

The Good News of God's Authority

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: 11 February 2024

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[0 : 00] Friends, I'm going to read one additional text, and this will be the text that I will be preaching on this morning. It comes from 2 Peter chapter 1, starting in verse 16. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was born to Him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. We ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven, for we were with Him on the holy mountain.

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Knowing this, first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation, 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.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, let me say again, good morning. I'm delighted that we can be here. I'm delighted that we can spend some time talking about this very mysterious encounter that we call the transfiguration and the implications of it.

[1 : 19] This morning in the lectionary readings, we're actually going to be focusing on this reading that you just heard from 2 Peter chapter 1, where Peter, who was a witness of the transfiguration, talks about how that transformed his understanding of Jesus, of the word of Jesus, and all of the words of Scripture.

So in a nutshell, we're going to be talking about spiritual authority as it comes to us through the Scripture, so the authority of Scripture. And I know that for some of us, the moment I say the word authority, that is a trigger word.

That in general, we as a culture, and some of us for very good reason, we resist the idea of authority. We live in a culture that is very, very, very resistant to the idea of any authority in our lives.

You know, we live in a culture that very much values something that has come to be known as expressive individualism. The right that we perceive ourselves to have to be true to ourselves, the fundamental right we have to pursue what we desire above all else.

The idea that anyone or anything would presume to have the authority to tell us how to live our lives, to tell us anything about who we are, is anathema. So this morning, we're going to be talking about knowing that that's the context, the authority of Scripture and how that works out in our lives.

[2 : 51] And my hope is that over the course of the next few minutes, that we come to see not only that Scripture has authority, but that that authority is actually good news, that it's actually tremendously good news over and above what we might believe about authority and its place in our lives.

So we're going to see that the best life, the most liberated, the most free life is actually found under the authority of Scripture.

So we're going to answer three questions this morning as we look at the text. Scriptural authority, why do we need it? Why do we need it? Where does it come from? And then how does it work out in our lives?

Let's pray. Lord, you have made yourself known. You're a God who spoke all existence into being. Lord, you spoke and there was light. You spoke and there was land and sea. You spoke and we came to be. And now we pray that you would speak again. Just as you at one time created all things, we pray that you would recreate us.

[3 : 59] That you would breathe new life into us. That you would remake us according to your word, Lord. We pray that so that we would benefit, become more fully human.

We pray that so that you would be glorified. We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen. Amen. So first of all, when it comes to biblical authority, scriptural authority, and our reaction may be this, why do we need it?

Why would it matter? The reality is everyone lives under some form of authority. Everyone answers to someone or something in their lives.

In traditional cultures, authority tends to rest with your family or your ancestors and the traditions that have been passed down to you.

Some of you may have come out of a more traditional culture, an Eastern culture where family and tradition matter most. And you are strongly expected to honor the ways of your people, to be faithful to the traditions that have been passed down to you, to honor the ways of your family.

[5 : 11] You live under the authority of family and tradition. Everything else is meant to be subordinate to that in your life.

And if you break that, if you break from the traditions of your family, that's seen as heretical. You're bringing dishonor to your family.

But, you know, most of us didn't grow up in a culture like that. Most of us come from a more postmodern Western culture, which is in many ways the very opposite of what I just described. If you think of a lot of the movies that we love, a lot of the stories that get told again and again in our society through books and movies and music, the postmodern hero's journey is the person, the individual who has the courage to break from family tradition, to break from mores and taboos, to break from the way things have always been done, and to forge their own new path.

To look within and to discern what is true for them, and then to have the courage to follow it out regardless of what it might cost them. And we watch these stories, we read these stories, we absorb these stories, and it feels right to us because that's the authority that we are used to, the authority of one's inner life, the authority of one's inner voice.

And so we love to think of ourselves as courageous heroes who forge our own path in the name of being free. So people say, I am my own authority.

[6 : 45] No one can tell me what to believe or how to live or who I am. The question that I want to ask with all due respect is, how's that working out for you? How's that working out for us as a society?

Are we truly as free as we believe ourselves to be? I would suggest, number one, that I don't believe that we, and I'm including myself in this, are nearly as emotionally free as we might think we are.

When you say that you're your own authority, when you say that you want to be true to yourself and no one else, how do you then go about deciding how to live? How do you navigate your day-to-day life?

Life. Most people end up following their feelings. When we say, look within, what are you really, you're following how you feel.

You're following your desires somewhere. So let's say we live that way for a while. Where does that lead us? Where do we end up? Right? What you find is that if you live that way for any amount of time, if you're following those inner feelings and inclinations and desires, they begin to lead you into certain things that start to take on greater and greater importance.

[8 : 06] You start to come to depend on certain things. Certain things start to be elevated until they start to become ultimate in your life. You start to find things that you cannot live without or that you don't want to live without, that life isn't worth living without.

Those things, in other words, start to become your master. You start to live under the authority of these things. Right? So if you find yourself unable to stop eating the food that you know is unhealthy for you and you're unable to force yourself consistently to eat the food that you know is healthy for you, then perhaps food or certain kinds of food are becoming your master.

And you're not as free as you like to think to eat in ways that will allow you to live a healthy, fulfilled life or to see your children graduate from high school.

Right? If you can't stop losing your temper despite your best efforts, you snap and you say hurtful things to the people that you love, perhaps anger is beginning to be your master.

If you can't stop conforming to what other people expect of you, if you can't say no when you really should say no, if you can't have direct conflict with people but instead you go along to get along, perhaps approval is starting to be your master.

[9 : 24] If you can't stop working and put down your laptop and put down your smartphone for at least a few hours or even maybe a whole day out of a seven-day week, if you're working nights and weekends consistently, maybe your career is starting to be your master.

If you can't stop hating the other political party and seeing them as subhuman, right, if you're filled with existential dread over the coming election, maybe politics is starting to be your master.

If you can't stop scrolling on your smartphone, then maybe dopamine is becoming your master. You see the point I'm trying to make? Live following those inner inclinations for any amount of time and you will begin to find yourself seeding ground.

You won't be as free as you think you are. One female writer put it this way, whatever controls us is our Lord. The person who seeks power is controlled by power.

The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by acceptance. We do not control ourselves, she says. We're controlled by the Lord of our lives. So if we allow that inner world of feelings to lead us, we will very quickly find ourselves not free but actually something like a slave.

[10 : 51] So we're not as emotionally free as we like to think. I would also suggest, with all due respect, that we're not as intellectually free as we like to think. The unfortunate news is most of us are almost entirely defined by the culture in which we live.

If you ask the average Westerner today, what is life about? You would probably hear something like what we've said, that life is about being true to ourselves.

Life is about not letting any outside voice like family or religion or social norms tell you who you are, look within. The thing we need to understand is that would have sounded absurd to somebody who was alive 500 years ago.

If you said that back then, people would think that you were crazy. Probably 100 to 200 years from now, that idea will sound utterly absurd.

But in this particular cultural moment, it seems to be the common sense answer that everybody would say. The thing that we need to understand is these ideas themselves are the product of certain influential thinkers who came before us, who brought us to this particular moment in which we live.

[12 : 01] People like Rousseau, people like Darwin, people like Sigmund Freud or Nietzsche or Michel Foucault, these European philosophers by and large who brought about a certain movement, a certain paradigm shift that then got fed to us in all kinds of cultural sound bites until we absorbed it and it became the common sense way to think.

To put a finer point on it, if you say that you desire to be authentic and true to yourself, meaning you only want to live by the things that authentically come from within you and not any outside forces, if that is your vision of life, then that is itself inauthentic.

Right? You've already failed at the task because those ideas didn't come from within you. They were fed to you from the outside. In other words, you're living your life according to the teachings of a bunch of old, dead European white men.

I'm not sure you're being true to anything inside yourself. Right? So what we need is to recognize that everyone lives under the authority of someone or something.

And so the question is not whether to live under the authority of someone or something. It's which authority should I put myself under? What is an authority that will actually allow me to be what I was created to be?

[13 : 28] Allow me to live the life that I was made to live? To, in other words, be truly free. And this is what we see in the Scriptures. Every other source of authority that we could talk about comes from within the human condition.

It is a human-generated authority and it has all of the limitations that come with being human. So they are all imperfect, broken forms of authority. This is why we have so many abuses of authority in our society.

But what we see here is that the Scriptures are utterly different. So where does this authority come from if it doesn't come from us? 2 Peter 1. Peter says that the Scriptures are utterly unique.

Unlike any other source of authority out there, and this is for at least two reasons. Number one, he says the Scriptures were written, the New Testament in particular, by eyewitnesses of the Son of

God.

When he says, we did not follow cleverly devised myths, he's talking the we is referring to Peter and the other apostles. We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[14 : 38] And he says, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He's referring to himself and the other authors of the New Testament, and he's referring to the fact that the books of the New Testament were written by people who either witnessed Jesus, his death, his resurrection, personally.

These are people who knew Jesus, who saw it happen, and who wrote it down. Or in some cases, they were people who recorded all of the eyewitness accounts they could.

They gathered them together and wrote down all of these accounts as well as they could. He's saying, these are not things that we heard, these are not myths that were handed down to us. I saw with my own eyes what I'm, I'm just writing down what I saw.

And he specifically references the transfiguration, which is very appropriate for today, which he personally witnessed, where Jesus takes three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, up on a mountain, and there Jesus is transfigured, and it is as though for a moment the veil is pulled back. The veil is pulled back, and they're allowed for just a moment to see Jesus in his glory. He becomes radiant, and Elijah and Moses appear standing on either side of him, and God speaks and says, this is my beloved son.

[15 : 56] Listen to him. In other words, he has authority. Peter's saying, this is not a myth. We saw and heard for ourselves these things that we're telling you.

And then number two, the second reason why the Scriptures have authority is that the Scriptures, all of the Scriptures, New and Old Testament, were inspired by the Holy Spirit. He goes on as though immediately, it's as though he's aware of a possible objection where people say, okay, well, you're eyewitnesses, and you wrote the New Testament, great, but what about the Old Testament? Does that mean that the Jewish Scriptures are rubbish, and we should only pay attention to your letters? And Peter says, no. No prophecy in Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. He's talking about the prophets, the Old Testament writers. 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. And I love this.

It's referring to what we commonly talk about as the doctrine of divine inspiration. And there are a lot of people who think of divine inspiration in a kind of wooden way.

[17 : 09] This idea that God sort of is coming along and He's like, you know, I've got something I really want to say. You. Take this down. And that the person sort of is taken over and all of a sudden they just start writing like a human word processor.

And then when God's done, He says, all right, and they're kind of released and then they kind of go about their life. That's not how it works at all. It's much more human to be totally honest.

Peter gives us this wonderful way of thinking about it. Human beings as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The same word carried along shows up in Acts chapter 27. Paul and his companions are in a boat and they're in a boat and they have in mind the direction they want to go and they're like, let's go that way.

But there's a strong wind and the wind blows them that way. They have in mind they want to go here but the wind says you're going to go this way. And Paul says, or Peter says, this is how you can think about the writing of the scriptures.

Human authors are like people in a boat. Right? They have their life. They have their personality. They have their personal agendas. They have all of the things that make them human beings. And they have in mind when they sit down to write that letter a direction that they want to go.

[18 : 19] And they put up their sail, so to speak. Right? They're putting pen to papyrus. But the Spirit of God carries them along in the direction that God wants them to go.

And sets the true course of their writing. And what we see is this incredible interplay between the human and the divine. You have human beings genuinely speaking their own words in ways that reflect their family, their culture, their education, their environment, their personality quirks, their temperament.

But the words they use also are just those words that God wanted them to use. We talked about this in our adult Sunday school class this morning, how even between the gospel writers you can

see vast differences.

The Greek that Mark uses is very abrupt. It's very basic. It's very immediately this happened and then immediately this happened and it's immediately this happened. Mark is very to the point. He's very action oriented.

He doesn't have time to waste with details. He's just like this and then this and then this and then boom. That's Mark. Luke is the most educated writer in the New Testament. Incredibly highly educated form of Greek that he's using.

[19 : 29] It's a completely different, it's a completely different experience. Right? Both fully human, both working within the limits of their education, both with their own agendas and audiences.

Very different in form. Both carried along by the Holy Spirit. Right? In other words, the Bible is just like Jesus. It is fully human and it is fully divine.

And we get into trouble if we forget either one of those things. Right? If we start to forget that the Bible is fully human when there are differences, say when there are chronological differences between one gospel and another and we say, well did this happen in the early in Jesus' ministry or later, if you have a very literal wooden understanding of divine inspiration, you see something like that and your faith starts to fall apart.

Well this must not be inspired, there's a contradiction here. But if you understand that these are fully human writers and that this author may be very concerned with chronological accuracy and this author isn't at all concerned with chronology because he's writing thematically, he loves the metaphors and the imagery and the double meanings, you begin to say, oh well these are just two very different human beings.

Just like I'm very different from other people. Likewise, if we forget the divine element, it can be very easy when we come across a place in Scripture that is troubling or unsettling or challenging just to write it off and say, well this probably wasn't even Paul who wrote this.

[20 : 58] I'm not even gonna. It tends to be Paul who angers people. That's why I'm using that example. Well Paul clearly just didn't write this so we're just gonna ignore that. No, what he's saying is every word of Scripture was written as the prophets, as the writers were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Every word. Not just the red letters. All the letters. So this is a source of authority that comes from outside all human cultures so it's not limited by our bias.

It's not limited by our blind spots. It's not limited by the particular cultural moment in which it was written and yet it's been written by a chorus of human voices so it's fully accessible and understandable.

It's written by humans for humans which is incredible but it's not limited by humans. And because this unlike other sources of authority comes from outside us, from outside the human condition, from God himself, it's meant to have the final word over all earthly forms of authority.

Right? So some other sources of authority might be tradition as we said. Might be science and reason. Might be your feelings in your personal experiences. All of these carry certain amount of authority and we should pay attention to all of them.

[22 : 11] But the scriptures according to this are meant to have the final word over all of these other sources of authority and thank God for that. That is good news.

Why? Well, we see examples all through history why this is good news. When tradition, when tradition dictated in the Roman world that life was about personal power and glory and that if you were poor or destitute you were probably getting what you deserved.

The scriptures called people to love and to care for the poor and the vulnerable. The scriptures compelled people in the subsequent centuries to build hospitals and orphanages.

It transformed the western imagination and how we think about the poor and the vulnerable. That would not be our first instinct in this century had it not been for the authority of the scriptures 2,000 years ago overruling human tradition and saying this is the way to be a human being.

It wouldn't have happened. When science, when science during the enlightenment created a hierarchy, a racial taxonomy that said certain races are evolutionarily superior over other races and so it is beneficial for those subhuman races to have masters and when well-known scientists were speaking from the position of science and saying this is what we've determined through our scientific rigor, the scripture said no.

[23 : 51] Every human being is created in the image of God and therefore no human being can be the property of another. You know, the first person in history that we know of to directly challenge

slavery as an institution was Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century.

He's looking at slavery which is universally practiced. He's looking at the scriptures. He's looking at slavery and he's looking at the scriptures and he's saying this doesn't add up and he's choosing to allow the scriptures to have authority over that institution.

So I say this to say now let's get a little personal. In our lives when society is telling me that I should be defined by my feelings, by my sexual desires, by my inner inclinations, that I should follow that over and above everything else, the scriptures say beloved, no.

You're meant to be defined by so much more than that. You've been created by the God of the universe. He's made you as an image of His glory.

He's poured His Spirit into you. His desire for you is that in everything you do you bring glory to Him. What greater purpose could there be? And I have a choice.

[25 : 07] Which authority do I allow to be my ultimate authority in telling me who I am or why I'm here? Right? So it's good news that the scriptures have authority.

Now how does this work out in our lives? What does it actually mean? Peter says in verse 19, the scriptures are like a lamp illuminating the darkness.

We live in a world of darkness. It's more than just there's no light. It means we can't think our way out of our own problems. Right?

Our thinking has been darkened. We can't get out of this on our own. We don't know up from down, right from left on our own.

We need an orientation. We need something to show us the way things really are. That's what light does. It shows you the way things really are. So God has given us a lamp to live by. Without it we would be engulfed in darkness.

[26 : 03] So Peter's saying the whole course of our lives needs to be governed by scripture. Every step we take we want to make sure that we are allowing the scriptures to illuminate the path.

Right? One step at a time. But how does that work? Right? Because here's the thing. The Bible is not just a list of things to do and not do. It's not just a list of you know, do this, don't do that, do this, don't do that.

The Bible isn't a list of doctrines. Believe this, don't believe that, believe it. Most of the Bible comes to us in the form of stories. So how do you live under the authority of a story?

You go to the Ten Commandments and you're like, that's reasonably clear. Some of the writings of Paul, pretty clear. He exhorts us to do this and not to do that.

But how do you live under the authority of a parable? How do you live under the authority of the book of Judges? Have you ever read that book? How do you live under the authority of that story? So what do we do?

[27 : 07] Right? There are people like the late Rachel Held Evans who write books you know, about living by every word of the Bible and they sort of take the Bible and they draw out all the rules they can and they're funny to read, right?

I think it's like a year of biblical womanhood I think. And it's a fun read because she sort of takes this very wooden approach and so, you know, when Proverbs 31 says that a woman's husband is respected at the city gate, she goes out to the highway next to the entrance to her town and she holds up a sign that says Dan is awesome.

That's her husband's name and it's funny but obviously that's not what that passage means, right? She's taking a very literal approach to it. So how do we actually do this? Most of the time what we do is not too far from what Evans did, right?

We take these stories and we extract from them rules or principles to live by and honestly, preachers are among the worst of sinners when it comes to this. It makes for a good sermon to just say, you know, here's the application, da-da, da-da, da-da, da-da, right?

We extract it out. But here's the problem with that. It's not that it's totally wrong but here's what N.T. Wright says, the New Testament scholar. He says, that whole approach implies that we have somehow that God has given us the wrong kind of book and it's like our job to turn it into the right kind of book.

[28 : 26] It's like, thanks God, we'll take it from here and we sort of turn it into something that we can actually use and Wright says, you know, that's actually a low view of Scripture. A high view of Scripture would ask, how does someone live under the authority of a story?

How do we take the book as it has been given to us recognizing that there are a lot of little stories and they all make up one big story that goes from Genesis to Revelation and how do we live under that story?

And so Wright goes on to give us this beautiful image. He says, imagine finding an unfinished Shakespearean play and deciding that you want to perform it. The script gives us the first four acts. The fifth act is missing and so it would be up to us if we want to perform this play to figure out how to live out and perform that fifth and final act. And he says, you know, in order to do that it's going to require a couple of things, continuity and improvisation.

You have to immerse yourself so deeply in those first four acts that they just become second nature to you. You have to study every word until you're just immersed in it, until you can channel it, speak it effortlessly, you're a part of the story, you're living in it.

[29 : 38] And once you have that continuity then you would have to improvise because the fifth act has not been written. You would truly have to improvise but in a way that maintains continuity with everything that came before it.

And he says, that's what we have with the scriptures. It's as though God has given us this four act play. Right? Act one, creation. Act two, the fall. Act three, the story of Israel.

And all that they were called to do and all that they failed to do. Act four, Jesus, the true Israel coming to do what Israel never could have done for the world, to bring God's blessing to the nations.

And then we have act five, scene one. The resurrected Jesus commissions the church, fills the church with the Holy Spirit fulfilling all of those Old Testament promises, ascends to the throne in heaven and says, now is the age of the church to go and to be the hands and feet of Christ filled with the Holy Spirit preaching and teaching the gospel, bringing healing to the nations.

But it hasn't been written. Or more accurately, it's being written right now. How do we do that? Continuity and improvisation.

[30 : 50] We immerse ourselves in the scriptures. We have all the way up through act five, scene one. And then we have a little preview of how it's going to end all the way over here in Revelation. Revelation. Somehow, between here and there, all of the heavens and the earth will be joined together.

Everything will be made new. There will be no more tears. There will be no more death or suffering or injustice. The King of the universe himself will come and dwell in the midst of his people.

There will not even be a need for lights because the glory of the Lord will illuminate it all. So somehow here in the midst of all of this suffering and uncertainty and injustice and struggle and strife, somehow we get from here to there.

So we know where it's going. So what does this look like in here? That's how we immerse ourselves in the story of scripture so that we can live under the authority of scripture.

And we say, well, how could we possibly do that? And I think if Peter were here, he would say, just as the Holy Spirit carried the authors along as they wrote the scriptures, so you should trust that the Holy Spirit will carry you along as you seek to live out the authority of scripture.

[32 : 09] Final question as we come to a close. As we consider all of this, why in the world would any sane person allow an ancient book written thousands of years ago to have the true final say over every aspect of our lives?

And verse 19 shows us there's only really one reason why you would be crazy enough to do that. And that's if you are someone in whose heart the morning star is rising.

The morning star is a reference to Venus, you know, because when you could see Venus in the ancient world, Venus was a sign that dawn was not far off. You see Venus and you knew dawn was coming.

Peter's using this as a metaphor for Jesus Christ rising in the hearts of his people. Right? We don't believe in Jesus because of the Bible. We believe in the Bible because of Jesus.

And we've encountered Jesus and we see the reality of the resurrection. We recognize he's the most important person who has ever lived that when he gives his life for us that that kind of love cannot be found anywhere else and we give ourselves to him.

[33 : 20] And then we say, well, how do I live the way Jesus calls me to live? And the plain truth is no one held a higher view of Scripture than Jesus himself. In the wilderness when Jesus is being tempted by the devil, he responds by quoting from the Scriptures, Deuteronomy 8.

You know, man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. He viewed all Scripture as coming from the mouth of the Lord. You know, Jesus knew the Scriptures by heart.

He quoted the Scriptures throughout his entire ministry and there are so many places where he says this needs to happen in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. If this doesn't happen then how could the Scriptures be fulfilled?

That was his chief concern. His words as he hung there dying on the cross were not simply his words in the moment. He's quoting Scripture. Scripture. So this is how Jesus viewed the Bible and the hard truth is if we don't like that then we need to take it up with him.

Because saying that you believe in and follow Jesus but then rejecting the authority of Scripture that's not possible. So Jesus himself tells us why Scripture is such good news.

[34 : 30] He says this in John 8, If you abide in my word you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Don't make the mistake of thinking that if you go out and try to be your own authority you're going to be free.

You're not. Jesus is telling us this is how to be free. God's authority has the power to set us free to be who we were created to be. Let's pray.

Lord we thank you for your word and Lord may this not simply be may this not simply be a few ideas to consider. I pray that your Holy Spirit would press this radically and deeply into our souls.

Lord we we are crying out and longing for liberation. We know that's why you have come. You've come to set us free. Lord that we might no longer submit to the yoke of slavery but rather as Paul says by becoming slaves to Christ we might find in that our true freedom to live as truly human people in the world for your glory.

We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen.