

Interpreting the Bible

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 March 2000

Preacher: Claire Livingstone

- [0 : 00] Has everyone got a Bible? Is there some brave person that needs to go back and pinch them? I just want to start with a word association.
- So I'm going to say a word. I want you to say back to me the first word that comes to your mind. Pretty easy. Cat? Girl. Can't quite hear you. Black? Hot?
- Cold. Bible? There's a few. You might have, someone said book, I heard that. Someone else said God. Someone might have wanted to say but didn't say boring.
- Someone else might have wanted to say guilt. Well, every one of us has come tonight with different views and different experiences of the Bible.
- Some of us might be very familiar with it. Others of us may never have read it by ourselves at all. And others of us may have struggled to understand what we read.
- [1 : 01] It may all seem like gobbledygook. For a long time, I saw the Bible as I was growing up as very holy, almost magical, that sat on my shelf.
- And even just sort of sitting there made me really good, just because I had one. And I knew that you were meant to read it. So every now and then I picked it up and flicked through it so it looked like, you know, it was a really well-used Bible and had a bit of dirt on the outside of it.
- But I had absolutely no idea of what to really do with it. And I think sometimes we assume that just because people come to church or because kids grow up in the church, that they want to read the Bible for a start and that they understand it.
- So we're going to cover a bit of ground tonight. That doesn't mean that we'll cover lots and lots of time. We're going to look at different things about the Bible because some of it you may know, what we're going to talk about tonight, but some people sitting here may not know.
- And there may be people that you talk with who you can use some of these things to talk with them about it. So we're going to think about three questions. What's the big deal about the Bible anyway?
- [2 : 19] Why should we bother with it? And how do we get into it? But first let's just go back to a couple of more word associations. Short? Oh, tall, long.
- Football? I was waiting for that. Look, I had it written down here. Richmond. And Paul, I can't believe they lost when they kicked 20 goals. Oh, yeah, that's right.
- You sound like a Collingwood supporter saying that. Fast? Richmond. Ready, Paul? God? Well, how do you imagine God not as the coach of Richmond?
- What sort of picture do you have in your mind? I've seen him play cards. Oh, dear. You haven't seen him play cards. How do you think God relates to his creation to us?
- Do you have in your mind a dodderly old man who's sort of kind to everyone? That's what I'm talking about. Oh, dear. I think all of these I'm going to get.
- [3 : 35] So someone has to wait and see which one's Warwick. A cranky high school principal waiting to spring you doing something wrong.

Aloof and removed. Sitting high above. Just watching. Maybe having a little giggle now and then at the messes people make. Well, our first question.

What's the big deal about the Bible? The Bible is a record of God revealing himself to us. Who he is. What he's like. He's letting us in on his plans for the world.

The Bible is about God's relationship with his creation. With his people. The Bible is about us as human beings and our relationship with our creator.

Remember the Alanis Morissette song that said, What if God was one of us? Well, the Bible tells us about God becoming one of us in the person of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 41] What he did and why. Before we look more closely at the passage that was read to us though, we're going to look at a very quick summary of the Bible.

Because I don't want to assume that people know what it's all about. So keep your finger in 2 Timothy. That's if you've got a Bible. And turn to the index at the front.

Do you know it's okay to use the index? Have you been in Bible studies where everyone else seems to know where the book is and you just don't, you know, and you're flicking everywhere. It's okay to use the index.

And if you look at the index, you'll see that there are different books listed. So the Bible isn't like a novel where it's just one book. But it's made up of 66 books.

And then broken up into two sections. Everything before Jesus' birth is in the Old Testament. And everything after is in the New Testament.

[5 : 40] But it is like a novel in that there's actually one main story running throughout the whole Bible.

That's of God raising up a people who serve him. You could summarise it in all sorts of ways. And there are four main themes. Can we just have the first overhead? Four main themes.

Creation. God creating the world and his people. Fall. People rebelling against God. Redemption.

God calling his people back to him and showing mercy. Ultimately in Christ's death and resurrection. And return. Christ will return to judge all people.

And to bring in fully God's kingdom. These themes could probably be expanded a bit more. I've got a very condensed timeline in the next one.

[6 : 46] Do you want to put that one on? Now it took me ages to find those pictures on my computer. So you know you have to appreciate them. Creation and Fall.

Genesis 1 to 3. The very beginning of the Bible. God's plan was that his people would live with him as his people. Under his authority. But through rebellion that relationship was broken.

That's the setting of the whole of the rest of the Bible. And then I've summarised the whole Old Testament very, very briefly. There will be some names that you might have heard of.

Noah. Abraham. Through Abraham the nation of Israel. There's Joseph and Moses. There were kings and prophets. All sorts of other stuff happened as well.

Israel was in exile for a while. They were united as a nation. Then they were divided. They kept turning away from God. God had brought them back. He had turned away. Bring them back. And then comes Jesus' birth.

[7 : 52] Death and resurrection. So we're into the New Testament now. And with it the absolutely amazing proof of God's love for us. Romans 5.8.

God proves his love for us in this. That while we were still sinners. While we'd still turned away from him. Christ died for us. And his gift of forgiveness.

Then the Holy Spirit is sent. And the early church is born. We're also told that Christ will return.

And then God's kingdom will be completely here. With his people living with him in peace. Thanks.

That's the story of the Bible in a very small nutshell. So what's the big deal about the Bible? When the passage that was read at the beginning of verse 16.

[8 : 52] Paul writes that all scripture is God breathed. Inspired by God. Given by God. Just think about that for a minute.

Imagine a lovely clear night. Not quite like tonight. There's lots of clouds there. Where you can look out and see all the stars. Just stretching forever. Or you're standing on a beach.

And you can just see the power of the ocean. Or at the Melbourne Aquarium. With all those tropical fish. Where I always imagine it's like God was given a box of new Derwins.

Or Crayolas. And he just went crazy. Just colouring in all afternoon. Well that same God. The creator of the universe. Of the cosmos.

Loves his people so much. That he wanted them to know him. And to know how to live in his creation. Under his care and authority. So through human beings.

[9 : 48] God gave us the scriptures. His word to us. He's a speaking God. A communicating God. That's the big deal about the Bible.

Our second question. Why bother with it? Well let's see why Paul. The writer of the passage. Not the Richmond supporter. Thought Timothy should bother with it.

Timothy was a young leader in the early church. And Paul was writing to encourage him. And give him guidance in his leadership. He warns young Tim. About people who will try to deceive others.

And take them away from the truth about Christ. So he writes. Verse 14 and 15. Timothy's mum and grandma had brought him up knowing the Old Testament.

The sacred writings that Paul talks about. They didn't have the New Testament yet. It was still being written. But even the Old Testament Paul writes.

[11 : 12] Is able to instruct us for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. The Old Testament points us to Christ. When Paul talks about the sacred writings.

The scriptures. He's talking about the Old Testament. Now we have the New Testament. What was written about the Old Testament also applies to the New Testament. It's the whole Bible that instructs us about salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

So he goes on and says. Verse 16 and 17. All scripture is inspired by God. And is useful for teaching.

For reproof. For correction. And for training in righteousness. So that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient.

Equipped for every good work. Why bother with the Bible? Well the scriptures given by God. Not only show us how we can be put right with him through Christ.

[12 : 20] But teach us how to live as God intended. They help us to see what's wrong in our lives. They correct us. And teach us how to live well in the world.

Why? Verse 17 says. So that God's people can be mature and equipped to serve him. Hands up who's got a computer.

You might have to put two up if you've got two in your house. Keep your hands up also if you bought or read a how-to book to help you understand it.

You might have one but you actually haven't read it yet. I've got Windows 98 for dummies. Idiot's Guide to the Internet.

I'm not feeling real great about myself in the bookstore at this point in time. And Beginner's Guide to Computers. You just have to look in any bookstore or news agency and you'll see how-to books or mags about everything from building bookshelves to building websites.

[13 : 31] Raising babies to raising roses. Nintendo 64 tips to dating tips. Well, if I don't want to tape Ally McBeal instead of Law and Order, I'll read my VCR instruction sheet.

Even my new fridge came with a how-to, not book. Well, yes, it had a book but it also had a video. It's just so exciting sitting down watching a video about using a fridge that beeps at you.

Well, the Bible Society used to have a poster that read, when all else fails, read the manufacturer's instructions. And then it had a picture of a Bible underneath.

If the Bible teaches us what God is like, how to be put right with Him and how to live well in His world, why wouldn't you want to bother with it?

What's the big deal about the Bible? It's God speaking to us. Why bother with the Bible? It teaches us about salvation through faith in Christ and how to live well in God's world.

[14 : 55] Finally, how do you get into it? What do you do? Where do you start? Well, a good starting point is to get a translation that's easy to read. You mightn't find it easy to read the these and the thous of the King James Version that maybe you were given at your baptism.

So you might like to get a good news or a new international version. Or in the seats here there's a new revised standard version that you've got. You can read by yourself, with others, or by listening to Bible teachers.

It's important to be in a church that sees Bible teaching as vital and will encourage and support you like right here in Holy Trinity.

I grew up in a church where I don't know that the Bible was taught that well. So, say a sermon, most of us know about the story about Joseph who had all the coloured coat.

Well, it doesn't actually say coloured in the Bible. I don't know where that... Anyway, he had this coat that his father had given him. His brothers just got really jealous of him and threw him into a pit. Well, a sermon in my church would have been, Joseph was thrown into a pit.

[16 : 07] What are the pits in your life? Not a bad thing to maybe think about, but I don't know that that's what that passage is actually saying.

Isn't it just wonderful, I think, from this passage to learn that God's salvation plan, God's whole plan for the world can't be thwarted by human beings, that God uses a very human emotion like jealousy and uses that situation to place somebody who he's going to be using in a place that he wants.

So much more than what are the pits in my life. So, you've got your Bible in your hands. Then what? There were lots of different ideas that people had on the video and that's great.

So, you could start by talking to other people. You might like to start by reading something like Mark's Gospel in the New Testament. It's the shortest account of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

So, because it's short, you're probably not going to give up as quickly as if you started something like Jeremiah or Isaiah. Remember that the Bible was written in books and that's how it was intended to be read.

[17 : 22] If you read a passage from 2 Timothy and then another passage from Deuteronomy, maybe a verse from Ezekiel and another one from Revelation, well, you might get lots of different pictures in your head.

It won't necessarily help you understand the overall story of the Bible as well as if you focus on one book at a time. Some of the people mentioned using Bible studies or Bible reading guides and there are plenty around that can help you.

You could ask Warren or Paul about which ones would be best for you. But don't be afraid to pick up the Bible for yourself and start reading. And you could write down any questions you have and ask somebody about them.

That's where reading and discussing the Bible with other Christians is important too and most people talked about that, talked about meeting with other Christians. You could meet in a Bible study group or there are quite a few people at St. Jude's who are just meeting one-on-one with an older Christian, maybe even just once a month, as well as having their Bible study group.

But just somebody else who's been there, done that a bit more than them and who can encourage them in their faith and in their reading. Hearing sermons helps you benefit from the study and thought of other Christians too, especially if it's in a place like this.

[18 : 48] But whether you're reading by yourself or with others, there are three main questions that you can ask. So this is under the how to get into it. And these are basically the questions that preachers ask when they're preparing their sermons.

You can use these basic questions to help you bombard the text with lots of other questions. Who, what, where, why, how, when. Just ask all the questions you want.

Do you want to just pop that up? What does it actually say? So rather than jump straight away to how should I apply this today, it's really important to think through what is it actually saying?

Who wrote it? Who did they write it to? What was their situation? Why did they write it? What did they want to say? What did they want the readers to hear? Are there any words or ideas that you don't understand?

What does it mean? How would the first hearers have understood it? How does it apply? How did it apply then?

[20 : 00] How does it apply now? I think a great idea that somebody mentioned there is have a piece of paper next to you and write down your questions.

And then when you actually read it again, you'll often find the answers are right there in the text looking at you. But sometimes you might want to then take those questions and go and talk to somebody else about it. Thanks.

So what's the big deal about the Bible? It's God's word to us. Why bother with it? It teaches us about salvation through faith in Christ and how to live in God's world as his people.

How do we get into it? Use an easy translation to read. Begin with something like the Gospel of Mark. Talk with other Christians and ask three questions.

What does it say? What does it mean? How does it apply? But above all, come to the Bible with an expectation. God has spoken to us through the Bible.

[21 : 12] That's an amazing privilege. Come expecting God, the God who created you and loves you to speak to you.

Let's pray. Lord God, thank you that you loved us so much that you sent Christ to die for us so that we could receive forgiveness and be reconciled with you.

Thank you that you are not silent but have spoken to us through the Bible, through your word. When we read the Bible, open our hearts and minds to understand what we read, what we hear.

By your spirit, teach us, encourage us, rebuke us and change us. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.