

The Word of God

*Sermon Preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast
Celebration Fellowship, Ionia, Michigan
September 17 & 18, 2018*

Scripture: Hebrews 1:1-4

Sermon

I was still in high school when I started reading the Bible. To tell you the truth, I was not impressed. I thought it was a strange book. Because it was nothing like anything I had ever read before.

Back in those days, I mostly read books about history. And some of the Bible did seem like history. Also back in those days, I read science fiction books. And some of the Bible did seem like science fiction. There was poetry in the Bible, too. But the only poetry I read back in those days was the stuff they made us read in school!

So I couldn't figure out what kind of book the Bible was. I couldn't figure out what the point was. Then I started reading the Gospels. And that changed everything.

NOW, DON'T GET YOUR HOPES UP. Because reading the Gospels did not turn me into a Bible-believing Christian. Actually, it was just the opposite. The more I read in the Gospels, the more I decided that the rest of the Bible was disposable. The more I read about Jesus, the less I cared for Moses and David and Ezekiel, never mind the book of Revelation!

But it got worse. Because the more I read in the Gospels, the more I focused on the actual words of Jesus. And the more I read the words of Jesus, the more I decided that other words, even in the Gospels, didn't matter all that much. I didn't have a red-letter Bible, but I acted like I did. And I was sure I knew what all those red words meant.

But to be honest, I didn't even like all the words that Jesus said. I mostly ignored his harsh words. Instead I stuck with "Blessed are the peacemakers." That sort of thing. So I had a cut-and-paste approach to the Bible, with most of the Bible cut out and tossed aside.

ONE DAY, ALL THAT CHANGED. I didn't know how. I don't know why. But I woke up one morning, and I knew I needed to take the whole Bible seriously, not just the parts I liked. I knew I needed to take the whole Bible seriously, not just the parts about Jesus. That day was a new beginning for me!

But you know what? The Bible still was a strange book to me. I still couldn't tell what kind of book the Bible was. History? Poetry? Science fiction? Eventually I learned an important lesson. I learned that the Bible is the Word of God. That was supposed to clear up all my questions. But it didn't, not in the long run.

AT FIRST, I LISTENED TO THE CHRISTIANS AROUND ME. I heard what they said about the Bible. I paid attention to how they used the Bible. And soon enough, I figured out that the Bible was a book filled with facts and with rules. I also figured out that the Bible was a book filled with doctrine, and with danger.

I became a Bible-toting literalist. I knew for sure that every word in the Bible was true, as true as anything could be. And I knew for sure that every verse in the Bible said exactly what it meant and meant exactly what it said. There was one principle to follow when it came to the Bible: *The Bible is the Word of God, and since God said it, you'd better believe it, every bit of it!*

So instead of ignoring parts of the Bible, I now had complete faith in the Bible. I had faith in every part of the Bible, every word of the Bible. Because the Bible was the Word of God, the Word of God between two covers. It was the truth, the answer book. It was a way to take God with me wherever I went. And whenever I wanted to, I could open the covers of my Bible and God would speak.

BROTHERS [AND SISTERS], DO YOU REMEMBER the folly of the Israelites? They carried the Ark of the Covenant into battle against the Philistines. They were sure they would win the battle, because God was with them, because God was in the box (1 Samuel 4). Well, they were wrong!

Brothers [and sisters], do you remember the wisdom of Solomon? At the dedication of the Temple, he said, "The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain [God]. How much less this temple I have built! (1 Kings 8:27). Well, Solomon was right!

In the same way, the Bible itself does not and cannot contain the Word of God. Because the Word of God is bigger than the Bible. The Bible itself says so.

"In the beginning was the Word." That's what John's Gospel says (John 1:1). And John is talking about a time before time, which was long before there ever was a Bible. John also tells us that, in the middle of history, when the time was right, the eternal Word of God became Jesus Christ (John 1:14).

So Jesus himself is the eternal Word of God. He is the Word through whom everything was made (Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:16). And now Jesus himself is exalted above the heavens at the right hand of the Father. And he is the Word that holds everything

together (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:17). No book, not even the holiest of books, can contain this exalted, eternal Word.

SO IT TURNS OUT THAT MY ORIGINAL INSTINCT was not completely wrong. When I first starting reading the Bible, my instinct was to pay more attention to Jesus than to anything or anyone else. And that's not so far off.

This is what John says about his Gospel: "These [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). And what John says about his Gospel is true of the whole Bible.

That doesn't mean we only read the words of Jesus. And it doesn't mean we ignore the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms. No; if we want to hear Jesus, if we want to see Jesus, we have to read the whole Bible.

The New Testament says that Jesus is God's "yes." The New Testament says that Jesus fulfills every promise of God (2 Corinthians 1:19-20). But if we don't read the whole Bible and if we don't take the whole Bible seriously, including Moses and David and Ezekiel, then we don't know what the promises are and we don't know what the "yes" is about. If we don't read the whole Bible and if we don't take the whole Bible seriously, including the book of Revelation, then we don't really know Jesus.

SO, YES, THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD. God speaks in the Bible. And God continues to speak through the Bible. But in the Bible, God says, "Here is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him" (Mark 9:7). You see, it's about Jesus. It's always about Jesus. Because Jesus is the eternal Word.

So, brothers [and sisters], don't make the Bible an idol. Your faith and your hope are not in the Bible. Your faith and your hope are in God: the God who speaks everything into existence, the God who speaks the promises, the God who speaks salvation, the God who speaks Jesus.

Your faith and hope are in the Word of God, who was with God in the beginning, who is seated now at the right hand of the Father, and who will come again with glory to bring the Kingdom and its justice.

✠

Glory and thanks be to God:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

✠