

PENTECOST 24 2009: BIBLE SUNDAY MEDITATION
2 Timothy 3:14-17; John 20:30-31

BIBLE SUNDAY MEDITATION

It may seem a bit odd to have a "Bible Sunday." After all, the Bible is at the center of what we do in and through worship. The Scriptures inform our traditions. Many hymns are either taken directly from or inspired by verses in the Bible. The Bible is the foundation of our proclamation and our teaching in worship.

For believers in Jesus Christ, the Bible is the most wonderful and most important book. It contains the most important message for all the world = the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, it is also the most taken for granted and ignored book -- even among those who profess it to be "the Word of God."

There are many reasons given why people of faith do not study the scriptures as they should. They include:

- "I don't understand it."
- "It's just too hard, or too deep for me to comprehend."
- "I don't have a seminary degree to be able to understand all the historical background and theological doctrines that are a part of interpreting the scriptures."

The truth is that none of these reasons or statements is valid for why believers in Jesus Christ should not diligently study the Bible. The scriptures were inspired by God so that everyone might have an encounter with the love and hope God offers. It can, indeed, be a relevant word for our daily living. And it is meant to be read not simply as intellectual or

historical information -- be to introduce and deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord of life.

1 John 5:13 says this: *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God."*

-- The scriptures were written specifically for us!

2 Timothy 2:15 reads: *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a craftsman who does not need to be ashamed, and who correctly handles the word of truth."*

There are probably a number of you who have visited *Old Williamsburg*. (or perhaps, others have visited similar re-creations of historical sites.)

I visited Williamsburg along with a youth group. Our tour made a stop at the carpenter's shop. We watched as three skilled craftsmen used the period tools to hand-craft several beautiful pieces of furniture. It was amazing to think about the fact that the original craftsmen used such hand tools, by candle and window light, to make pieces of furniture which still exist today, and are used by many in their homes.

Only in watching someone with such skill do you truly appreciate the talent it requires. You also think about what it takes to develop such skill. One of the young men working in the shop that day told us about his journey. He had been doing such work for 20 years. And he described the apprentice process and his work experience there in Colonial Williamsburg.

Even our young people were impressed after hearing about the dedication required to become a skilled craftsman.

This is the image that is used in the verse from 2 Timothy. We are told to study so diligently that we can pass the same examination that would allow someone to become certified as a master carpenter. We are told to be ready to present ourselves to God as a highly skilled craftsman of God's word.

Can you do that?

Can you honestly say that you handle God's word with such skill?

Can you say that you have put in the diligent effort to develop such specific skills that you handle God's word and apply it in your life with the skill of a master carpenter?

This morning I want to define for you what I believe are basic skills for handling God's word. Some of you may already have these basic skills -- but perhaps, you need to either brush up on them -- or begin the process of developing them in ways that lead you to an ever-deepening relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

FIRST: WHY?

Why are we to have such Bible skills? Well, the Bible, itself, tells us to be diligent - consistent - in our study of the scriptures. But, we're not told to study the scriptures as some sort of punishment. Have any of you ever had to write out verses of the Bible as a punishment?

We are to study the scriptures because God loves us. And the scriptures are the foundational way that we get to know God and his love for us. God cares for us, and desires for us to have an ever-growing, and personal relationship with him. And God knows that we can most effectively build our relationship with him through prayer and the study of scripture.

And we are promised that by consistent study of the scripture, we learn life lessons. We learn how to live within the purposes of God, and build our trust in his wisdom and his ways.

BASIC BIBLE SKILLS:

The first principle of being a skilled craftsman is to have the basic skill sets necessary to work properly. I offer to you 4 basic skills for handling the scriptures:

- How to Handle Your Bible
- How to Read the Bible Properly
- Basic Search Skills for Finding Answers
- Memorizing Scripture

1. First, you should be able to use your Bible.

-Can you find the books of the Bible -- without the table of contents?

Can you find scriptures readily? Do you know which books are in the Old Testament, and which are in the New Testament?

We used to do "Sword Drills" where we were challenged to find a verse in the Bible before anyone else. They were fun competitions, but they also helped to teach where the books of the Bible were located.

2. Can you take a chapter of the Bible and read it properly?

Do you know the difference between the poetry found in Psalms and other parts of the Bible -- and the places where it is simply telling the story of what happened?

In knowing the difference, you can read and begin to understand God wants to teach you.

3. Can you answer simple life questions using the scripture?

This gets to the issue of interpretation and application to daily living. The reading and study of God's word always calls you to make a response. There is always a step of faith that God encourages you to make when you read and study the Bible.

4. Do you have a foundation of memorized scriptures?

Now -- I have to confess that this has always been a difficult task for me. I've always found it hard to quote the Bible, chapter and verse...as they say.

However.... there are verses that are certain basic verses that are "hidden in my heart." They are the Word of God that speaks to me, and through me, when I don't have a Bible near. Or in those times of personal trial and doubt. They are words of truth that strengthen me during times of temptation, and in times of loss and sadness.

Basic Knowledge Creates a Biblical Worldview:

Developing basic skills in handling the Word of God gives us the knowledge of the basic biblical principles of life, and they begin to affect our daily life. This is often referred to as having a "biblical worldview."

George Barna defined it this way: *"A biblical worldview is a means of experiencing, interpreting, and responding to reality in the light of a biblical perspective. It is a way of dealing with the world such that we ACT LIKE JESUS, 24/7, because we THINK LIKE JESUS."*

Having the basic skills for handling the Bible is just the beginning. I know some basic of carpentry -- but there's no way I can build beautiful furniture or tackle any major repair job. I haven't developed the skills beyond the basics.

So it is with our Bible skills.

For us -- fully developing our Bible skills is important because when the BIG things of life happen to us, we need to have spent sufficient time and effort learning and experiencing the truth and love of God to be able to go through life with firm faith and certain hope that God is with us and for us, through Jesus Christ.

And on top of that -- it is when we have a strong biblical worldview and a faith made strong through our experience with the Scriptures that we are able to be effective witnesses to others of the life-saving, life-changing, life-everlasting relationship we have with Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION:

The question put before you today is this:

Are you willing to honestly (and without fear) evaluate yourself, and do what you need to do to become a skilled craftsman in handling the word of God's truth?

The teaching is offered in and through the ministries of this congregation -- for both the skills and the basic knowledge. There are persons willing to mentor you. There are classes to take you deeper in your understanding and application of God's word in your life.

But, it's up to you as to whether you take advantage of such gifts.

With the remainder of our time this morning...

we are going to hear further witness to the power of the Scriptures to reveal the love and grace of God in the lives of others.

First -- we will hear from a life-long believer in Jesus Christ, and her experiences with the scriptures.

Then - we will hear how through the ministry of the Gideons -- the availability of the Bible has been the means through which the Spirit of God has worked life-saving and life-changing miracles in the lives of individuals who have picked up a "Gideon's Bible" someplace, somewhere.

WHAT MY FAITH IN THE BIBLE HAS MEANT TO ME
by Rochelle Pope (101 years old church member)

It never occurred to be that I would live over a hundred years.

I have been wonderfully blessed.

My philosophy of life is very simple. It is based on the proverb:

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust him in everything, and he will direct your paths."

There have been many times when I questioned, but I have always come back to the same philosophy and belief.

I have lived through the financial panic of the twenties -- when many families in our community lost everything. I survived the period of the Great Depression. Millions were hungry, or out of work. I have seen two world wars, in which friends and a neighbor lost lives.

Many times I wondered, "why?" --

My husband Claude died at the age of 61 with prostate cancer. I was so lonely. It was hard not to question.

My oldest son, Claude, died at 54. He also had prostate cancer.

Losing my granddaughter, and then my son, Pat (age 57, was just about more than I could endure....

If I hadn't had faith.....

I wouldn't be here today.