

BIBLE M.A.P. #3
(Meaningful: Accessible: Practical)

Scriptures: 2 Timothy 3:16-17: John 1:1-5,14: Revelation 1:1-3

We have been talking about making the BIBLE, Meaningful, Accessible and Practical. So this is week 3 in our BIBLE MAP series. Let's begin with a question? Why is the Bible so very important to us as Christians, and particularly for us as Presbyterians? Here's what The Presbyterian Church in Canada believes about the Bible. This is taken from our Statement of Christian Belief called "Living Faith."

The first part is based on 12 different Bible passages, drawn from both the Old and New Testaments. Read with me.

**5.1 The Bible has been given to us
 by the inspiration of God
 to be the rule of faith and life.
 It is the standard of all doctrine
 by which we must test any word that comes to us
 from church, world or inner experience.
 We subject to its judgment all we believe and do.
 Through the Scriptures
 the church is bound only
 to Jesus Christ its King and Head.
 He is the living Word of God
 to whom the written word bears witness.**

The next section of Living Faith draws on another 8 Scripture passages, again from both the Old and New Testaments. Read with me:

**5.2 The Holy Spirit give us inner testimony
 to the unique authority of the Bible,
 and is the source of its power.
 The Bible, written by human hands,
 is nonetheless the word of God
 as no other word ever written.
 To it no other writings are to be added.
 The Scriptures are necessary, sufficient, and reliable,
 revealing Jesus Christ, the living Word.**

The third section is based on 9 Scripture passages, again from both the Old and New Testaments. Read with me.

Both Old and New Testaments were written within communities of faith and accepted as Scripture by them. Those who seek to understand the Bible need to stand within the church and listen to its teaching.

The final section is based on 13 Scripture passages, again from both Testaments. Read with me:

The Bible is to be understood in the light of the revelation of God's work in Christ. The writing of the Bible was conditioned by the language, thought and setting of its time. The Bible must be read in its historical context. We interpret Scripture as we compare passages, seeing the two Testaments in light of each other, and listening to commentators past and present. Relying on the Holy Spirit, we seek the application of God's word for our time.

Presbyterians simply hold the Bible in very high regard. In the book "Our Presbyterian Belief" Felix B. Gear writes:

"The leaders of the Reformation held that the Bible alone is our source of religious authority and truth . . . Since that time it has been an essential part of our Protestant, and especially our Reformed, heritage to view the Bible as our only certain rule for faith and practice."

That's why, for us as Presbyterians, knowing the Bible is such an important part of the expression of our faith. Now let me say this. We always have to remember that the purpose of the Bible is not to be a literary masterpiece. The purpose of the Bible is found in its message, in its teachings, in its revelation of God's plans, not in its literary style.

Listen to these words from the New Testament book of Second Timothy 3:14-17 (NLT). This is the apostle Paul mentoring his colleague in ministry, Timothy.

**14 But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught...
 15 You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. 17 God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.**

That means the primary purpose of the Bible is not to be scientific; or philosophical; or historical or literary. The primary purpose of the Bible is to instruct us in the way of salvation. The opening words of the New Testament remind us that this message of salvation is rooted in the OLD TESTAMENT, and finds particular expression in the NEW TESTAMENT. For example, Matthew Chapter 1:1

This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham.

John Chapter 1:1-5 and verse 14

**In the beginning, the Word already existed.
 The Word was with God,
 and the Word was God.**

2 He existed in the beginning with God.

**3 God created everything through him,
 and nothing was created except through him.**

**4 The Word gave life to everything that was created,
 and his life brought light to everyone.**

**5 The light shines in the darkness,
 and the darkness can never extinguish it. . .**

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

Old and New Testament held together as the message of salvation unfolds, and as it becomes centered in Jesus Christ.

Two weeks we took a quick tour through the Old Testament. Let's do the same thing this morning with the New Testament.

There are 27 books in the NEW Testament written by 9 different authors over a time span of fewer than 100 years.

It is the historical record of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the record of his words:

It is the story of his followers;

It is the account of the birth and development of the early Church in the years after the resurrection:

And it is a final book of prophecy that speaks to the present and future reality of Christians and the Christian Church, which is described in Scripture as "the Body of Christ."

And please remember this because it is so vitally important. In Scripture, the Church is a movement, NOT an institution, it's a living organism NOT a static organization. It is the people of God, NOT a building.

Unlike the Old Testament that was written in Hebrew, the New Testament was originally written in Greek, which was the common language of that time. Some of it was also written in Aramaic, which is a Semitic language still used in some parts of the Middle East, and which may have been the native tongue of Jesus.

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament is divided into four sections.

The first section contains THE GOSPELS. These are four in number;

MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE & JOHN.

That word gospel simply means "**good news**". The gospels tell us the good news of Jesus Christ and the salvation he offers us. The gospels are a mixture of biography and autobiography, written by the people, who gave their names to each book.

The second section contains one HISTORY BOOK: THE BOOK OF ACTS, or more correctly, THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES. In Greek, that word "**apostle**" literally means '**one sent forth, an envoy, a missionary.**' Usually, "apostle" refers to the disciples of Jesus, and to Paul.

The Book of Acts tells us about the return or the ascension of Jesus to heaven: the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church: the ministry of the disciples in the years following the resurrection: and the growth of the early church. It centers on three key people: Peter, the disciple of Jesus, who is now a leader in the early church. James, the brother of Jesus, who became the head of the church in Jerusalem: and Saul or Paul, a Jewish Pharisee, who

had a dramatic encounter with Jesus; who was converted to Christianity; and who became the greatest Christian missionary of all time.

By the way, the Book of Acts was written by Luke, the gospel writer, and ACTS is actually volume 2 of Luke's Gospel. That's why Acts begins with these words. Acts 1:1:

In my FIRST BOOK, I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit.

The gospel of Luke is the first book, Acts is the second book.

The third section of the New Testament consists of 21 letters of different lengths. These are personal or pastoral letters sent by an individual to another person, or written to a certain congregation, or to a certain group of churches.

The 21 letters are ROMANS, FIRST & SECOND CORINTHIANS, GALATIANS, EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, FIRST & SECOND THESSALONIANS, FIRST & SECOND TIMOTHY, TITUS, PHILEMON, HEBREWS, JAMES, FIRST & SECOND PETER, FIRST, SECOND & THIRD JOHN & JUDE.

Sometimes these letters are called "**epistles**", which is simply an old term for a formal letter that contains a teaching element. So sometimes one of these New Testament letters might be introduced at worship as, "*A reading from the epistle of . . .* " The letters all begin with a formal greeting typical of greetings in letters written around the same time. So the letter from Paul to the Church in Rome starts this way. Romans 1:1, 7-8:

This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News. . .

I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people.

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Peter's first New Testament letter begins (1:1):

This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

I am writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

The last section in the New Testament contains one book of prophecy. It's called THE BOOK OF REVELATION but it is also known as THE REVELATION OF JOHN THE DIVINE. Listen to how REVELATION begins. It's very similar to some of the Old Testament books of prophecy we looked at two weeks ago.

“This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the events that must soon take place. He sent an angel to present this revelation to his servant John, 2 who faithfully reported everything he saw. This is his report of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

3 God blesses the one who reads the words of this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to its message and obey what it says, for the time is near.

The Revelation was written by John, who in total wrote five New Testament books. The gospel of John, three letters called First, Second and Third John and the Book of Revelation.

At the time of writing REVELATION, John was an old man, who had been imprisoned because of his faith on the Roman prison island of Patmos. It was while in Patmos, that God granted to John a series of visions relevant to the time he lived in and also to the time that was yet to come. By the way, Revelation contains many Old Testament references.

Now there is a reason REVELATION is the last book of the New Testament. All that was begun in the first book of the Bible, GENESIS, is reflected in the last book of the Bible, REVELATION. Here's a quick comparison to illustrate that.

In Genesis, God created the heavens and the earth. In Revelation, God promises a new heaven and earth.

In Genesis, God says, "Let there be light". In Revelation, God says "Jesus is the light of the new creation".

In Genesis, sin is born. In Revelation, sin is destroyed.

In Genesis, Satan makes an entry into the human story. In Revelation, Satan makes his final exit.

In Genesis, death comes to humankind. In Revelation, death dies and eternal life is the theme.

OK. Why not go home today and pick up your Bible, and read some of the New Testament and the good news of God's salvation.

Next week, we'll talk about the Bible again. And remember you can find all the messages in this series on our church website.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Creator God,
We live in such a bad news world,
with wars, rumours of wars, rising international tensions,
millions of refugees with nowhere to go,
billions living in poverty,
and despite the wealth of our country
homeless people on our streets,
and families visiting food banks to simply survive.

Thank you, Saviour God,
for giving us the good news of Jesus Christ.
That where there is hatred, we might bring love.
Where there is injury,
that we might be your healing agents.
Where there is despair,
that we might be the means of providing hope.
And where there is death and dying
that we might proclaim eternal life.

Holy Spirit,
may our lives live out the words of Scripture.
May what we believe and what we say and what we do
be aligned with each other.
May we remember to pray that the good work begun in us by your Son
Jesus Christ be brought to completion
when we see him face to face.

We pray particularly today, God of the Nations,
for the people of the United States
as they prepare on Tuesday to elect a new President
after a very bitter and divisive election campaign.
Lord, heal that nation and
grant its new President wisdom to govern
in such a way as to bless all people.

These things we pray in Jesus Name. Amen.