

Holy Scripture

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Date: 02 March 2016

[0:00] So, just a little bit of an introduction to the series that we're going to be doing these! next few weeks, since I haven't gotten a chance yet to talk to you about that. I've entitled the series Anglican Faith for the Christian Life. Basically what we're going to be talking about is as Anglican Christians, what do we believe, why does that matter, and how does it impact the way we live our lives as Christians and as a Christian community?

So, as I was thinking about how to kind of structure the series, I had already in my mind sort of the topics I wanted to cover, but I had to kind of ask myself where I was going to start, and I started with a question, basically. If we're going to be talking about what we believe, we have to start with the question of, well, how do we know what we believe?

So, consequently, tonight, I'm going to be talking about what it is that we believe about the Bible, and how we use it. Just to give you kind of a heads up, in terms of where I'm getting this information, I'm pulling it from a few sources. It's not originating in my own mind. Particularly, I'm using, to be a Christian, an Anglican Catechism, which is the new catechism for the Anglican Church in North America. I'm using the Articles of Religion, which can be found in the historical documents section of your prayer book, and provide sort of an overview of Anglican belief. And I'm also going to be using some, particularly, some Anglican writers.

I'm going to be using J.I. Packer tonight. I don't know if you're familiar with Dr. Packer, but he is a good one. I'm also going to be pulling out some C.S. Lewis at some point as well.

Indeed. Anglicans have all the fun. Alright, so I want to start off with a basic question. How do we know what we know about God?

[2:32] From the Bible. Alright, is it the only way we know about God? Paul said that we can see who God is by looking at creation.

Yep. So, basically, when we're talking about how we know what we know about God, we have kind of these two categories. We have reason, which is what you just alluded to, okay?

Where we use the minds that God gave us to observe the world around us and see what it tells us about a creator. And then we have revelation. So, reason is this category where, you know, God did give us minds to use.

We can observe the world around us and know something about God just from looking at the natural order. I'm not going to go into that a whole lot tonight. We're going to be talking about revelation instead.

But I just wanted to kind of raise that. Because it's important to have that sort of in the back of our minds as we're getting into the questions of how God speaks to us and how we know about Him.

[3:42] Alright, so, revelation. I'm going to give you a really technical definition of what that is. The stuff we can't figure out without God showing it to us. That's what revelation is.

Now, we live in a culture, I think, where there's kind of this false dichotomy between revelation and reason. So, you have like this narrative in the culture of, well, you can either believe in science or you can believe in the Bible.

Well, the reality is that without Christianity, we wouldn't have science. Science depends on believing that the world around us makes sense and is well-ordered and we can learn from observing it.

And so, that's what Christians believe, right? It's no mistake, no coincidence, that science arose from that sort of worldview. So, the point being that reason and revelation are not in conflict with one another.

But let's talk a little bit about revelation. The question of how does God reveal himself? Well, first of all, I think we can see God acting in human history, right?

[5:03] God made a covenant with Abraham. Well, before all of that even, he made the world and created mankind, made a covenant with Abraham, called Israel to be his people, Israel sent the

prophet, sent his son, sent the spirit on the early church.

So, God reveals himself by acting in human history. Well, we get the record of God acting in human history and the record of what God has revealed in the scriptures, right?

So, let's talk for a second about what we as Anglicans believe about the scriptures. Does anyone have any thoughts on that? Please feel free to share insights or ask questions.

I'm not, this isn't a lecture hall. Why is none of this in the history books? Moses or any other? I mean, it's, why isn't that?

That's a really good question. And I don't know because I don't write history books. I think, I don't mean that as a person.

[6:12] No, no. And I think that's a very good question. I think the part of it is that we all have, we all have biases, right?

People who write history books are no different than the rest of us. I think that they're probably, to some extent, reflecting the biases of the age that we live in now, which is very secular.

Yeah, there is that. Indeed. So what do we believe about Holy Scripture?

Well, as Anglican Christians, we see the Scriptures as the place where ultimately we find God's revelation. We say that the Bible is our final authority in faith and practice.

And we agree with St. Jerome, who wrote 1,600 years ago, roughly, that ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ. Right?

[7:21] We know what we know about Jesus because what has been revealed and recorded in the Scriptures, right? Now, something that I want to be kind of a focus for us because I think this is a really helpful way of looking at how we approach the Scriptures.

When I was ordained both times as a deacon and as a priest, as part of the ordination service, I had to take an oath that we call the Oath of Conformity.

Now, the Oath of Conformity includes the following. I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and to contain all things necessary to salvation.

And therefore, I hold myself bound to conform my life and ministry thereto. Now, three major things I want to focus on there in terms of what our church believes about the Bible as it's reflected in our liturgy.

First thing, the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God. Second thing, the Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation.

[8:36] And the third thing, Christian ministers and indeed all believers are supposed to conform their lives to the teaching of the Bible. So, let's start with one.

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God. Well, what does that mean? In case you were wondering, Dr. J.I. Packer is here to help and he says it better than I could.

So, I'm actually just going to read. If you haven't read Packer's book *Taking God Seriously*, it's really good. I would recommend it.

All right, so he gives two reasons we call the Bible the Word of God. Christians call the Bible the Word of God God's Word written, as Anglican Article 20 puts it, for two reasons.

The first is its divine origin. Jesus and his apostles always treat Scripture as the utterance of God through the Holy Spirit, transmitted by the agency of men whose minds God moved in such a way that in all their composing they wrote just what he wanted as their contribution to the text and texture of the full Bible that he had planned.

[9:59] The Bible's quality of being thus completely shaped by God so that it may and must always be read as God testifying to himself through the testimony to him of the human writers is its inspiration.

So we call the Bible the Word of God because of its divine origin. It came to us ultimately from God himself revealing what he wanted us to know about him.

So it's the Word of God because God inspired it. Now the second thing that Dr. Packer talks about is the role of the Scriptures to reveal God's mind to us specifically.

He says the second reason for calling the Bible God's Word is its divine ministry of revealing God's mind to us as the Holy Spirit gives understanding of what its text says and thus makes us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

the quality of thus communicating knowledge of God of his grace and of his Son is the Bible's instrumentality.

[11:18] So the Bible is inspired by God it's his revelation to us and also God uses the Bible to bring us to faith in his Son.

Now something that we need to be clear about here when we say that the Bible is the Word of God is that we have to realize that its authority if it is really the Word of God its authority does not change.

And that's why our church teaches the Anglican church historically teaches and I quote directly from the Articles of Religion that the scriptures are the final authority or I'm sorry I quote directly from the Jerusalem Declaration getting these documents mixed up.

The scriptures are the final authority and unchangeable standard for Christian faith and life. Final authority and unchangeable standard for Christian faith and life.

Now if we keep up on Anglican news or sometimes if we even watch the secular news we get the sense that this Anglican communion that we're part of has in some parts of the world stumbled into a total mess.

[12:49] Well here's why. the scriptures Anglicans historically have believed the scriptures are authoritative and they are the unchangeable standard.

Now some who call themselves Anglicans have departed from the historic Anglican position on that. And we've seen what happens.

Right? So scripture isn't the final authority and the unchangeable standard. The cultural norms are the final authority and the unchangeable standard.

Or my feelings or my experience are the final authority and unchangeable standard. people well well right so people when you start approaching scripture with the attitude of wanting your preferences and your will and your way of looking at things to be shaped by scripture and you flip flop that right and you start making scripture or trying to make scripture fit your preferences and your feelings and what you want the text to say that's where you end up and it's a mess.

Right? Well sometimes some people are certain faces get certain parts they don't like that part so they want it. Yeah yeah absolutely and we will get to that when we talk about how we're supposed to read the Bible.

[14:36] Because that's important I agree. So here's the thing the Bible should shape our experience and our preferences our experience and preferences shouldn't cause us to depart from biblical teaching.

We get that backwards we wander off into the wilderness so that's that's point one what we mean when we say that the Bible is the word of God what we mean about its inspiration and its authority. Let's talk about the next point the holy scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation this time I am quoting from the articles of religion excuse the Elizabethan English we will break it down contains all things necessary to salvation so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby is not to be required of any man but it should be believed as an article of the faith or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation so let's break that down a little bit in other words we as Anglicans believe that everything that we need to know to be saved can be found and improved by scripture we are to teach and to preach and believe what can be proved by scripture my task as a priest as rector in this parish my teaching and preaching office is to teach and preach the scriptures period now the

Anglican reformers when they adopted this sort of approach they were reacting against a medieval model of authority that was causing a lot of problems and it basically at that time in that place looked like this scripture and tradition together contain all things necessary to salvation along with the necessity of being under the authority of the pope basically so we have two sources of authority with that model right we have scripture and then we have tradition and they're ultimately equal and both infallible with that model the Anglican reformers took a different approach they noted rightly that tradition can err and sometimes does right you start doing something really weird for long enough it becomes tradition there's no way to correct your course if you're following that sort of model and you go off the rails now don't get me wrong we as Anglicans believe that the church does have

God given authority but that authority has clearly defined limits articles of religion going back to Elizabethan English again it is not lawful for the church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's word written neither may it so expound one place of scripture that it be repugnant to another wherefore although the church be a witness and a keeper of holy writ yet as it ought not to decree anything against the same so besides the same ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for

necessity of salvation well let's break that down the church is under the authority of God's revelation in scripture not the other way around the church is under the scriptures under the scriptural authority the scriptures judge the church the church doesn't judge the scriptures so there have actually been people who have said and this makes me want to pull my hair out because no one who is an orthodox historic anglican would ever say this well the church wrote the bible so the church can rewrite the bible no no no no the church as we go back is a witness and a keeper of holy writ we bear witness to scripture we don't change scripture to suit our fancies or our preferences so here here are some limits to our authority one we don't have the authority to violate scripture indeed funny how that works right so we don't have the authority to violate scripture we do that we have stepped outside the bounds of our authority nor does the church have the authority to teach what can't be proven by scripture when either of those things happen the church is in serious error i keep thinking of the times that jesus was talking like the pharisees and stuff and he would be saying you set aside god's truth for your own tradition neglecting the weightier matters of the law and all that sort of thing yeah indeed indeed and that's that's a perpetual problem you start yeah you start doing weird things for long enough and they become tradition and then if you have tradition as equal to scripture there's no way to correct the course once you've gone off track so that's that is the second point the third point is that we are to conform our faith and our life to the teaching of the bible now second timothy three paul writes to his protege timothy he says as for you continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed knowing from whom you learned it how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation [21:47] through faith in christ jesus all scripture is breathed out by god and is profitable for teaching for reproof for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of god may be complete equipped for every good work so the scriptures one make us wise for salvation through faith in christ because they reveal they they function as the word of god revealing what god wants us to know about his son and about salvation in him right and secondly the scriptures teach and train us in righteousness now something that we need to think about something that can be kind of sobering so that if we want to grow in our faith we have to be spending time with the scriptures have to be and we have to be present where scripture is rightly taught and where the gospel is preached so that's what we believe about the bible as anglicans how do we read and interpret the bible as anglicans well i'm going to jump to the jerusalem declaration and if you have never read the jerusalem declaration it is awesome it is a just wonderful statement of what it means to be an anglican in our time and in our world read it seriously but the jerusalem declaration says we believe the holy scriptures of the old and new testaments to be the word of god written and to contain all things necessary for salvation well again that should be familiar at this point but then it says the bible is to be translated read and preached taught and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense respectful of the church's historic and consensual reading well that's that's kind of fancy theological speak so let's break it down a little bit bible is to be translated read preached taught and obeyed in its plain sense so what's the plain sense well it's pretty basic um but people have the ability to mess this up read carefully what does the text say what can we tell about what the author intended to say a lot of errors can be avoided just by reading the plain sense of scripture now let's talk about its canonical sense and Rob you actually um really already brought this to light well what does that mean well does my interpretation of this passage contradict anything found elsewhere in scripture right if scripture is divinely inspired if it is

God breathed then it's going to be consistent you can spot error very easily and this happens a lot by checking how it corresponds with the rest of what God has revealed now in order to do that right we have to have we have to have a sense of what the Bible as a whole teaches right and that's that's part of the reason that everyone in the church needs to know the scriptures well because you know what there are there are people who will put on vestments put on a chasuble and get up and supposedly preach the word and say things that are not true and all of you as lay people it is your responsibility to know the scriptures and be able to spot that and call it out when it happens yeah so you you've got to be on guard because a number of you I think have seen firsthand and been damaged by the impact of what false teaching can do so do I have a sense of what the bible as a whole teaches when I read one passage do I interpret it in a way that is consistent with the rest of what the bible teaches and if it doesn't match up there's a problem because the bible is unified it sends a unified message because it's been revealed by God now let's talk for a second since we're talking about the unity of the scriptures let's talk about the

relationship between the old and new testaments this is something that our formularies our doctrinal stances as anglicans this is something that we address and this is something that gets mixed up a lot so let's think about that for a second the articles of religion tell us the old testament is not contrary to the new for both in the old and new testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by christ who is the only mediator between god and man being both god and man so as anglicans we believe in the unity of the old and the new testaments why is that well both are about salvation in and through jesus christ old testament and new testament it is about jesus now saint augustine of hippo said back in the fifth century he said the new testament lies hidden in the old and the old is unveiled in the new right we look at the old testament and we see prophecies we see signs we see we see types of christ who is to come and be our savior right we look in the new testament we see what all of those sacrifices what the old covenant what god revealed through the prophets we look back and see that it was all pointing to jesus all along we see that there is only one way of salvation there has only ever been one way of salvation that is god's grace to us in jesus christ now finally when we look at how christians read the scriptures how we particularly as anglicans read the scriptures we are respectful of the church's historic and consensual reading what does that mean well the anglicans you know we already established that scripture is our unchangeable standard and final authority that tradition is not an infallible source alongside with scripture but we do believe in the importance of tradition as anglicans now the anglican reformers rejected tradition as an infallible authority that is equal to scripture only scripture is infallible and tradition is subordinate to scripture right so what do we do with the church's historic and consensual reading of the scriptures what the church has through the ages said about these passages about these books which of course is another way of describing tradition right when we interpret the scriptures we ask what have the majority of faithful christians throughout time and throughout the world believed about this passage what have they believed about this topic now the answer that we get from that isn't infallible but it's generally an important and helpful guide to reading the bible rightly so much so that if an interpretation that we have is something that other believers have never thought of it's probably a sign that it's a bad interpretation I said this to the bishop this weekend after I complimented him on his sermon saying that he you know that's the kind of preaching that raises the dead he said well you know it wasn't original to me to which

I said well bishop you know when we're dealing in the realm of eternal truths we don't want to be original right if we are original that's a sign that we're probably going off the train tracks so we talked a little bit about how we read and interpret scripture as Anglican Christians let's talk a little bit more about scripture in our lives so I've already touched on this a little bit but I just want to reemphasize that without spending time in the scriptures without sitting under the preaching and teaching of the word we will not grow into our full stature scripture so what are some good ways to spend time with scripture well first of all let's think about how important it is to be present gathered with

[33:17] God's people for the reading of the word and the preaching of the gospel week after week after week another great way to spend time with scripture in fellowship with other believers is to take part in a small group or a Bible study and we have even just within our parish we have opportunities for that and we're about to have more opportunities for that another thing you know a number a number of Christians I don't think this is uncommon have never read all of the Bible and if you've never read all of the Bible that's no cause for being embarrassed I would just encourage you to read all of the Bible no matter how long it takes you do what you can and read all of it read the full counsel of God and what he's revealed in the scriptures and in terms of how long it takes there are a lot of programs and kind of plans that can say for example help you read through the entirety of scripture in a year those are widely available

I would recommend something like that particularly for those who have never had a chance to read through the whole Bible before another way to spend time with the scriptures praying the scriptures I was really pleased when I could unfortunately not be here that Raymond was willing to step in and do a teaching on praying the psalms yes pray the psalms absolutely we pray the psalms in our worship corporately right that should be part of our personal devotional lives too if we're not doing that we're missing out on something that's really incredible like I've heard it said that the Psalms are the original prayer book seriously they were written and used for worship for God's people another thing pray in the daily office morning and evening prayer now sometimes we pray the daily office together here at holy trinity we pray morning prayer that is something only when the priest is sick only when the priest is sick there we go this is true you can pray the daily office though without the

priest being sick you can pray morning and evening prayer and it will immerse you in the scriptures it will show my ignorance and say that I don't

I wasn't here that week so I don't know what that was it is morning and evening prayer and it includes readings from the scriptures every time there's a lectionary for that just like we have for holy communion on sundays prayers and in the age of the internet praying the daily office is easier than it's ever been because you can find websites that give you all of the specific prayers for whatever particular day it is and all of the readings you don't even have to go looking them up on your own being Anglican in the 21st century is awesome and it's easy with the internet and it's a way it really is another way to spend time with scripture reading scripture slowly prayerfully letting what we find there lead us to prayer and shape our prayers we reflect on what we've read we let what we've read shape our prayers now there's a fancy

Latin term for that called Lectio Divina and you might have encountered it it's description that's really what it boils down to we're letting the scripture we're contemplating the scriptures we're letting the scriptures soak in and then we're praying in a way that is directed by the scriptures that we've read and we're going to get a little bit of a chance to practice that here now let's talk for a second about the parents in the room and most of us are sensible enough not to have our kids out this late at night but I am not one of those people let's talk about scripture in our kids and for those who don't have kids or those whose kids are grown up guess what it takes a church to raise a child so so this is for all of us for our whole community well first of all obviously some kids are old enough to read and some aren't

I know from my own upbringing my mother was faithful about studying the scriptures with me we would sit down and open up the word and go through it together for parents I would commend that to you for those with children old enough to do that that was huge I can't even begin to describe the kind of impact that had on my life secondly kids even the little ones who sometimes make a lot of noise should hear the gospel preached now we don't often give kids enough credit especially small kids enough credit for their capacity for faith and even if they don't register everything and everything doesn't stick in their mind when they're hearing the word preached the Holy Spirit is still active when the word is preached the Holy Spirit is still going to be teaching them and forming them so it's important now for smaller children who might not necessarily respond well yet to

[39:39] Bible study you know talking with them about the scriptures about the faith as they are able to understand it praying with them teaching them the faith and there are lots of resources for doing this one of the things that I love and probably at least some of you are familiar with it the Jesus storybook Bible anyone familiar yeah so the Jesus storybook Bible is written for children although honestly I love it too and it's about how the whole of scripture points us to Christ resources like that are out there and they're great for kids so scripture in our kids it's important now before we split up there is something I want to say as we're talking about scripture in our lives how scripture forms us and shapes our prayer spending time in the scriptures is a habit sometimes that means it takes a little while to acquire the habit sometimes for some of us it takes a long time to acquire the habit

I do want you to know that if anyone is having trouble don't be discouraged and don't feel guilty God wants you to spend time in the scriptures because he loves you he wants to train you in righteousness and reveal himself to you more and more don't feel guilty just start slowly with what is manageable for you to do every day even if it's a paragraph!

start somewhere and keep going and be encouraged any questions before we split into group discussion how do you think memorizing scripture fits into that whole picture I would actually tend to put memorizing scripture under the same heading as praying scripture because when you memorize scripture it becomes part of you right it becomes part of your mind part of your heart and you find yourself praying the scripture that you've memorized even when you don't expect it it's there it's within reach and so yeah I would say memorizing scripture is an important essential component of praying scripture thank you any other thoughts or insights or questions at all just one you know scriptures spirit breathes but there were times that people like

Moses heard audible voices so you have it two different ways in some cases you have an audible voice these people heard in other cases it's just spirit breathes well so what we're dealing with there and I will be honest with you there is some kind of across the board in the Christian church there's a question of whether supernatural manifestations of God giving prophecy or speaking audibly to people there there are some who think that that doesn't still happen because we have the Bible it

did happen they would say that it happened then because the Bible hadn't been compiled yet I will tell you that I think that all of the ways in which God was active in the early church as we see in the New Testament through prophecy and tongues and all of those things I don't see any indication in the Bible that that stopped so I don't teach that right no and I didn't think so I didn't think you were and I think in general that's that's kind of as a congregation not really where we are but that being said if God is acting in that sort of way it will always be consistent with what has been revealed in scripture it will point us to what has been revealed in scripture and it will point us to Christ if it doesn't do that it's not from God I I think you're right Norm I think you're really right I I think a lot of it is us not so much I think you're still talking as much as you possibly can we just don't know how to hear it yeah indeed so would modern excuse me modern day prophecy then be sort of what he's talking about with the audible voice that's [44 : 55] God's audible voice now I mean we're probably most of us if not all of us are probably familiar with the fact that there's sometimes you know almost if it were an audible voice that God has spoken to you and some people have literally heard an audible voice like the the bishop when he was here he was talking about people in Islamic countries who don't have access to evangelists there are people who have had Jesus come to them in dreams and visions and reveal himself to them and they've come to faith in Christ that sort of stuff happens right thoughts or questions before we split up!

all right why don't we do that