

“CHRISTIANITY 101 (#4): NAVIGATION”

(2 Timothy 3:14-17)

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[PROPS NEEDED: (#1) “Pirates of the Caribbean 2” clip; (#2) My 3rd Grade Bible]

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 1-28-24]

--I--

1. Read CEB scripture: 2 Timothy 3:14-17 and Pray.
2. **[WATCH VIDEO-CLIP (“Pirates of the Caribbean 2,” Scene 7, 30:17-31:04) -Time 0:49]**
3. **[SHOW my 3rd-Grade Bible...]** This is the Bible given to me by my church when I was a rising third-grader. It's well worn and marked-in, and until I received my next Bible when I was teenager, this was the one I used to learn about God, Jesus, & things of faith.

A--Maybe *you* have a favorite Bible from your past sitting somewhere, too. Well, a recent survey showed that 85% of all Americans own at least one Bible, and the average U.S. household has at least four or more. ¹

B--But with all these Bibles, do we really know what's IN them? Or, like Pintel & Ragetti in the movie “*Pirates of the Caribbean 2*” (that we just saw a clip from)... do we just pretend?

1--Consider, for example, some of the responses received by Ann Landers in a Bible test originally given in the “Chicago Tribune” newspaper:

- a) *"Noah's wife was Joan of Ark;*
- b) *Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night;*
- c) *Moses went to the top of Mt. Cyanide to get the 10 Commandments;*
- d) *The 7th Commandment is "Thou shalt not admit adultery";*
- e) *The epistles were the wives of the apostles;...*
- f) *A Christian should have only one wife. This is called monotony."* ²

2--No wonder a Lutheran pastor once noted that “*The Bible is the best-selling, least read, and least understood book*” in human history. ³

C--Well, because there's still so much misunderstanding about the Bible, today as we continue our series “*Christianity 101*,” I want us to explore what the Bible *IS*, and how it exists to be a source of authority and hope in our lives today.

4. To understand what I mean, I want to first talk about several things that the Bible is *NOT*

--II--

5. For one, **the Bible is NOT a science or history textbook.**

A--It was never intended to be read or interpreted primarily as a source book about astronomy, biology, or physics, and neither was it written to outline a history of the world, of the Jewish people, the Christian faith, or even to be a biography about Jesus

1--Yes, there are many people (perhaps including many of us!) who would very much *like* the Bible to BE these things. ⁴

2--And yes, it does *contain* many things which *are* scientifically verifiable and historically accurate. ⁵

B--But these are *not* the primary things the Bible was written to address, and to try and read and interpret it through the lens of these (I believe) only creates confusion and misunderstanding. ⁶

6. Another thing **the Bible is NOT is a source-book for problem-solving.**

A--You know, many people (perhaps many of us) tend to turn to the Bible *only* when we're in trouble, or when we need a *specific* answer to a *particular* problem.

1--We reference it as if it were an encyclopedia of spiritual "home-remedies", or an index of "propositions" to be lifted out of context to address our issues --

2--...As if the Bible were a gigantic scientific experiment we can dissect into parts to help us to "fix" our problems and answer our questions. ⁷

3--Yet, even contemporary science tells us that if you dissect the parts of something, you *destroy* the whole.

B--So, even though the Bible *can* guide and help us when we're in trouble or facing decisions, we still have to be careful *not* to read/interpret it *merely* as a source-book for problem-solving. ⁸

7. So if these are a few things that the Bible is NOT, what can we then say that it IS? And what significance and authority can this very old book have for us *today*?

--III--

8. Well, first we need to recognize that **the Bible is (in fact) not just one book, but a collection of many books....(but) all ABOUT GOD.**

A--To be exact, it's a collection of 66 very *different* books, written over at least 1500 years, in at least 3 different languages, by hundreds of different men (and perhaps women),⁹ but all of which share a distinctly *theological* purpose --"*theology*" means "*words about God.*"

1--In previous weeks of this series, you've heard me say that *GOD* is the principle actor, character, and subject in the Bible.

2--Well, that means that the *primary* focus of what's written there is *not* science, history, or philosophy, but the story of *God & God's* interactions with humanity

B--Take the creation story in the book of Genesis (Chapters 1-2) as an example:

1--To read what's in those chapters as a detailed description of *how* the universe, the earth, and human beings were created -- or about *how long* it took to be created -- is to miss the point of the story in the first place.

2--It's not a story about WHAT and HOW (or how long). No. The Bible's creation stories were written to explain WHO did the creating and WHY. ¹⁰

3--If so, the so-called "Science Vs Creation" conflict is not really a conflict at all, because the Bible is a book... about a GOD who had so much love that He wanted to share it, so he created all there is (making the WHAT and HOW of the story subservient to the WHO and WHY).

9. But in addition to being many books *about God*, **the Bible also tells us HOW WE HUMANS are to find & have a relationship with God** (i.e, how to find "salvation").

A--No, the Bible *doesn't* tell us all we need to know about science, history, or philosophy. But it *does* tell us absolutely *everything* necessary for salvation and a relationship with our heavenly Father. ¹¹

1--Verse 15 of today's scripture bluntly says that... "*the holy scriptures ...help you to be wise in a way that leads to salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus*"

2--In its pages, you see, we discover not only *how* to find our way *back* to a relationship with God by accepting Jesus as our "*Savior*", but also how the Holy Spirit can help us to walk & grow with him daily as "*Lord*" of our lives.

3--That's the meaning of Verses 16-17 in today's scripture, where it says:
"16 Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, 17 so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good." ¹²

B--In other words, its purpose is not so much to *INFORM* us of facts *about* God, but to *FORM* us *IN* a daily walk of faith *with* God -- to allow its words to permeate our lives to such an extent that it *shapes* us into the kind of people God wants us to be.

C--The 19th-century evangelist Gipsy Smith once wrote that “*What makes the difference is not how many times you have been through the Bible, but how many times and how thoroughly the Bible has been through you.*” ¹³

--IV--

10. Most of us use (or are at least familiar with) various GPS travel apps (like Waze, Google or Apple Maps, etc) to help guide us to where we're going when we're driving.

A--Well, all of these apps do multiple things: they show the time, temperature, weather, restaurants and retail stores near you.

1--Some even show you how fast you're driving, or let you message in real time with other nearby drivers.

2--But while all of these things are great (and I might use some -- or all -- of them from time to time), if *these* are the ONLY things I use the app for, then I've missed its main purpose... *to get me to my destination.*

B--Well, its the same with the Bible: yes, it contains interesting tidbits of history, science, philosophy, politics, poetry, and ethics --but those are *not* why it was written.

1--No. It was written to teach us about GOD, and about how you and I can have a *relationship* with Him.

2--And (for me, at least) that's why the Bible is still significance and authority for me & us today... because through it, God speaks, inspires and shapes our lives.

3--In a very real sense, the Bible is the primary navigation tool in our journey to & with God, & to read/interpret it for any other purpose is to misunderstand it.

C--So, as your pastor, it's my hope and prayer that (if it's not already) this Book of books will become part of your heart and shape your life, and that we as a church will be a people who love it because it's God's Word for us -- God's “*Navigation*” tool for life.

11. **[PUT ON SCREE & INVITE ALL TO PRAY** (From Anglican Book of Common Prayer) :
“Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever, Amen.” ¹⁴].
12. **[CLOSING SONG: UMH#601, “Thy Word Is A Lamp Unto My Feet”,**
 OR Chorus “Word of God, Speak (by MercyMe)]

ENDNOTES:

¹ The report is from a 2021 study by Lifeway publishers, as reported at https://www.myleaderpaper.com/columns/bibles-are-everywhere-but-who-is-reading/article_ed3853ce-25e0-11ec-a7a0-d733fa501b76.html. You can find similar findings in the Barna study "State of the Bible 2021: Five Key Findings" reported at <https://www.barna.com/research/sotb-2021/>.

² From the Chicago Tribune article "*Holy Moses... Mount Cyanide?*" by Ann Landers (January 24, 1997), cited at <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1997-01-24-9701240241-story.html>

³ Rev. Andy Dzurovcik, Faith Lutheran Church, Clark, NJ, cited in Wesleyan Christian Advocate, Vol. 165, No. 15, February 2, 2001.

⁴ Christians who would like us to take what the Bible says about science or scientific things or history and make them things that we should teach within our public schools.

⁵ For example, the Bible *does* teach us that God is the Creator of all the universe. What it *doesn't* do, though, is teach *how* or *when* or in *what manner* it was all created -- it's primary concern is not with exact periods of time, or reconciling fossil records, or where the dinosaurs fit into the record of creation. No. It's primary focus is on the WHO & WHY of creation, not the WHAT and the HOW.

⁶ In addition, it also does contain many historical stories about the world, the Hebrew people, the Christian church, the life of Jesus, but it doesn't contain *everything* that can be known about those subjects. So at least in this sense, the Bible does *not* claim *for itself* what some Christians call "inerrancy" or "infallibility." From today's 2 Timothy passage all it claims is that God "*inspired*" all that's there -- but *doesn't* explain *exactly* what that means.

⁷ For example, there's one study Bible on the market today that divides every scripture passage in the Bible into different application categories, and then color-codes them for readers to simply "cut-and-paste" into their own experiences/needs.

⁸ For example, "*Judas hanged himself... Go thou and do likewise*" -- did you know that that's in the Bible? The problem is, that's not telling the *whole* story, because these are two independent passages taken out of context and put together -- but this is often what people do. And reading it this way, we can make the Bible say anything that we want! And that's exactly what some Christians do with the Bible -- they destroy the intent of the whole by cutting it up into parts and then use those "propositional" parts to justify their own biases and theological prejudices. And in the process, they destroy the integrity of the very message the Bible was written to convey.

⁹ Many of us talk about the Bible as if it were monolithic -- as though, when we open it, everything is written on the same level and all equally understandable. But in fact, the English word "Bible" comes from an old Greek word that literally means "book~~S~~" (plural). So, it's *not* one monolithic book but 66 individual and very *different* books --each of which happens to share a common story about God and God's relationship with humanity. Within its pages we find poetry, prose, law, historical theology, philosophy, personal letters, books that are hard to understand, and others that are easy to understand. As today's text from 2 Timothy 3 points out, God inspired them *all*, but to do it he used human beings who each wrote in different ways from different theological and social perspectives.

¹⁰ It's trying to teach us, in as clear terms as possible, that before anything else existed, God was that God was the initiator behind the "Big-Bang" or whatever it was that happened in the beginning -- ... that God, by his own word and power, called these things into existence. The story is *not* meant to teach us *how*, but *who* and *why* -- that God created this universe for a purpose and plan, and that it therefore belongs to him.

¹¹ In this sense, it is a book about *us* as human beings, too. It was written by human beings, inspired by God, but dealing with *our* dilemmas -- nothing was written within it that was written by accident or chance, but rather because it met a need or hit an issue that human beings struggle with. For example, the story of Adam and Eve is *not* just a story about how these two people messed up the rest of history by eating some forbidden apples. Instead, it's a story about how *all* human beings (including us today) have lived ever since the garden of Eden. For there is not a one of us today who hasn't heard the serpent whispering in our ear, "*Eat the apple. Eat the apple. Look how pretty it is.*" The point here is that it's a book (or books) about *our* dilemmas and problems -- things we *all* have to face.

¹² In a like fashion, Psalm 119:105 tells us that "[God's] word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path."

¹³ That is what John Wesley, founder of Methodist Christianity, meant when he said that he wanted to be "*homo unius libri*" ("*a man of one book*") -- to let the Bible teach and form him in how to walk with God daily.

¹⁴ Modified slightly (to change antiquated language, such as "thee's" and "thou's") from The Church of England's "Collect" prayer from the Second Sunday in Advent, The Book of Common Prayer, cited from <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/collects-epistles-and-gospels-2>.