

First Baptist Church, Midland  
November 15, 2009  
II Timothy 3: 14-4:5

Pursue It! Proclaim It! Profit By It!  
A Sermon by the Rev. John P. Dick  
Theme: The Bible

Throughout the course of the year there are many Sabbath days that are designated in a special way. There is Thanksgiving Sunday (which happens to be next week), Christmas Sunday, Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, Pentecost Sunday, and on the list goes. But did you know that each year there is also a special holy day known as “Bible Sunday”? Perhaps you noticed the simple description included at the top of our worship bulletin this morning. *Bible Sunday was established in 1915 by the American Bible Society. It is celebrated each year on the Sunday before the American Thanksgiving, and its purpose is to help us focus on the place of the scriptures in our daily lives.* Well, today is that day.

So, I thought you might be interested in a little biblical insight. Some elementary students were given a Bible knowledge test and here are a few of their responses. In their words...

*Moses went to the top of Mount Cyanide to get the Ten Commandments.  
The seventh commandment is “Thou shalt not admit adultery”.  
Joshua led the Hebrews in the battle of Geritol.  
Jesus was born because Mary had an immaculate contraption.  
The epistles were the wives of the apostles.  
Paul preached acrimony, which is another name for marriage.  
A man should have only one wife. This is called monotony.  
Samson slayed the Philistines with the axe of the Apostles.  
The greatest miracle in the Bible is when Joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him.  
Jesus enunciated the Golden Rule which says to do one to others before they do one to you.*

The wisdom of a child... I think it’s fascinating to hear these responses because they not only make us laugh. They help us realize that our stories are being heard by the kids and being communicated to yet another generation. And that is good news! But that’s not all. The responses of the children enable us to hear through their ears and see through their eyes how confusing our stories can sometimes be. And let’s face it... who among us doesn’t occasionally feel a bit confounded by our Biblical traditions. In fact, let me give you a little quiz to see how you do. Some of you may recall we did this a few years ago on Bible Sunday, and I don’t think we did all that well. But I’ve got a new set of questions to rattle your brain. Are you ready?

- 1) At a banquet, Babylonian king Belshazzar saw:
  - a. The light at the end of the tunnel
  - b. The handwriting on the wall
  - c. That the die was cast
  - d. That his days were numbered

The answer is B. Belshazzar, who showed no respect for the God of the Israelites, profaned the golden cups taken from the Temple at Jerusalem by ordering his companions to drink wine from them while toasting Babylonian idols. He was then amazed to see a disembodied hand, writing on the wall.

Do you want to try another one? I thought so...

- 2) Satan claimed that Job's virtue resulted from the material blessings God had granted him. To prove that Job's goodness derived from his great faith, God allowed Satan to test him by punishing him with horrible afflictions. Job's children were killed, his crops were ruined and his wealth was destroyed. Yet Job remained faithful, telling his friend that he:
  - a. Made it by the seat of his pants
  - b. Escaped by the skin of his teeth
  - c. Came within an inch of his life
  - d. Would survive by hook or by crook

The answer is B. Job actually said, "I am escaped with the skin of my teeth." (Job 19:20)

Another?

- 3) Jesus began his ministry by performing miraculous cures that attracted huge crowds. Once, when Jesus was surrounded by a multitude, his friends said he was:
  - a. Out on a limb
  - b. On the path to perdition
  - c. Beside himself
  - d. On the side of the angels

The answer is D, right... "on the side of the angels." No, I got you... the correct answer is C. The press of the crowds and their response to his words affected Jesus deeply, for he seemed to go into a mystical state. "And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold of him: for they said, He is beside himself." (Mark 3:21)

Okay... one more. You ought to be able to get this one.

- 4) Ehud was:
  - a. The left-handed judge
  - b. Middle linebacker for the Detroit Lions

- c. Former lead singer for “The Temptations”
- d. The new guy who stands out in blizzards and hurricanes on the Weather Channel to tell you the wind is blowing really hard.

The answer is A. Ehud was the left-handed judge. We know that because the book of Judges tells us he took his sword in his left hand to thrust it into Eglon’s belly. The moral of the story... don’t mess with lefties.

We can have fun with scriptures, can’t we, but it does not negate for a moment the esteemed place we give to our spiritual stories as a people of faith. The meanings may not always be completely clear but our book, *The Bible*, is a reminder of the incredible relationship we hold with the One we call Creator, Sustainer and Savior. So in this spirit, let me suggest three things we should do with our sacred written texts... three suggestions we might take directly from the apostle Paul.

First, we can hear Paul saying the Bible is our Word from God so **PURSUE IT!** Can’t you hear that in verses 14-16 of chapter 3? “**...Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...**”

If ever there was an invitation to pursue the word of God, this is it. *Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed.* This is where we discover life’s great truths and it is from this source that we receive the keys to eternal life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it well when he said, “the word of scripture should never stop sounding in your ears and working in you all day long, just like the words of someone you love... accept the word of scripture and ponder it in your heart as Mary did.”

The fact is, unless we read the Bible regularly it’s impossible to ponder its meaning and pursue its truths, because this book is a living book which interacts with everyday experience. In our Sunday School class about a month ago, the presenter described it as “a lens through which we look to see God more clearly.” Put another way, the Bible isn’t simply a novel which tells an interesting story. We believe it is a living word with which we interact daily to direct our thinking, impassion our hearts and point us toward God. We referenced Bonhoeffer’s perspective. I also like the way Martin Luther once put it: “it is the cradle in which the Christ child lies, waiting for us to come and adore.” *The Bible is our word from God and we should pursue it.*

Then we can also hear Paul saying, the Bible is our Word from God so **PROCLAIM IT!** We are living in a darkened world, aren’t we, and people need light! But is it any different today than it was in Paul’s day? To be sure, our challenges are much wider in scope because our technology enables us to be far more destructive to one another and to the good green earth that God created. But the reality of our brokenness is still the same. We are separated from God and we need to share our story with the world so reconciliation can unfold.

Or as Paul put it, “**I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus... preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.**” (II Timothy 4:1-2)

I’ll never forget that these were the words my pastor shared with me on the day of my ordination. It would be tough to find a clearer directive than this. We all have a responsibility to tell our story because people need hope. And how will they receive it if we don’t share it. That’s why Paul’s admonition to Timothy is timeless: *I charge you.. preach the word... be urgent in season and out of season...*

Unfortunately, this word “preach” has taken on some negative connotations since Paul first used it and that’s too bad because its image is really quite provocative. Originally it connoted the heralding of trumpets preparing the way for the coming of a king. It carried with it tremendous excitement and an air of good news. That’s the emotion our message should generate for we are sent to proclaim not just the message of an earthly king but the Word of God!

John Wesley spoke for each of us when he said, “I want to know one thing, the way to heaven... O give me (the) book: at any price give me the book of God.” Now that will preach!

And that brings us to the final point. The Bible is our word from God so **PROFIT BY IT!** It is one thing to study this book and share it with others but it is quite another to live by it ourselves. Take its riches and allow it to color the way you see and interact with the world. Allow its peace to settle in your heart and its good news to light your way. You are a treasure in the eyes of God and he has sent this book as his love letter written especially for you so *profit by it*.

And there you have it... three directives related to the Bible... **Pursue it! Proclaim it! Profit by it!** And on that note, I’ll end with just one more thought.

About 250 years ago there lived a French poet and philosopher named Francois Marie de Voltaire. Had he been listening to my sermon this morning, he probably would have been chuckling under his breath the whole time for he didn’t believe either in our Book or our Savior. To the contrary, he had it in his mind to cast doubt and to destroy the credibility of the Christian movement. In fact, at one point he said “if we would destroy the Christian religion, we must first of all destroy man’s belief in the Bible.” You see, even though he stood against us, he understood the power of God’s word to change human hearts and hence the world.

But listen to this point of irony. As Voltaire went about speaking against our faithful movement, he was so bold that he predicted its demise. He said that within 100 years Christianity would be gone from the face of the earth. But do you know what happened? Within 50 years of his 100 year prediction, Voltaire’s house had been sold. You know who bought it? The Swiss Bible Society was the new owner and it was full of Bibles! Now, who says our God doesn’t have a sense of humor...

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Francois Marie de Voltaire.  
Swiss Bible Society