going to be much more useful than the Bible. But if you're not stranded on an island, and want to know who God is, or the meaning and purpose of life, or where all of history is heading, then the Bible is **the** book for you.

2. 2 Peter 1:16-21: At this time I want to move on to our second text. Perhaps you've noticed that I seem to be speaking out of both sides of my mouth this morning—one moment I refer to the Bible as God's Word, and the next I'm talking about what the apostle Paul wrote. So which is it? Is this God's Word or the collection of human words? Let's turn our attention to 2 Peter 1:16-21.

"16 For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

19 We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but

prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Peter is addressing a particular concern here—false teachers dismissing the truth of Christ’s return—he bases his argument on two things **(1) eye-witness testimony (vs. 16-18)**, and **(2) the reliability of the Scriptures (vs. 19-21).**²

Vs. 16 b-18 looks back to an event where Peter, James, and John were eye-witnesses of the glory revealed in Jesus. They were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration when the Father spoke about Jesus saying, *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”*

Peter argues that what they saw and heard—**eye-witness testimony**—is reliable; in the same way, the Scriptures themselves are a reliable witness of God’s character, purpose, and action in the world.

Verse 19 says, *“We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place”*. Because the Scriptures are reliable, we can believe, embrace, and obey God’s Word. God’s words are like a light shining in the darkness. His Word reveals things we could never discover on our own, it makes us wise, it keeps us from stumbling. Psalm 119:105 says, *“Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.”*

As we move on to vs. 20-21, let’s get back to the question I asked a few minutes ago. Is the Bible God’s Word or a collection of human

words?

Perhaps you’re wondering why any of this matters. Here’s why it matters: if the Scriptures aren’t from God, if they aren’t for us, then we can do what we like with them—embrace the parts we like and reject the parts we don’t. But if these words are from God, and for us, then a listening obedience becomes crucial.

Let me read a statement—about the Bible—that has been adopted by one of the United Churches on the North Shore. “We take the Bible seriously but not literally. We understand the bible as a human product, written in the context of two ancient communities. It is a record of how those people understood and experienced God and their life of faith. We use the Bible as a central source of wisdom, inspiration, understanding and guidance for our life.”

There are profound implications of this statement: the Bible isn’t God’s Word—it’s a human product—and, it’s not really for us; it simply records the religious experiences of particular, ancient, people. They take the Bible seriously, in the sense that they can learn something from other people’s experiences, but they don’t take it literally, and consequently it has no inherent authority.

Sadly, this United Church and many like it, have made up their mind about what the Scriptures are but they have completely ignored what the Scripture says about itself. The irony is that if they’ve concluded that the Scripture is not trustworthy in what it says about itself, why would these churches *“use the Bible as a central source of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance”*?

² Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: 2 Peter, Jude*, 70.

What does the Scripture say about itself? Verses 20-21, “[No] *prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*”

The Scriptures aren’t filled with human speculation about the way things are, or, who God is. The writers didn’t sit down, think deep thoughts about God and then put pen to paper. The Scriptures didn’t originate with human beings; God spoke, and humans captured what He said.

Let’s look at another example of what the Scripture says about itself. Jeremiah 1:4-9 captures a conversation between God and the prophet Jeremiah. “*The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 5 ‘Before I formed you in the womb [Jeremiah] I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’ 6 ‘Alas, Sovereign Lord,’ [Jeremiah] said, ‘I do not know how to speak; I am too young.’ 7 But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, ‘I am too young’...9 Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, ‘I have put my words in your mouth.’”*

I’ve already read the United Church statement on the Bible, let me offer an alternative statement. “Inspiration is that supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which He superintended the writing process of the Scripture so that all the words and every part of the original writings were at the same time the words of the human writers and the words of God.”³

The Bible is a remarkable document! It’s composed of 66 different books, with contributions from at least forty writers, written over a span of nearly 1600. The continuity in the message of the Bible is astounding in light of the uniqueness of the human writers. Two of the writers were kings (David and Solomon), two were priests (Jeremiah and Ezekiel) and two were fisherman (Peter and John). Matthew was a tax collector, and Nehemiah a government official, Luke was a doctor, and Paul an academic.

These writers were not co-authors with God—in the sensed that they wrote part and God wrote part; instead, God spoke through His Holy Spirit and they captured God’s words. But they did more than simply record God’s dictated words, God drew upon the particular knowledge, experience, and style of the writer to communicate His exact message. Think about it...who better to capture God’s thoughts in Psalm 23, then David, who spent his early years as a shepherd? “*The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack no good thing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.*”

It’s true that God’s Word first came to particular people, expressed in the language and culture of their day. But because God is the One who speaks in history, we can trust His Word to continue to speak in our own day and time; His word remains eternally relevant.

Application: As I wrap things up this morning, I want to move to application. In actual fact, I want to move from information to relationship. While the Bible certainly contains information about

³ The Princeton statement on Inspiration, as quoted by David Finkbeiner, *Built Upon The Truth: Biblical Authority Yesterday and Today*.

God, the Bible's aim isn't to *inform* but to *introduce*. God isn't an object to be studied, He's a Person to be embraced. Can anyone tell me...*what good is it to be an expert on God but have no experience of Him?*

A.W. Tozer, in his masterful work, *The Pursuit of God*, writes, "for millions of Christians...God is no more real than He is to the non-Christian. They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle." He continues, "God can be known in personal experience. A loving personality dominates the Bible, walking among the trees of the garden and breathing fragrance over every scene. Always a living person is present, speaking, pleading, loving, working, and manifesting Himself whenever and wherever His people have the receptivity necessary to receive the manifestation."⁴

Don't be content with trying to love the idea of God; God isn't an object to be studied, He's a Person who can be known and embraced. I wonder, *do you know God personally? Do you live with an awareness of His presence? Is God's love an idea that you hold in your mind, or, something that you continue to experience?*

The Scriptures are God-breathed and we can be confident in what God has revealed about Himself and this world. We don't need to be afraid about what God thinks of us, not when His Word reveals a love so vast that He would willingly, joyfully, lay down His life to

save us.⁵

We don't need to look at our lives and wring our hands in despair, as though God were absent or has better things to do than pay attention to us. His word tells us that He chose us before the beginning of creation and that He will finish the good work He has begun in us.⁶

Just think about how many promises has God given us in His Word:

- God will never leave us or forsake us—Psalm 9:10
- As far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our sin from us—Ps. 103:12
- God can take our ashes and give us beauty; He can take our mourning and despair and give us joy—Is. 61:3
- God will give us wisdom when we ask for it—James 1:5
- In every place where we feel weak and fragile, God can bring His strength to bear—2 Cor. 12:7-9.
- Right now, Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven and He is asking for God's best for you—Heb 7:25

Because the Bible is God-breathed, it has eternal relevance, speaking to all people, in every age. Because the Bible is God's Word, it has authority in our lives—we are called to listen and obey.

illus: I want to conclude with a story. 10 years ago, I spent two weeks on an educational tour through Israel—we stopped at many of

⁴ A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Kindle Edition, Updated, Annotated), 33.

⁵ John 3:16; Romans 8:31-39; Hebrews 12:2; 1 John 3:16.

⁶ Ephesians 1:4-6; Philippians 1:6.

the major sites that described in the Old and New Testament. When we stopped in Capernaum—a city Jesus spent a lot of time in—we visited an ancient synagogue.

While there, our tour guide and teacher, Todd, explained what would have taken place at an ancient synagogue service—one part in particular stood out to me then, and continues to do so today.

At one point in the service, the appointed person would go and take the Torah scroll—the Scriptures—out of the cupboard, he would lift it above his head and begin to parade the scroll through the people, dancing as he went. Everyone would get to their feet and join in the dance, waiting for the moment when he walked by them. As the scroll passed by, people would reach out with their hands, touch the scroll, and then press their fingers to their lips...Psalm 119:103, *“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”*

God’s Word is sweet to the soul and a light for our eyes. The Bible reveals God, introduces us to God, and records His words to us. May the Lord bless the reading of His Word, both now, and forever.

Worship

Benediction