

Last Sunday I began a sermon series on what the Bible has to say about the Bible; I've entitled the series, *A Word For Today*.

On one hand the Bible *is* an ancient document, written over a span of nearly 1600 years, with contributions from at least forty different writers. But on the other hand, the Bible is much more than an ancient historical document. The Scriptures aren't filled with human speculation about the way things are, or, who God is. The writers of Scripture didn't sit down, think deep thoughts about God and then put pen to paper. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that all Scripture is *God-breathed*; 2 Peter 1:21 tells us that those who wrote the Scriptures "*spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*"

While the Bible certainly contains information about God, the Bible's aim isn't to *inform* but to *introduce*. The primary intent of the Scripture is relational in the sense that it is *from* God to *us*, and, it is *about* God, and, *about us*. Because God is infinite, and we are not, He must reveal Himself if we are to know Him. The Bible contains the story of God revealing Himself to the world.

As I concluded last week's service, I invited anyone who was willing to send me an email, outlining what their favourite Scripture is and why. My reason for doing this is born out of the conviction that the Bible remains *A Word For Today*. God has spoken and He continues to speak to us through His Word to all who listen. I want to share a few of the responses I received.

One person highlighted Proverbs 3:5-6 as their favourite Scripture: "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*" She went to write, "I've been repeating these verses

often as a reminder that I am not in control! That can be difficult for me and many others as well."

In a similar vein, a different person quoted Proverbs 19:21 as their favourite verse, "*Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails*". This person went on to write, "[This] verse assures me that regardless what I am planning or doing, it is God who is in charge. [This is] a source of comfort."

I wonder, do find yourself facing a decision with uncertainty?

What will you do when you graduate? For those wrestling with health issues, which treatment plan is the right one for you? For those looking for a job, where should you apply? The Scripture reminds us that God is both present and powerful—He loves us, He is shaping our lives, and He can guide us in times of choice. Psalm 32:8 says, "*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.*"

Another person wrote to tell me that their favourite verse is found in John 17:24. Jesus knew that He would soon be going to the cross and that His disciples would feel a sense of loss. Jesus prays for His disciples and for all those who will come to believe in Him. "*Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*"

The person who shared this verse went on to say, "Often I feel that this world is not enough, that seeing Jesus dimly...is not enough, and that to fulfill my deepest desires I want to go and be with Jesus. This verse tells me that Jesus wants that too, so it's good that I want that. Also, the fact that I'm not with Him right now tells me He must have

a good reason to delay, and that helps me to be patient.”

This life is not all that there is, and our longings—though real, and powerful—point to a fulfillment that can only be found in God Himself. You were created for a purpose, to know God, to experience His love, to align your life to His, and in doing so, experience peace and joy.

Another person wrote to me saying, "In different periods of our life, different verses touch our heart. When I have [experienced suffering], Roman 8:38-39 gives me a solid foundation and assurance of God's love. *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Through the Scriptures, God has spoken and made Himself known, and the Bible remains *A Word For Today*.

In thinking about how to say what I want to say this morning, and have it remain coherent, I've decided the best course of action is preach two different sermons, or, one sermon in two parts.

I want to begin by answering a few of the questions that people ask about the Bible, and then go on to outline the grand story of the Scriptures.

1. Questions About the Bible: Last week I addressed two particular questions: **(a)** *Is the Bible a product of human speculation about God, or, is it God's Word to humanity?*; and **(b)** *What is the purpose*

of the Bible? Is it meant to provide information, or, to introduce us to God?

This week I want to address the following set of questions:

- How do the Old and New Testaments relate to one another?
- Is the God of the Old Testament the same God as the One we see in the New?
- Are some parts of the Bible “more inspired” than others? For example, should we pay more attention Jesus' words than to the words written by Paul?

illus: The way we answer these questions matters; it will determine what we do with the Bible, and, how we relate to God and one another. I learned this truth years ago when I sat down with a fellow pastor from the North Shore.

I had recently been hired as the Lead Pastor here at NSA, and the pastor I was meeting with was 30 years my senior. He had reached out to me, to welcome me to the North Shore and I was looking forward to hearing his story and learning from his broad experience.

At one point in the conversation, we were talking about the challenge of pastoral leadership and he told me the story of a Christian couple in the church whose marriage had recently been devastated by infidelity. When the husband's extra-marital relationship was exposed, he made it clear that he had no intention of ending his marriage, or the new relationship—he was happy for things to go on as they were.

I asked this pastor, “*what are you going to do?*” and he responded saying, “*In these kind of situations, I choose to follow Jesus instead*

of Paul. Paul talks about speaking the truth in love, and, about disciplining those in the church who refuse to listen, but I prefer the way of Jesus—the way of mercy.” He went on to say that we wasn’t going to say anything to the husband, to do so was to judge him, and Jesus wouldn’t do any such thing.

On a number of levels, I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. In showing “mercy” to the husband—as the pastor defined it—by refusing to confront the husband, by default, this pastor was blessing the injustice done to the wife. And when it came to the Bible, this pastor was suggesting that Paul was into “judgement” and Jesus was into “mercy.” He was suggesting that certain parts of the Bible were “more inspired” than others—we need listen to Jesus, but we can disregard Paul. And when you begin to read the Scripture this way, the whole thing falls apart. Is “**all** of Scripture is God-breathed” or just the parts we’re comfortable with?

When I pressed him on his answer, it became clear that he had little use for the Old Testament. He spoke about the God of the Old Testament as though He was entirely unrelated to the God we see in Jesus Christ. The truth is that Jesus didn’t come to show a new side of God—a nicer God, a more merciful God—in Jesus we have the clearest revelation of the God we meet in the Old Testament.

Hebrews 1:1-3 says, “*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...3 The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*”

¹ Matthew 5:18.

In Jesus we meet One who is fully God and fully human. The entire Old Testament looked forward to, and was fulfilled in, Jesus Christ, and for this reason, Christians have a different relationship to the Old Testament than ancient Jews.

In the Old Testament we encounter laws of every kind; these laws were given to a God’s people, at a particular time, for particular reasons. But in the light of what Jesus has done, some laws have been set aside while others remain in place. Allow me to briefly explain.

Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the law; He came so that the law might be fulfilled through Him.¹ In living a sinless life, Jesus offered His perfect obedience to the Father—the New Testament speaks of Jesus’ death in terms of a once-for-all sacrifice. Through His death, all of the ritual and purification laws have been fulfilled and set aside—Jesus is the one who makes us “clean and acceptable” before God.

In a similar way, the dietary laws have been fulfilled in Christ. These laws were designed by God, for a time, to set Israel apart as His unique people. But through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the door has been opened for all people to join the family of God.

But other laws remain. In Jesus’ *Sermon* from the mountain, He affirmed and intensified the Ten Commandments—He saw them as important and ongoing for New Testament people. In fact, most of the ethical imperatives from the Old Testament are affirmed in the

New—since God doesn't change, what He considers right and good doesn't change from age to age.

It is simplistic and false to say that the Old Testament is about law and the New Testament is about grace. Law runs through both Testaments. It isn't God who has changed; our appetites have changed. We no longer want a Holy God, a God who asks us to change, to follow, or obey. We want a nice God, an affirming God, a God who sets us free to be and do whatever we want. We want an all-powerful genie, who will grant our requests, no questions asked.

Yes, Jesus shows love and mercy. Yes, He comes to set people free, but not from their inhibitions—He sets us free from the power of sin so that we might become slaves to righteousness. Jesus regularly reminded people that their life was not their own, that they belonged to God; He called people follow Him as the Lord and Master of their lives. He still does.

If “law”—as I've defined it—runs through both Testaments, so too does grace; God delights to show mercy.

In Exodus 34:6, God describes Himself saying, “*The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness*”. In Ezekiel 33:11 God says, “*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked;*” in 2 Peter 3:9 we read, “*The Lord...is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*”

There is much more that could be said on these matters but I want to move into the second part of my sermon and tell the Grand Story of Scripture; as I do, I trust you will see the continuity between the Old

and New Testaments.

2. The Grand Story: As I've already said, the primary intent of the Bible is not to inform us about God but to introduce us to Him. The Bible is a story of how God interacts with the world; it's a story about God *and* about us.

For most of history, people have looked to some kind of grand story in order to make sense of their own lives, but in the last century, there has been an active movement to deconstruct any kind of meta-narrative.

As you have well noticed, the values and spirituality of our country has dramatically shifted in the last 75 years. A 2015 Angus Reid poll found 39% of Canadians identify as “spiritual but not religious;” this has become the new “normal” for many.

I read an article this week written by a PhD Candidate in the Cultural Studies Program, from Queen's University. He writes, “[Those who identify as ‘spiritual but not religious’] look to the self for guidance, above all. When [they] make decisions about what to do, they do not appeal to a sacred text, but rather look within for guidance. What their gut tells them, or what their intuition reveals, is what orients them...Allowing individuals to be their authentic selves has become a moral imperative.”

It seems to me that the primary reason for the deconstruction of any grand, unifying, story comes down to the desire for autonomy. If there is a grand story—one that makes sense of who we are, and why we're here—then there's something bigger than me. If there's

something bigger than my wants, needs, or desires, then my freedom is limited; I'm accountable to something else, someone else.

And while this is certainly true, most humans beings have a deep, inborn desire, to be a part of something bigger than themselves. Human beings are made for meaning and purpose but we cannot create meaning or purpose from a self-directed life.

You may achieve something for awhile, you might be recognized and even celebrated, but in the end, if there's no grand story, your life is ultimately meaningless, and no one cares. If there's no grand story, then there's birth and there's death, and the thing in between called "life" is simply what you make of it.

I believe the evidence points in a different direction, I believe that life is filled with meaning and purpose because there is a God who has been writing a story throughout history that includes us all. Many before me have summarized the grand story of the Bible with the following four words: **creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.**

God created a world free from pain and loss; humanity was created for perfect relationship with God and others. But when humanity chose to push God out of the picture and go their own way, they cut themselves off from God's protection and blessing. To fall away from God is to fall further and further from life itself; there is no life apart from the God who gives it.

But God, being a good Father and Creator, didn't reject humanity even though humanity rejected Him. Instead, God drew near and

offered mercy. In fact, this same movement is repeated again and again throughout the grand story of the Bible—humanity runs from God, and God draws near and invites them to return.

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, sets the stage. God's solution to the problem was, in a real sense, a very human solution. He chose one couple, Abraham and Sarah, and He showed them mercy. God promised to bless them, and through them to bring blessing to the entire world. By the time we get to the second book of the Bible, Exodus, Abraham and Sarah's family had become the nation of Israel; God's promise and calling extended to them.

God's desire was for Israel to enjoy relationship with Him, showcasing His love, His mercy, and justice to the world—that the world might know Him, that the nations might turn to Him. In Isaiah 49:6, God speaks of Israel's calling saying, "*I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.*" God always seems to work from the particular to the universal; He singles out some for the sake of all.²

The problem was that all too often, Israel failed in her calling—instead of being a light, she wandered from God into darkness. God's faithful, persistent, love for Israel showcases His commitment to humanity today—God refuses to give up on us. In order for Israel to be a light for the nations, God needed to redeem and restore Israel first! And that's exactly what God did.

What God required of Israel was summed up in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus entered into Israel's story as the faithful Son—He

² Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*, 47.

perfectly fulfilled the life of worship, obedience, and love that God required. Not only so, but He also summed up Israel's calling—He represented God to the people, and the people to God. Because God became Man in Jesus, Jesus can stand in the Father's presence as Man, bearing our sin, pain, and need.

When we go to a doctor, they diagnose our sickness, prescribe a treatment or medication, and then leave us to get better on our own. Jesus did something very different. Jesus became the patient!"³ God the Son became human—He shared in our flesh and blood, our weaknesses, our temptations, difficulties, and losses. Jesus assumed the very humanity that needed to be redeemed, and through His death and resurrection our humanity is healed.

In Jesus, God has come down—the One for the Many—He stands in for us to complete what we could not for ourselves. Those who entrust their lives to Jesus, are adopted into God's family. When we put our faith in the Lord Jesus, we are united to Him, we partake in His righteous status, and we are welcomed by a holy God.

What Jesus has accomplished on the cross—triumph over sin and death; what He has secured—forgiveness, restoration, resurrection; is for you, and you, and you.

Even now, God is in the process of making you new. He is at work to restore your dignity, to realign your thinking and desires, to transform you from the inside out. Romans 8 reminds us that God will restore all things, including all of creation. God will finish what He has started in you, in me, in this world. One day, all things will be

made right, pain and suffering will come to end, greed and violence will be gone, selfishness and hunger will pass away. On that day we will finally be free to enjoy God, one another, and this world as He intended from the beginning—this enjoyment will last forever.

What are we to do in the meantime? Once we've been adopted into God's family, we join the family business—so to speak. 1 Peter 2:9-12 says, "*you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you...to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*"

God has reached out to you because He loves you! What are we to do with this love? Receive it, enjoy it, celebrate it, and share it with others! Once we've been adopted into God's family, we are given a high and holy calling to represent God to the world, beginning with family, friends, and neighbours. When we know our part in God's story, we invite others to join us. By the grace of God, it is my prayer that many will come to know God's love through you, and me.

The Lord's Supper: This morning we come to celebrate the Lord's Supper, rejoicing in the truth that God loves the world and sent His Son to rescue us all. The Bible tells us that whoever puts their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus is included in God's grand story.

³ James Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 53.

There's more to life than just your life—much, much more. The cross is the central symbol of the Christian faith because at the cross, Jesus died carrying the sin and shame of the world. At the cross, the power of sin was broken, death was defeated, and a way was made for humanity to receive God's forgiveness and be restored.

Just before Jesus was arrested, convicted, and crucified, He ate a final meal with His disciples, sharing bread and wine. During the meal he took the bread, and as a prophetic symbol He broke it saying, "This is my body, broken for you." In the same way, after supper, He took the cup saying, "This is my blood, shed for the forgiveness of your sins." At the cross, Jesus offered His life for the sake of the world.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we remember the death of Jesus, we receive afresh the forgiveness He won for us on the cross, and we revel in the deep, deep, love that God has for us.

This week I received an email from someone who has come very recently to our church. He responded to my invitation to share his favourite Bible verse and this is what he wrote, "*For God so loved the world He gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.*"

"This is probably unusual, but my favourite passage is the only one I really know...I memorized this about 50 years ago when I went to a Billy Graham "crusade" with a neighbour friend and her family. I stayed afterward for a class, and we were told to memorize [this Scripture]...and I've remembered it passage ever since. Later, I found out it was John 3:16 when I listened to a Keith Urban song and had

no idea what John 3:16 was. I looked it up, and was surprised when I found the answer. As you can tell, I have never been much of a "church-goer". That changed last month, and I have been to 5 services so far. "Better late than never!"

It's never too late to discover that we are loved by God, that we're invited to join His family, and that Jesus is the way in! When we eat this bread and drink this cup we remember, receive, and revel in all that Jesus has done for us. If you are hungry and thirsty for Jesus, you are welcome at this table.

At this time I want to invite those who will be serving to come and take their place—we have three stations up front and one/two in the balcony. In just a moment, when the music begins to play, you can come to one of the servers and you will be invited to tear off a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, and then eat with joyful thanksgiving.

Worship

Benediction