

“CHRISTIANITY 101 (#6): NAVIGATION”

(2 Timothy 3:14-17)

[PROPS NEEDED: (#1) “Pirates of the Carribean 2” clip; (#2) GPS video clip; (#3) my GPS unit]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 3-2-08]

--I--

1. Read Text: 2 Timothy 3:14-17 and Pray.
2. **[WATCH VIDEO-CLIP (“Pirates of the Carribean 2,” Scene 7, 30:17-31:04) -Time 0:49]**
3. According to a Gallup survey, 92% of all Americans own at least one Bible– the average U.S. household has 3, and 27% say they own at least 5 Bibles. ¹

A–But my question is: with all these Bibles, do we really know what’s in them? Or, like Pintel & Ragetti in the movie “Pirates of the Carribean 2” (that we just saw), do we just pretend?

1–One Lutheran pastor noted that, “*The Bible is the best-selling, least read, and least understood book*” in human history. ²

2–Consider, for example, some of the responses received by Ann Landers in a Bible test originally given in the “Vancouver Sun” newspaper:

1–Noah's wife was Joan of Ark;

2–Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night;

3–Moses went to the top of Mt. Cyanide to get the 10 Commandments;

4–The 7th Commandment is "Thou shalt not admit adultery";

5–Joshua led the Hebrews in the battle of Geritol;...

6–The epistles were the wives of the apostles;...

7–A Christian should have only one wife. This is called monotony.

2–Obviously, there’s still a great deal of misunderstanding about the Bible today (even among Christians)!

C–So as we conclude our series “Christianity 101,” today I want us to explore what the Bible *IS* and the role it exists to play in our lives of faith.

4. To understand this, I believe we first need to identify several things that the Bible is *NOT*.

--II--

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

A–God never intended it to be read or understood as a textbook on astronomy or biology or physics or cosmology, and neither was it intended to be a history of the world, of the Hebrew people, of the Christian faith, or even to be a biography about Jesus.

B–And yet, there are many Christians who would very much like it to be these things.³

C–Now it’s true that the Bible *does* contain some things which are scientifically verifiable and historically accurate.

1–For example, and it *does* teach us that God is the Creator of all the universe.

2–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.

D–Now, WE might be concerned with these things, but these are not the issues that the Bible was written to address, and to try and force it to do so just creates confusion.⁴

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

A–Too 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 often reference it as if it were a spiritual encyclopedia of “home- remedies”– “propositions” that we can simply lift out of context to solve our problems – ...

2–...As if the Bible were a gigantic scientific experiment that we can simply dissect into the parts that we think will help us to “fix” our problems.⁵

B–But friends, even contemporary science tells us that if you dissect the parts, you *destroy* the whole – so beware of reading/interpreting scripture as a source for problem-solving.⁶

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

–III–

8. Well, first of all, we need to recognize that **the Bible is not one book, but a collection of many books,... 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),⁷ but all of which share a distinctly *theological* purpose – “*theology*” means “*words about God.*”

1–In previous weeks, you’ve heard me say that *God* is the principle actor, character, and subject in the Bible.

2–That means that it is not so concerned with science or history or philosophy as it is with the story of *God* and His interactions with humanity.

B–For example, take again the creation story: If we read Genesis 1 to try and answer the “how” of creation, then we’re asking the wrong question.

1–The creation story is *not* a story about *how* the universe was created, or *how long* it took to be created, but *that* it was created, by *whom*, and *why*.⁸

2–In other words, it’s not a “Science” Vs. “Creation” story – it’s a “God-story” that tells *who* did *what* and *why*.

9. But in addition to being many books *about God*, **the Bible also tells us HOW WE HUMANS are to find and relate with God once again** (i.e., how to find “salvation”).

A–While it may not contain everything there is to know about science or history, we believe that it *does* contain absolutely *everything* necessary for salvation.⁹

1–Today’s scripture even says as much: (Verse 15) that...

[NRSV] “...*the sacred writings... are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*”

[MSG] “...*the written word of God [is] for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*”

2–In its pages, we discover *how* to find our way back to God by accepting Jesus Christ into our heart and committing our lives to him.

3–That’s the meaning of Verses 16-17 in today’s scripture:

[NRSV] “*All scripture is... useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.*”

[MSG] “*All scripture is... useful one way or another – showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way,... shaped up for the tasks God has for us.*”¹⁰

B–You see, the Bible’s 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 hearts to such an extent that it actually *shapes* us into the kind of people God wants us to be.

C–The 19th-century evangelist Gipsy Smith said 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.*”¹¹

–IV–

10. Let me summarize all we’ve said today with an analogy from another video. Watch...
[WATCH GPS Video (over shoulder of driver making turn & “arriving at destination”) –**Time 1:15]**

A–[**SHOW MY GPS UNIT...**] This is the GPS unit I recently received for my birthday, and it does all kind of neat things, like telling me where I can find certain restaurants/stores. It can clock my car’s speed and distance, and it even has a calculator!

1–But if these are all I use it for, then I’ve misunderstood its primary purpose (which is what we just saw on the video)... *to get me to my destination*.

2–That’s the same purpose of a good-old fashioned atlas or road map, as well.

B–And the Bible is the same way: it contains all kinds of interesting tidbits about history, science, poetry, life philosophy, and ethics – but those are *not* why it was written.

1–No. It was written to teach us about God and about how we as human beings can have a relationship with Him again.

2–And that’s why its so significant for us today... because through it, God speaks. Through it, God inspires and shapes our lives.

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

C–As your pastor, it’s my hope that this Book of books will become part of your heart, will shape your life, and that we as a church might be a people who love this book – God’s Word; God’s “*Navigation*” tool for us.

11. [PRAYER (From Anglican Book of Common Prayer):
“Blessed Lord, you have caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast [to] the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever. Amen.”]
12. [HYMN: #601 -- “Thy Word Is A Lamp Unto My Feet”]

ENDNOTES:

1. Reported in the North Georgia United Methodist newspaper Wesleyan Christian Advocate, Vol. 165, No. 15, Febr. 2, 2001.
2. Rev. Andy Dzurovcik, Faith Lutheran Church, Clark, NJ, cited in Wesleyan Christian Advocate, Vol. 165, No. 15, February 2, 2001. For example, the same Gallup Poll revealed that while 92% of Americans own a Bible, only 17% of them read it daily, only 23% weekly, and 20% have *never* read it at all.
3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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 "bookS" (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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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."

11. I think that's what John Wesley, founder of Methodism, 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.