

WE BELIEVE IN THE BIBLE

2 Timothy 3:15-16

Last week we began a series of messages on what we believe as Christians. And for this reason I was especially intrigued by an article I read this week by Chuck Colson, entitled Doctrinal Boot Camp. In it this old ex-Marine draws numerous comparisons between the mission of the Marine Corp and the mission of the church. He begins by describing the rigors of Marine Corp boot camp – how in six weeks a recruit's entire way of thinking is reprogrammed. How every attitude, habit, and preconceived notion is beaten out of him, and how he takes on a completely new mindset about himself, his fellow soldiers, and his mission. And he goes on to say that the modern church has failed the present generation of young Christians because unlike the Marines, we have not prepared them to go to war against the forces of Hell. We have not engrained into them the basic truths of the faith that are essential for spiritual survival. To quote, he says, "Every successful Christian movement has embraced ways to effectively pass on the faith entrusted to the saints once for all".

So in the next three months or so we are going to Doctrinal Boot Camp. We are going to examine the pillars of our faith that make us who we are – followers of Jesus Christ, pilgrims and strangers in this world, like Abraham looking for a city whose builder and maker is God. We are going to equip ourselves to better fight the good fight of faith. And today we are going to address the nature of our training manual for boot camp, the foundation of our faith, and that is God's holy Word, the Bible.

Every building that is built to last must have a good foundation. A few years ago I was reminded of just how important a good foundation really is. I made a visit to one of the newer homes of our community, and when the lady greeted me at the door I asked her how she was doing. Well, it did not take her long to share with me that she was not doing too well. And when I asked why she told me that she was having a problem with the developer who sold her house to her. And then she took me in and showed me her problem. She removed part of a large area rug in the family room, and there was a huge crack running across the floor. That house had a bad foundation. And she was having trouble getting the developer to assume the responsibility for the repair. But this lady's problems were not nearly as bad as what we see occasionally on the evening news, when flood waters begin to encroach onto properties where million dollar mansions are built, right at the edge of a shore line or river bank. And we've seen whole houses just slide down a mountain side because the foundation washed right out from under them.

A year and a half ago the tallest building in the world opened in the little Arab country of Dubai. The Burj Khalifa is 2716 feet high. But one of the interesting tidbits

about the construction of the skyscraper is that before they started going up they had to go way, way down. All the way down to 164' below the ground to begin pouring the foundation, which would be about the height of a 13-story building. And when they had finished pouring that foundation they had used 45,000 cubic yards of concrete that weighed 110,000 tons. But they had to do it to support such a tall building.

Well, beloved, as important as the foundation of a building is, it is not nearly as important as the foundation of your faith. For when your child or grandchild has broken the laws of God or broken the laws of the land or both, and they've also broken your heart into a thousand pieces, the only thing that matters to you at that time is that you have a foundation to stand on to see you through. When you've just lost everything in a stock market crash or a crooked financial planner's ponzi scheme, the only thing that matters is that you have a God Who has promised to meet your every need. Young people, when your parents split up or when you long for them to just to care about you but you know that deep down they care only about themselves, the only thing that matters is having a solid foundation that will be there when you feel so all alone. And old or young, when the doctor comes walking in to your hospital room with his head down and begins to stammer for words to tell you the big "C" has ravaged your body, and you know that you are staring death square in the face, you don't care at that moment if your house has a good foundation or not. You care about the foundation of your life. When one minute we are on top of the world and the next our world comes crashing down on us, oh, how we need a solid foundation!! And there is no other solid foundation except the Word of God.

Years ago an unknown hymn writer expressed it probably as good as it has ever been expressed. He wrote:

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

Now, as Baptists we would say that this unknown writer must have been a Baptist, too. For we have historically believed that the Bible is truly a firm foundation, that it is the perfect Word of God. Listen to the words of our Southern Baptist doctrinal statement, the Baptist Faith and Message:

"The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy".

Well, this is what we say we believe as Baptists, but does the Word of God actually claim to be a perfect treasure of divine inspiration, truth without any mixture of error? Well, it surely does, and we are going to examine those claims. And after we do I want us to look at just a few examples that validate those claims.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to 2 Tim. 3:15&16. In v. 15 Paul calls the Word of God the “Holy Scriptures”. The word “holy” means “sacred”. It refers to something that deals with divine things that therefore to be devoutly revered. And Paul goes on in v. 16 and explains just why the Scriptures are holy. He tells Timothy that the Scriptures are inspired by God, that is, they are God-breathed. They have come out of the very inner being of God. They are not the most lofty inspirational thoughts of the great spiritual men of their times; thoughts of Moses, David, Isaiah, and the wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon. No, these men were only the scribes that wrote down the thoughts of God. God used their personalities and vocabularies to give flavor and variety to the Scripture, but what they wrote were His words, and not theirs.

Peter weighs in on the nature of Scripture in 2 Peter 1:21 (“...for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”). Beloved, Peter and Paul are exactly on the same page. Peter says that prophecy, which here means all of the OT revelation, was never written down because some man decided to give an account of the works of God, but that the men who wrote the OT were moved to write by the Holy Spirit. And the phrase “moved by the Holy Spirit” gives the picture of a sailing ship that is moved along by the wind, effortlessly, going wherever the wind would blow. And the OT writers, who Peter says were holy men, allowed the Holy Spirit to carry them along and write down every word that He inspired them to write.

So both Peter and Paul declare that the Scripture came from God, and not man. And Luke has the same belief as well, for in Acts 17:11 he says that when the Thessalonians heard the message of the apostles that they didn’t believe it totally without question, but they searched the Scriptures to see if those things were so. In other words, the Scripture was their final authority as to what God had really said. If they read it in the Scriptures then God said it and they could believe it.

But some people might respond to this by saying, “So what? Just because Paul and Peter and Luke said that the Scriptures are really the words of God and not the words of men still doesn’t prove that all of the OT is true. The OT writers may have been inspired by God, but they were still fallible, imperfect men who could make mistakes”. Well, those who believe this should consider three things. First of all, is God almighty or not? If He is not, then we all are certainly in serious trouble. For if the devil could do one thing at all he would indeed scramble the signals from Heaven to earth so the Biblical writers would not know clearly what God was saying. And we would not know what God really said and how we could come to know Him and be saved. But if God is almighty, then the fact that God spoke His word clearly and then

preserved the writers from error is not a problem. Secondly, is God righteous or not? If He is not, then we are all in more serious trouble. For if He is not righteous then we cannot trust anything that He says, and we cannot trust the Bible. But if He is righteous then we can believe whatever He says with total confidence.

Well, we learned in last week's message that God is almighty. He said in Isaiah 46 that His purposes will stand, and that He will do all His pleasure (46:10). And we also that God is righteous. He also said in the same text that He would bring His righteous near (46:13). And if God is righteous and if He is almighty, then we know that the Word He spoke through the OT prophets is absolutely perfect.

But there is a third thing that we should consider in our musings about the authority of the OT. And that is, what did Jesus think about the OT? Well, our Lord Jesus had no doubt about the nature of the OT. He said in Matt. 5:18, "For assuredly I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled". And in John 10:35 Jesus said, "...the Scripture cannot be broken". That is, whatever the Scripture says **will** come to pass. In Luke 24:44 Jesus said that all the things written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. And the testimony of the 1st century historian Josephus and of the NT itself is conclusive that when Jesus spoke of the Scriptures He was talking about the same OT that you and I have today, the 39 books of the Hebrew Bible. Now, beloved, I don't know about you, but for me, the testimony of Jesus settles the question once and for all!

But what about the New Testament? What evidence do we have that it is also the Word of God? First of all we see that even in the days of the apostles the NT was already being recognized as the Word of God. For in 2 Peter 3:16 Peter equates the writings of Paul with the OT, and in 1 Tim. 5:18 Paul equates the words of Jesus with the OT. And the early church fathers also attest to the authority of the NT. At both the Council of Hippo and the Council of Carthage the delegates officially confirmed that the NT was the Word of God, the same as the OT. But we must understand that these **councils** did not make the decision about what was God's Word. They merely confirmed the decision that God had already made. Sir Isaac Newton discovered the law of gravity way back in the 1600s. But Newton didn't make the law, he just discovered the law that God made when He created the Heavens and the earth. And in the same manner, these councils didn't select the books that God ordained to be in the Bible. They just made official what the church had already known and practiced since the days of the apostles.

Most of you know James Fowler, who has compiled a study entitled Bible Basics. And in that study James includes a chart of the NT quotes of seven early church fathers, such as Justin Martyr, who all lived between 100 and 340 AD. And the sum total of their quotes amounted to every verse in the NT except 11. And they quoted the NT as their grounds of credibility, as their source of truth. So considering

all of these proofs, there is no doubt whatsoever that the early church had the same high regard for the NT as they did for the Old.

Now, for the next few minutes I want to give you just a snap shot of the supernatural nature of God's Word, some indisputable evidences. There are so many it is hard to choose just one or two. But here goes. The Bible tells us in Job 26:7 tells us that God hangs the earth on nothing. This doesn't make sense to the logical mind, something as huge as the earth just to be suspended in space. The Koran's explanation is that the earth sits on the backs of elephants, who produce earthquakes when they. But the fact is the earth is indeed hanging out in space on nothing. But how did Job know this hundreds of years before Christ was born? God told him, that's how. We will talk more about this next week. But in whatever field of knowledge you pick, anthropology, astronomy, biology, geology, physiology, you name it – when the Bible speaks it is 100% accurate.

As you know, the OT is filled with prophecy. A few months ago we studied from the book of Daniel the prophecies of the rise and fall of the four great world empires – Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. And it all happened exactly like Daniel predicted it would years beforehand. And there are other prophecies in Daniel that are so minute in detail that liberal scholars say that the book had to be written after the fact and not before, and they give it an extremely late and inaccurate date. But perhaps the most striking illustration of fulfilled prophecy in the Bible is in Psalm 22.

Psalm 22 is a Messianic Psalm, that is, its primary application is not to the author, David, but it looks ahead to the Messiah of Israel, Who of course was the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is very clear from the very first verse, where David cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But the real message of the verse is the fourth cry of Jesus while He was hanging on the cross (Mark 15:34). But let's quickly glance at other verses in this psalm. Look at v. 6. David calls the Messiah a worm. The Hebrew word is *to'la*, and it refers to a little worm that that the Palestinians would crush and use the blood to make beautiful scarlet dye for garments. Oh, and that is exactly what they did to Jesus. He was crushed with a Roman scourge and with the nails of an old rugged cross, and the red blood that He shed, washed our sin-blackened hearts and made them whiter than snow.

Look at vs. 7-8 and 12-13. This is a clear reference to the ridicule of the Pharisees as Jesus hung on the cross. They were like bulls and lions walking back and forth, spewing forth insults, as it were tearing Him apart. Now glance down at v. 18. I don't have to tell you what this refers to. But the most vivid picture of the crucifixion is back up in v. 16. "They pierced My hands and My feet". How much more precise can you get? But the most amazing thing about all of these prophecies of Jesus' crucifixion is that crucifixion was not even used as a means of execution in David's time. He had never seen nor heard of crucifixion. It was not even invented until 400 years later by the Persians.

Can you imagine what David must have been thinking as he was writing all this down? "...I am a worm....for my clothing they cast lots....they pierced my hands and feet. 'Lord, what in the world are you talking about'?" But David was a prophet, and David knew that what he was hearing from God was not for him but for future generations, (1 Peter 1:12), and you and I are a part of those generations, and we can look back and see the miraculous fulfillment of his words and declare, "Only God could bring this about!"

Beloved, I could go on and on, giving you example after example of the supernatural nature of the Bible. But let me just say this. This book is not just God's perfect revelation of Himself. It is that, but it is so much more. It is God's love letter to you. It is God reaching out to you, saying, "I love you and I want to forgive your sins, save you from eternal damnation, and bless you beyond your wildest imagination. And here is the guideline for how all of this can come to you. Here is what life, death, and eternity is all about". The Bible is God's love letter to you. The very words that He used to express His great love for you.

So what should be our response to this precious love letter? Well, beloved, simply that this Book should be our highest earthly treasure! Listen to what David wrote: "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97). "I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches" (119:14). "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (119:103).

Sir James Barrie was a Scottish novelist and playwright of the early 20th century. He is most famous for the creation of Peter Pan. But one of his most meaningful works was a short essay in which he described his mother, who was a committed Christian and deeply in love with God's Word. It is said that she literally read her Bible to pieces and then stitched it back together. And when she was old and her eyesight failed and she could no longer read God's Word, her husband would still put the Bible in her hands, and she would just sit there and hold it reverently. Beloved, never forget. Behind a Bible coming apart is a life that will never come apart. "Great peace have they that love Thy Law, and nothing causes them to stumble" (Ps. 119:165).

I have received some great gifts on Father's Day over the years, but this year I received the best one without a doubt it is the best. I'll keep it until I die and then hopefully Janice will pass it along to the girls one day and it will stay in the family forever. And interestingly enough, it is the cheapest. It didn't cost Rebekah, Anna Katherine, and Emily anything but time. But each of my girls sat down and wrote me about 18 short notes apiece, so I could have one note a week to open up for the next year. And in those notes they've just said some personal things about their daddy that if you were to come up to me and say, "I'll buy that box of notes for \$10,000 dollars", I'd say to you, "Friend, the joy of my soul over these notes is worth 10,000 times \$10,000. No deal". But beloved, the Word of God should be more precious to me than that!

But I must say as we close that the Word of God, as precious as it is, is only a means to an end. And the end, beloved, is Jesus. This Book points you to the One Who is the Living Word, the Word that became flesh and dwelled among us. It points you to the perfect Son of God Who paid the penalty of your sins on the cross. It points you to the mighty captain of our salvation Who conquered death, hell, and the grave so that you could conquer death, hell, and the grave. And beloved, let me say, that if you love Jesus you will love His Word. Because there is where you meet Him. There is where you hear Him speak to you sweet words of love, comfort, and strength. There is where you get your instructions as how you can obey Him and please Him. And so you see, dear friends, here's the bottom line. If you really love Jesus, you will love His Word. And if you don't love His Word, you don't really love Jesus. How much do you love Jesus today?