

God's Word Is Authoritative

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 November 2022

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[0 : 00] Well, good morning to all of you again. Happy Advent as we begin this season together. We are going to do something this morning when it comes to the sermon that's a bit of a bridge.

We're going to look at a passage that is at the same time the end of our series that we've been doing on Scripture, but it also has some Advent themes, and so it'll sort of transition us into the Advent season.

And if you'll notice, I'm a bit hoarse, so I'm going to do my best up here. It's not COVID, but I'm going to do my best up here, so bear with me. Hopefully, my voice will hold out.

But we've been doing a series this fall looking at Scripture, and I think it's fair to say that most people have a fairly complicated relationship with Scripture, even people who have been Christians for a very long time.

And so, we've been looking at some of the things that Scripture teaches about itself. For instance, we've seen that God's Word is clear, and it's meant to be understood. We've seen that God's Word is sufficient, that it gives us everything necessary for salvation and godliness.

[1 : 13] We've seen that Scripture is reliable, that we can actually count on this book that we have in our hand to be a reliable transmission of God's Word. We've seen that Scripture is even missional.

And now, we come to the sort of final theme that we want to focus on, and so we're going to consider the authority of Scripture, the authority of Scripture. Christians believe that this book has authority.

I've read a lot of great books in my life. I have my list of favorites, my top ten. It's always changing. Many of you love to read. A lot of great books that have inspired me, challenged me, books that I will remember for the rest of my life.

But none of those books have authority the way this book does. This book has authority that is unique to these words. What that means is that unlike anything else ever written, this book has the final say on what is true, on what is real.

So, it's not just advice. It's not just wisdom from the past that we take into consideration. This book is actually meant to rule the hearts and the minds and the bodies of God's people.

[2 : 25] We're meant to sit under it. And so, we're going to look at this this morning because I think of all of the topics that we've covered, this is where most people have the hardest time.

The idea of any authority, much less the authority that we talk about being vested in this book, this book written thousands of years ago, the idea of that is absolutely ludicrous to modern ears.

And I think it's a bit ludicrous to a lot of Christians, even if we don't admit it. It just doesn't jive with anything else that we take seriously in our culture. And so, we're going to look more at this.

And we're going to do that by looking at this passage in 2 Peter chapter 1, verses 16 to 21. We're going to try to understand the authority of Scripture a little better. We're going to ask three questions as we look at this text.

Where does this authority come from? What does it mean for us? And then why does it matter?

Where does it come from? What does it mean? Why does it matter? Let's pray.

[3 : 25] Our Heavenly Father, we come this morning with all kinds of priorities, everything bidding for our attention, Lord.

And these are good things. Many of them are things that we need to attend to at some point in our day or week. But now, Lord, we desire to turn our attention to You and to hear from You by looking at Your Word.

And so, we pray that by Your grace, You would give us the ability to do that, that You would turn our hearts and minds toward You, that through Your wit and Word, we would hear Your voice, and that

we would come face to face with Your living Word, Jesus Christ.

And it's in His name that we pray. Amen. Amen. So, first of all, where does the authority that we talk about this book having, where does that authority come from? In 2 Peter 1, there's a theological debate happening.

The second coming of Christ is being debated. See, this is where it ties in to Advent. They're debating whether or not the second coming of Christ is actually going to happen.

[4 : 31] Is it going to happen or not? On the one side of the debate are the false teachers. These are people who have come in, and they're essentially saying, this is a cleverly devised myth.

People made this up, but clearly it's not actually going to happen. On the other side, Peter and the apostles are absolutely certain that Christ is going to return in glory.

There's no doubt for them that this is actually going to happen, that as we celebrate this Advent season, our hope is placed in something real and true. Jesus is coming back.

And so, we ask, well, why are they so sure that it's actually going to happen? And they give a two-part answer. In part, they're sure because some of them were there when Jesus was transfigured.

They saw Him glorified with their own eyes. And so, they have reason by virtue of their eyewitness experience to believe that Jesus is who He says He is.

[5 : 29] But the other reason they give is the one we want to focus on. They say, you know, it's not only because we saw this happen on the mountain, but also because this is what Scripture says is going to happen.

And if Scripture says it, it is therefore true. So, their response to the critics is essentially to say, the Bible tells me so. And that's the thing I want to focus on this morning, the authority of Scripture.

What is our basis for believing that this book, that these words have authority in a way that no other writing has? In verses 20 and 21, Peter says this, No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.

In other words, these prophecies are not merely the product of people sitting around and trying to make sense of the times and trying to make predictions about what they think is going to happen.

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

He's saying that there's a category of writing, unlike other kinds of writing, that is set apart. Because unlike all other written documents, there are certain writings that are not merely the product of human beings.

[6 : 48] They're the product of God Himself. And this is a reference to what is popularly known as the doctrine of the divine inspiration of Scripture.

And you know the word inspiration means breathed in. So, Christian theologians use this word to describe the idea that God has breathed His words into Scripture.

The classic text for this is, of course, 2 Timothy 3.16. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. You say, okay, well, that's a nice answer, but how does that actually work?

How does God breathe His words into Scripture? That sounds like poetic imagery. And so, some people think that this works sort of like a form of divinely led dictation, where God is sort of going along, and He says, you know, there's something I want to say.

And He sort of looks around, and He picks somebody, and He says, hey, you, grab a pen, take this down. And then the person sort of becomes like a vessel. You know, God sort of inhabits that person, and they become like a divine word processor, and they sort of channel God.

[8 : 02] And in that moment, they just sort of write what they are told to write by God verbatim. And then all of a sudden, God leaves them, and they say, what happened? And then they look down, and then there's this document, right?

And a lot of people sort of imagine that's always what I thought growing up, as I heard about this doctrine in the church that I attended growing up. I always thought, well, God just maybe just takes people over. Now, you lie.

I guarantee you some people in this room thought that. Maybe it was just me. That's called the doctrine of, or the idea of dictation. But as we look at the way Peter words it, that's not actually accurate.

And it's actually very important that we understand this, because if we think of it in terms of dictation, that's going to lead us to all kinds of problematic areas, and I'll talk more about that in a moment.

It's not actually accurate. Peter gives us a wonderful way of thinking about this. He says, human beings, as they write, are carried along by the Holy Spirit. Now, that same word shows up in Acts chapter 27.

[9 : 03] Paul and his companions are in a boat, and they all get into this boat, and they have in mind the direction that they want to go. And so they put up their sail, and they grab the tiller, and they say, we want to go in this direction.

But then it says a strong wind comes up, and the wind carries them along in the opposite direction. Right? So they put up their sail. They grab the tiller. They want to go this direction, but the wind carries them along in this direction.

And despite all of their efforts, at some point they just have to give up their attempts to fight the wind, and they have to allow the wind to carry them where it wants them to go, and ultimately where, as the story says, where God wants them to go.

So this word is really important and evokes a very important image. Human authors are sort of like people in a boat. And they sit down to write, and they are in their particular place and time and context, and they have in mind the things that they want to say.

But they sit down to write, and in a way they're putting up the sail, they're grabbing the tiller, they're saying, I want to write, I want to go in this direction. But then the Spirit of God carries them along.

[10 : 12] In other words, God sets the true course of their writing. What we have here is a kind of interplay between human and divine authorship.

We have human beings genuinely speaking their own words in ways that reflect their family, their culture, their level of education, their environment, their personality quirks, their temperament, their limitations.

But the words they use are also just those words that God wanted them to use. Because God is carrying them along. And you actually see this very clearly when you read the Bible.

You see it in the Old Testament and the New Testament. I'll just give one example for the sake of time. Have you ever sat down to compare the four gospel accounts? These are the first four books of the New Testament.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And just to compare these four, they're all telling the same story. The story of Jesus. But what we see when we compare them are four very distinct styles of storytelling that reveal four different personalities.

[11 : 21] Right? So Matthew's gospel reveals a writer who is very precise. He's very detail-oriented. He has lots of lists and numbers. There's lots of symmetry and structure.

A bit of a perfectionist, probably. Right? Now, some of you resonate with that. You're like, man, I like that style of writing. Right? Mark is very different. Mark is written by someone who is straight to the point, who is action-oriented, who doesn't waste time, who doesn't mince words.

And honestly, he uses relatively poor grammar. Now, you say, well, is God just having a bad day and God made some grammatical errors? No.

Mark did, as he was carried along by the Holy Spirit. Right? Luke's writing, unlike Mark, is elegant. Right? It reflects his Greek liberal arts background.

It reflects a man who is deeply compassionate and cares deeply about the poor and the vulnerable. His writing also includes details only a physician would notice.

[12 : 28] Why? Because he was a physician. We learn about that in Colossians, right? John, by contrast, has a very literary mind. John sees types and symbols in everything.

John loves irony. He loves paradox. He loves double meanings. We have four distinct human personalities fully represented in the writing, all four carried along by the Holy Spirit.

And what this means for us, by the way, is that we get to view Jesus through four distinct human lenses. And as I describe those personality types, there's probably one that you resonate with more than the others because of the way God has wired you.

And what this does is it gives us a rich, multi-layered, highly nuanced view of Jesus. It's a kind of four-dimensional view of Jesus that goes way beyond anything that a single writer ever could have accomplished.

And what we're meant to do is to take these layers of story and layer them one on top of another and then look down through them. And you see this incredible portrait of Jesus that just leaps off the page.

[13 : 43] Well, then, what does that mean? Does the Bible have errors? And then their faith starts to crumble down. And they begin to say, well, if the Bible has errors, then it can't be inspired. And if it's not inspired, then it doesn't have authority.

And if it doesn't have authority, then I can't believe any. Well, how do I know if any of it's true? But if we remember that the authors are fully human, that's no longer an issue.

We recognize that certain authors, because of their personality, simply aren't concerned with chronology. So certain authors are ordering their events thematically, topically.

They're trying to make thematic points rather than give a chronologically accurate account. So we have to hold on to the human element, realize who we're dealing with, actual human beings with styles of writing, right?

But if we deny the divine element, which other people are inclined to do, that's common and typically in more progressive circles, we're going to also run into problems. For example, if we don't like something that Paul says, for instance, we can't just write Paul off as a misogynist and a bigot and say, well, these parts of Scripture are divinely inspired, but not that part that Paul wrote.

[14 : 54] He's clearly a bigot, so we're going to ignore that part. We can't do that. Because Paul, though fully human, was carried along by the Holy Spirit, meaning the Holy Spirit led Paul to write what God had intended us to hear.

Right, so in answer to our first question, where does the authority of Scripture come from? All authority ultimately rests with God.

But Scripture is God-breathed, meaning God has, in a sense, delegated His authority to this writing, which makes this book utterly unique. That's our first question.

Now, what does that mean? What does that mean for us? What does that mean for me as I'm sitting down early in the morning, and I'm opening this book, and I'm reading whatever my reading is for the day?

What does that mean for me in that moment as I read those words? Peter says in verse 19 that Scripture is like a lamp illuminating the darkness.

[15 : 56] In other words, we live in a world of darkness. God has given us a lamp to live by. This is our lamp. Without it, we would be engulfed in darkness. So the whole course of our lives needs to be governed by Scripture.

Otherwise, we are walking in darkness. You say, okay, well, how does that actually work? How do I apply that to my life? Well, it seems pretty straightforward.

Just do what the Bible says. Right? End of sermon. Do what the Bible says, right? Have you ever tried that? I mean, you don't have to raise your hand, but have you ever actually tried that?

I'm not talking about just doing what a certain passage in the New Testament says. I'm talking about have you ever tried to do what the whole Bible says? Have you ever done it in a non-selective way?

Have you ever come across books like *A Year of Living Biblically* by A.J. Jacobs? Or *A Year of Biblical Womanhood* by the late Rachel Held Evans?

[16 : 57] If you've ever read either of those books, you'll start to see what I'm getting at. Both of these books came out of the author's attempts to read and obey everything in the Bible for a year.

Right? Slightly different emphases, but both books are essentially based on the same premise. Jacobs actually extracted, before he began his project, he read the Bible beginning to end, and he extracted over 700 rules to live by.

Now, they both take a very literal, wooden approach to interpretation, and that makes for a very entertaining read. And certainly that's a part of the hope there is, you know, books are, you know, they want to make their books entertaining.

For example, Evans read Proverbs 31, 23, which says that a virtuous woman's husband is respected at the city gate. So, she makes a poster about her husband, Dan, that says, Dan is awesome.

And she goes to the entrance to her town where the sign that says, Welcome to wherever in Tennessee. And she holds up this sign for a half hour on the side of the road. Dan is awesome.

[18:04] Right? Now, that's funny, but obviously we know that's not actually what the passage means. In the ancient world, the city gate was the place where the most influential people would gather, like the town elders.

And so, what that passage actually means is a husband who is well-respected in the community. Right? But these books actually do highlight a problem that we all need to wrestle with. Many Christians believe correctly that we should live under the authority of Scripture, but we don't actually know how to put that into practice. Because even with good interpretation, most of the Bible is not a list of rules, regulations, or creeds to affirm.

Right? I can imagine maybe living under the authority of the Ten Commandments. Maybe parts of the New Testament, places where Jesus is teaching. But what about all the rest of it?

Right? How do you live under the authority of the book of Judges? What does that mean? If you happen to be there and you're devotional. Right? So, what do we do?

[19:14] Well, most of the time we end up extracting rules or principles like Jacob's did, and then living under those. But the problem with that, you see, is that if we do that, if I read the book of Judges, and then I pull out some rules to live by, you know, maybe not principles for leadership, but maybe some other kind of rules, and I pull those out and I live by that, I'm not actually living under the authority of Scripture, am I?

I'm actually living under a list of rules that I have derived from Scripture. It's something else. And here's the problem with that, and this is the critique that comes from N.T. Wright.

This whole approach implies that God has somehow given us the wrong sort of book, and that it's up to us to turn it into the right sort of book that we can then live by.

And so that, according to Wright, is in fact a low view of Scripture. It's a low view of inspiration. A high view of Scripture would respect the fact that most of what is in here is not rules or creeds. It is stories. A high view of Scripture would recognize and respect the fact that God has given us, at the end of the day, a story. Or more accurately, stories within stories within stories within a grand story, a grand narrative that claims to be the story of history, the true story of history, salvation history.

[20:48] That is what God has given us. That is what God inspired. That is what He breathed His Spirit into, this grand story. Right?

And so a high view of Scripture would ask, how does someone live under the authority of a story?

And that is the real question. Right? Wright says this. Here's the example that he gives.

We ask the question, how do I live under the authority of a story? He says, well, imagine we found a lost Shakespearean play. And imagine we found this Shakespearean play, but it was left unfinished.

We only have the first four acts, but the fifth act is missing. And imagine we read the play, and it's the best play we've ever, it's the best of his works, and we decide we want to put this play on.

We want to perform this play. What would we do? Well, we would have to call in some well-trained Shakespearean actors, and what would they have to do? They would have to put themselves under the authority of the first four acts.

[21:52] They would have to learn that story inside and out, internalize it. Every nuance, every twist, every turn, every theme would have to be internalized. And once they lived under the authority of those first four acts, they would then have to improvise the fifth and final act.

And what you would need to have for it to be faithful to Shakespeare is two things. You would need to have continuity, so that it connects with the first four acts, but also improvisation.

Because they are truly and really creating something new, improvising a fifth act. And if you could have both, then you would be able to complete the play.

So, this is the way that right encourages us to think about Scripture. Take that idea and apply it to Scripture.

It is as though God has given us the first four acts of a play. Creation, Act 1. Fall, Act 2. The story of Israel, Act 3.

[22:58] And ultimately, the story of Jesus, Act 4. But the fifth act is incomplete. We only have scene one of Act 5.

The Holy Spirit has come. Jesus has risen and overcome death. The gospel is beginning to go out into the world. The church has been established and is beginning to grow.

And people are coming to faith. The walls between Jews and Gentiles have come crashing down. And we see people from every tribe and tongue and nation beginning to come into the church through the preaching of the gospel.

But it is left up to us to live out this fifth and final act. We have some guidance from the apostles in the New Testament on how to live, on how the church should function.

And we also have previews of how the story is going to end. Right? We have a vision of the new heavens and the new earth. We see a world where justice and peace reign.

[24 : 04] Where people from every tribe, tongue, and nation are praising the Lord. Where every tear is wiped away. Where death is no more. Where all things are made new. We see these previews of the end of the story.

But the rest of Act 5 has yet to be written. And it's up to us to live out this fifth and final act. In order for us to do that faithfully, it would require the same two things.

Continuity and improvisation. We would have to place ourselves under the authority of this story. Which means immersing ourselves in it deeply until we internalize it.

Until it reforms and reshapes the way we think and the way we feel and the way we act. That would require a deep understanding of every word in Scripture. Every nuance.

Every detail. It would require a lifetime of reading and studying and telling and retelling the story over and over and over. But the more we do that, the more it would set us free to improvise.

[25 : 10] To live a faithful improvisation. That maintains continuity with the story that came before us.

That aligns with and points to the hope that awaits us. Continuity and improvisation. Continuity and just as the Holy Spirit carried the biblical authors along as they wrote.

It would mean that we would have to trust that the Holy Spirit would carry us along. As we write the fifth and final act with our very lives. That I would suggest is a better way of thinking about what it means to live under the authority of the Scripture that God has breathed His authority into.

There's one final question that we need to ask with the few minutes we have remaining. And that's why does this matter? Because none of what I've said up to this point matters if we don't actually want to live under the authority of Scripture.

Right? Why would we allow an ancient book, even if it's an ancient story, to have the final say over every area of our lives? Verse 19 points us to the only reason we would.

[26 : 33] The only reason anybody would. The only reason we would.

This is talking about the second coming of Christ. The morning star rising. Jesus coming.

Illuminating everything. Heralding the coming of dawn and the new creation.

But also, in a sense, it is talking about a process that is ongoing in the hearts of all believers. As Jesus Christ, like the morning star rises in our hearts.

As He ascends. As He gains and establishes preeminence over all things. The morning star is rising in the hearts of His people. We don't believe in Jesus because of the Bible.

It's the other way around. We actually believe in the Bible because of Jesus. We believe in the Bible because the morning star is rising in our hearts. The plain fact is that no one held a higher view of Scripture than Jesus Himself.

[27 : 59] When He was in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, He responds by quoting Deuteronomy 8.3. He says, man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

So, in Jesus' view, Scripture is words that have come from the mouth of God. And when you look at His ministry, He knew Scripture by heart. He quoted it all throughout His ministry.

In every time of testing, trial, suffering, even at the moment of His death, He was quoting Scripture. He saw His entire mission as not doing away with Scripture, but fulfilling it.

Fulfilling every jot and tittle, everything that had been written. He saw as His mission to fulfill. He even defines what it means to be His disciple as abiding in His words.

John 8.31. If you abide in My word, you're truly My disciples. So, this is how Jesus viewed the Bible. And this is something that I've come back to again and again and again. If we believe in Jesus, then it means believing what Jesus believed about Scripture.

[29 : 03] If we don't like it, we have to take it up with Him. But here's the thing. Once we begin to read the story of Scripture for ourselves, if you are someone who has come to faith, the morning star is rising in your heart, God has given you the Holy Spirit, and you begin to read the story of

Scripture, Scripture, something actually begins to happen.

The more we read it, guess what? The more it begins to read us. We read Act I, creation, the way things should be, and something in us stirs because we long for such a world where there's no pain or death.

It says when somebody dies and you grieve, you're right. It shouldn't be this way. I knew it.

Scripture is speaking truth to me. We read Act II, the fall, and we reluctantly admit that we're not the good, upright people we like to think we are.

We know deep down that something is wrong in the world and something is wrong in me, and maybe no one else had the courage to tell me, but Scripture does. It's speaking truth to me.

We read the story of Israel and all of their attempts, all of their desires to be faithful, people who despite all of their good intentions and learning and effort cannot save themselves.

[30 : 24] They again and again and again go after idols, and reluctantly we admit we see ourselves in that story. We say that's me and my job. That's me with my family.

That's me with food. That's me with approval. I know I want to worship the Lord, but I keep getting torn away, and I keep going after other lesser things. I see myself in that story.

Scripture is speaking truth. And then we see a God who, despite all the rejection and disobedience of His people, sets a plan in motion to ultimately save and restore His people, His creation, at the cost of the life of His only begotten Son.

And then we read about the resurrection of God's Son, and how He ascended to the throne of heaven and now sits as the rightful King of all creation, and how He's calling all people to Himself, and how He sets out to heal the world.

You know, and at some point the morning star begins to rise, and we say, I want to be a part of that story. I want to be in that story.

[31 : 26] I want that to be my story. I want to have that kind of hope. I want to love and serve that King. I've never met anyone like Him. And you begin to see the real point here, friends, that the authority of Scripture is not a burden.

It's not something that can or should ever be forced on anyone. It's a gift. It's an invitation. It's a way out.

You know, those of us who live under our own authority for long enough, we begin to realize, oh my gosh, my life. When it's in my hands, it doesn't make sense. It falls apart. Those of us who live under the authority of Scripture for long enough begin to realize something about it, that this is the way to find freedom in life.

And so we do it not because anyone forced us to, but because we've tasted freedom, and we've tasted life, and we want more of it. And we do it because we know that the voice that we hear in Scripture, we begin to recognize that voice.

It's the voice of our Savior and King. Because the ultimate purpose of the written Word is to point to and bring us into relationship with the living Word, Jesus Christ.

[32 : 40] And when that morning star has risen in your heart, this is where you want to be. This is where you want to be. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for your Word. And we recognize here with this last point that we're talking about something ultimately spiritual. That no one can be reasoned into this. There's no apologetic that can convince me to kneel.

Lord, that is a work of your Holy Spirit. I pray that your Holy Spirit would be at work in us as we sing songs of Scripture, pray prayers of Scripture.

And as we gather around your table, Lord, we pray that you would minister to us and give us the grace, give us the grace to submit ourselves to you as our true King, through your Word. It's in your Son's name that we pray.

Amen.