

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY

Bible Basics
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Good Morning, Men!

I am a bachelor this week; my wife has been out of town. It has been great. I have a stack of dishes that high. I haven't put my dirty socks in the hamper a single time. The bed has been unmade all week long and I haven't put the toilet seat down!

We are starting a new series this morning. Before we do that I want to give a shout out to some guys in California, The Men's Ministry of New Life Christian Center. I welcome you guys this morning. I want to thank you for the surveys you filled out; it was very helpful in putting together the direction that the series is taking.

The message this morning is called Bible Basics. We are going to look at the purpose, history and internal claims of the Bible. The purpose of the series is to give you confidence as you use your Bible to help improve your life and the lives of others.

I was looking around at Bible sales (figures) and found an interesting article in the archives of the New York Times. In 1907, a hundred years ago, the title reads: *The Book that is the Best Seller – Daily sales of the Bible 40,000 copies exceeding the annual sales of most popular novels.*

Just out of curiosity do you think we are selling more, fewer or the same number of Bibles today, a hundred years later? Yes we are. We now sell about 100,000,000 Bibles annually; seven times as many.

That is way north of 250,000 Bibles a day, still exceeding -by far- the annual sales of the top best selling books in the world.

A staggering amount of Bibles are being sold, and when you think about it the Bible is fascinating. It is certainly the most studied book in the world. The most historically significant book in the world with its academic scrutiny, its critical scrutiny, and its scientific scrutiny this book has been under more microscopes, by more people than any other piece of literature that has ever been in existence.

Go to Acts 3:17. The first thing we are going to do is look at the purpose of the Bible.

Why do we need the Bible? What does the Bible do for us?

Looking in Acts 3:17, Peter has healed a crippled man and begins to preach a sermon at Solomon's Colonnade.

At verse 17, picking up in the middle of his sermon he says this:

17 "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.

19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you-- even Jesus. 21 He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. 22 For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. 23 Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.' 24 "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. 25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' 26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

You see here, the incredible reference to the Old Testament. Jesus had a set of scriptures to which he constantly referred. Peter says the reason I want you to know the things I am telling you is so you will not be ignorant.

When we look around at the problems men are facing today, whether they believe or not, is that most men are not leading powerful lives transformed by the gospel.

In Matthew 22:29, where Jesus is explaining something to the confused religious leaders - ignorant leaders- He says, the problem is you do not know the scriptures. As a result you do not know the power of God.

Why don't men lead powerful lives? Jesus draws this correlation to leading a powerful life back to knowing the scriptures. Peter says, you did this thing, crucified the Lord, because you were ignorant of the scriptures and what the prophets said.

In this series we want to deal with that a bit.

When I first got involved in motor racing, I needed to buy a helmet. I was looking for the cheapest helmet I could buy and found one for \$50. Before I bought it I asked a seasoned racer's opinion; he said if you have a \$50 head buy a \$50 helmet. What you ought to do is buy the most expensive helmet you can afford, to get the most protection. We should be after the most 'expensive' Bible to do whatever we can to protect our faith.

To give definition and perspective on the Bible there is so many ways to summarize it. The Bible is the final rule for all matters of both faith and life. The Bible works its way into every area of faith and life.

This week's perspective on the Bible: It is the Autobiography of God and the Story of His Creation. Including Mankind, Our Fall and God's gracious plan to redeem and perfect us. Organically assembled to say exactly what He wanted to say, exactly the way He wanted to say it.

Each week I will give you one of these perspectives.

C.S. Lewis, as many of you know is my favorite dead person. I always like quoting Lewis because I know he can never come back and embarrass me later. I am fascinated by him. If you wanted to get to know someone like C.S. Lewis, how would you go about doing it? He is dead! One thing you could do is read everything you could that he has written. I have personally read all his Christian literature. Then you would not be satisfied with that and would want to know what others have to say about him. You would look for some eyewitness'. I have read a lot of what they have had to say about him, to get their unique account of his life.

I have spent some time looking for video of C.S. Lewis, but unsuccessfully because of his era. I have also looked for and found one audio of him reading his book the Four Loves. I have two copies of that clip. I have listened to C.S. Lewis' voice. Imagine what it would be like to actually have audio of Jesus. Oh My Goodness! What if Jesus had waited until now to come; and two thousand years from now people could hear His voice?

It is so interesting His timing, exactly what he wanted to say, exactly the way he wanted to say it, exactly when he wanted to say it.

By the way C.S. Lewis is from Belfast, and you know who he sounds like?
He sounds exactly like Sean Connery.

That is why we have the Bible. That is the perspective of the week:

It is the Autobiography of God and the Story of His Creation.

We are getting at it by looking at what God said, the way he wanted to say it, and I will show you how it comes together.

The big idea for this week is: In the Bible we find a flawless record of exactly what God wanted to say, exactly the way He wanted to say it.

I am going to set out to prove that to you right now.

Is that really true? That is what we want to know. There are a lot of doubters.

There is this story about a guy that traveled on business and would always take his Bible with him because he found that air travel made him a little nervous. When there was turbulence he would take out his Bible to read for comfort. One day he was on a trip and sure enough turbulence came up, so he pulled his Bible out and opened it and began reading. The guy next to him looked over and smirked. A few minutes later the turbulence got worse so the guy said, to the man reading the Bible, You don't really believe any of that do you?

As a matter of fact I do. It is the Bible.

The guy said, What about the part where the whale swallowed that guy?

You must be talking about Jonah. Yes I believe that.

Come on how could a fish swallow a man and he still live?

That is a good question. I guess when I get to heaven I will ask him.

What if he is not in heaven?

Well, then you can ask him.

How did the Bible come to exist? You can spend a lot of time taking notes on this or you can just take it in. Even if you do try to write all these notes down it is not going to do you as much good as reading some sort of a primer on this. Bottom line is do we have the right Bible?

The word Canon, these 66 books – 39 Old, 27 New Testaments – are called Canon; which means rule or standard. When used in conjunction now with the Bible it has come to mean a collection of sacred writings. The sequence of how the Bible came into existence goes something like this: These eyewitnesses saw and experienced Jesus. And Jesus appointed them to be His witnesses. They began in their proclamation of what they had seen and heard, began what is called oral tradition. Then people realized as Christianity began to explode in the Roman Empire and Europe, they would need to start writing down these oral traditions. There began to come along side the oral tradition a written tradition and there were many gospels and many epistles (letters to churches) in circulation.

Towards the end of the first century, as you would imagine, a sorting process was taking place. The letters in the gospels that seemed to have the most authority and most accurately represent what had happened began to come into a common usage.

The Old Testament, as I said was Jesus using a set Canon of Old Testament scripture. It is possible that this Old Testament Canon was formalized as early as 300 B.C. We do know that there was a council that took place at about 90 A.D. The Old Testament Canon was virtually locked in for sure by 90 A.D.

For sure this Old Testament Canon became a fixed set of books.

The New Testament was not. It was yeasty, robust and organically forming. There were some interesting things going on. Irenaeus, an early theologian, was the first one to suggest the idea of a New Testament, something that would go along with the Old Testament. Some of the books that were floating around were the four gospels, but there were other gospels as well.

There was a gospel of Thomas; there were approximately 26 sacred writings around that are still considered to be valuable.

There is Paul's letter to the Laodicean for example. Some people wanted that to become part of the Bible in the early days. There are other books by early Christian fathers that carry a great deal of weight.

Around 150 A.D. there was a man named Marcian. Marcian came out very strong and took the gospel of Luke and stripped it down - to suit his own interests - and then ten of Paul's letters and said this is the Canon.

We have strong evidence that there was already a list in existence and Marcian was trimming down the list. He wasn't establishing a list; he was taking a list of what was probably already there and stripping it down. That early Bible would have included all four gospels, the book of Acts as a bridge to (at that point) 13 letters of Paul. This was then widely regarded the indisputable Canon, universally accepted and then other books that were generally accepted.

Very early, about the 2nd Century we already had 85-90% of the Bible in place. Twenty-two of the twenty-seven books were universally accepted; five of the books were generally accepted: James, Jude, 2 John, 3 John and 2 Peter. They were still not universally accepted, even Lutheran Reformation called James a 'strawy' little epistle and by the 16th Century he still didn't think that James needed to be in the Bible.

Now we know that Luther had misinterpreted James and had he interpreted James differently he would have come to a different conclusion about that.

These books were being discussed scientifically, academically, scholastically in every other way. In the early 4th Century, Eusebius came up with a grouping of books universally accepted, books that are generally accepted, books that were questionable and books that were heretical. There were many gospels and people just wanted in on the deal.

In other words, in trying to get to know C.S. Lewis you have to know who is for real and who is not for real. In the same way all these church leaders were doing the same thing. They knew who to accept and who to reject. They knew who the eyewitnesses were. They knew the people that had forged documents in the name of Peter and it would be obvious to them.

If you wanted to learn how the decision was made to determine whether or not there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq; you would have a methodology of how to find out that information. In fact there was a big documentary on TV about it and they talked to all the players. You can make your own decisions, but you can figure out who was and was not credible. If you have five people saying one thing and a sixth saying something not in agreement then you would know that the sixth person is either mistaken or he is making something up. You would know these things.

In Alexandria, Egypt -the second most important city in 367 A.D. - in Christendom after Rome there was a tradition that the Bishop of Alexandria, in his annual Easter letter, would write out his list of what he thought were the authoritative books that belong in the Canon. In 367 that first list was made by the Bishop Athanasius, the first list that syncs exactly to the Bible you and I read today.

The official sync date is 367 A.D. that we have for the Bible today.

In 393 and 397 in Hippo and Carthage and councils that took place there, these 27 books were confirmed as the Canon of the church and it is interesting, St Augustan was present at both of those meetings.

The Bible we have is organically developed; there are three qualifications:

- 1) From J.R. Packard- in order for a book to make it into the Bible it had to have apostolic authority or authentication.
- 2) It had to be Christ honoring and inline with existing teaching.
- 3) It had to be in continuous usage and acknowledgement and its use to be fruitful.

Bottom line is do we have the right Bible? Absolutely! There has been universal acceptance by the church that this is the Canon, since 367 and almost universal agreement leading up to that as it has been organically forming. Yes! We do have the right Bible.

That is the big idea: In this Bible we find a flawless record of exactly what God wanted to say, exactly the way he wanted to say it.

Through His spirit He inspired all these people to discern what should be in this final Canon.

The final thing today: what does the Bible say about itself?

Turn to 2 Peter 1:20.

What I wanted you to do in that last thing is to know that I knew what I was saying is the truth and that you would be able to have confidence in it. For example if I were trying to sell you a car and I spent hours explaining the mechanics, suspension and computer workings when all you want to know is can I drive this car? I want to go. But at the same time you do want to know that those things are there and they work. That is the balance I am trying to strike here.

In 2 Peter 1:20:

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Turn to Chapter 3:15:

15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

So even at this early state it was understood that Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was writing scripture. There are so many other verses. You know and I know because you can look in John 14:26 and 15:26 where it talks about how Jesus will give us the Holy Spirit and will remind us of everything that Jesus has said.

That is why when we read this book our hearts come alive; this is why when the men were walking with Jesus their hearts burned inside of them. The word of God is flawless and perfect. The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when He said to the prophet Isaiah: He will guide you into all truth.

He said to Moses: I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first (after Moses broke them).

He said to Jeremiah: This word came to Jeremiah from the Lord, This is what the Lord the God of Israel says, write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.

Jesus said to John in Revelations: write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches. It is everywhere.

Now, how do you apply this?

Remember what we are talking about. The problem is you do not know the power of God.

Knowledge is power. The purpose of this book is not to put a bridle on you. The purpose of this book is to take the bridle off. When you don't know the book the world has a bridle on you and the world moves you in the direction it wants to take you, but there is freedom in the gospel.

This metaphor has meant so much to me lately. Thinking about the difference between being bridled and being unbridled: a wild stallion running free. I feel like I have been unbridled by the gospel.

When we took a vacation with our family to North Carolina, we climbed White Side Mountain and had a picnic. There is a big flat spot that tapers off and if you walk out to the edge it is about two thousands feet down.

My son John was playing around and I kept screaming at him-Get back here! Don't play so close to the edge! This went on all lunch, because he was an active kid.

We continued on our hike and came to a place where there was a railing. You could walk along this narrow pathway with a railing on the right. On the other side of the railing was a two thousand foot drop to the bottom. I had no problem with my son being six inches from that same edge than when he was 250 feet from the edge of the same fall.

Why? Because of the railing, there was a boundary there that I knew would protect him. That is what the application is for us. It is a paradox really, we feel free when we know where the boundaries are. When you don't know where the boundary then you don't know how far you can go. The boundary is there to give us increasing confidence about the Bible.

The Bible is the flawless record of exactly what God wanted to say, exactly the way He wanted to say it. And it will set you free.

Let's Pray:

Our dearest Father, we are so grateful for this extraordinary best-selling book. I pray that we would each have confidence that we do have the word of God in our hands. That it is a flawless record and says to us exactly what you want to say with the precision and clarity with which you want to say it. I ask this in Jesus name, Amen.