

# Scripture Alone (Evening Service)

*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: 20 August 2017

Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[ 0 : 00 ] God, your word is a lamp unto our path and a light unto the world. We pray that tonight you would bring that reality to bear on our lives, our hearts, our minds, our souls, and our wills.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. As Aaron said, our theme this evening is one of these five pillars of the Reformation as we celebrate the 500th anniversary of that occasion, that event.

And so I want to begin with a quote from John Calvin, who you've heard a little bit about tonight.

And just affirming the importance of the history of the church. Before I read this quote from Calvin, in your pew there is, and don't pull that out, but there's a burgundy book.

And in the front of that is a calendar. And in that calendar kind of counts some remembrances of some really important figures in the history of the church. I'm sad to say that Calvin is not actually in that calendar.

But just to kind of note that there are other important figures in that. And over the past three weeks on these Sundays, the remembrances are assigned of people like Jeremy Taylor.

[ 1 : 22 ] It was about 100 years after Calvin came on the scene. Important Anglican, what we call divine. And then today we remember the life of Bernard of Clairvaux.

Some of you may remember that from the 12th century. And then a week after, or sorry, a day after next week, we remember someone by the name of Augustine of Hippo. Maybe you've heard of him. And I really like Augustine quite a bit.

And I don't know if you take selfies at all. But I figure the first person who took a selfie that got more views and more hits than anyone else throughout history was Augustine.

When he wrote something called the Confessions. You can imagine that, making your confession and having other people read that. But it was his expression of his relationship with God and the course of that over his life.

So let's hear this quote from Calvin as we begin here tonight on the subject of Sola Scriptura. If true religion is to beam upon us, our principle must be that it is necessary to begin with heavenly teaching.

[ 2 : 27 ] And that it is impossible for any man to obtain even the minutest portion of right and sound doctrine without being a disciple of Scripture.

So we come to this subject tonight of Scripture. And if you don't have a Bible, reach for that in the black book. Open it up to page 615. As we look at this next subject called Sola Scriptura or Scripture Alone.

After two weeks ago, we looked at Sola Gratia or Grace Alone. And last week, Aaron looked at Sola Christus, which is Christ Alone. And I wonder if you're going through this, anticipating tonight and the next two sermons on this subject, how you're thinking they all actually relate to one another.

I'm going to say that the five pillars don't stand alone, but provide a unified theological foundation for Christian salvation and discipleship.

So the five Sola's are for the purpose of understanding God's work of salvation in our life and in the world in which we live in. So how do these Sola's relate to one another? You know, each time you hear Sola, so you're hearing Grace Alone, and then Christ Alone, Scripture Alone, Faith Alone, God Alone.

[ 3 : 43 ] How many Alones can there be? I thought maybe there would only be one alone, right? Here's how I've kind of come to terms with it. I hope it's helpful to you. So we're talking about salvation and discipleship.

So it's salvation by grace alone, in Christ Alone, under Scripture Alone, for Faith Alone, and then to the glory of God Alone.

I hope that helps. You can see that actually there is a unity to this, and they don't stand alone, and they all complement one another. So we're not learning about the five Sola's as unrelated and independent virtues.

The Sola today is Scripture Alone, which follows Christ Alone, because it raises this question, I think, for us. How do we know, or who has the authority to say salvation is by grace and in Christ alone?

How do we know this? And the Reformers, they concluded this. We know salvation is under Scripture alone. That's what they're saying. Look at Scripture, and then you'll see that it's by grace and in Christ alone.

[ 4 : 48 ] Or, as the Anglican article says, holy Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation. We look to Scripture for our theology, for our life in Christ.

And it was contrasting two errors at the time. On the one hand, there was this error of their saying that the authority alone was actually in the church and in the bishops and in the systems of the church to decide what salvation looked like.

But on the other hand, there were those who were saying, no, it's about experience and reason and those things. That's how we actually affirm salvation. But the Reformers thought otherwise.

They said, Scripture alone is the standard of salvation, whereby we know grace alone and Christ alone, for faith alone, to the glory of God alone. So tonight, I want to defer, not just refer to Scripture.

What does Scripture say about Scripture? What does the Word of God say about the Word of God? And there are just two things I want to say about this from Isaiah 55. And the first one comes in verses 6 through 9, and that's the proposition of God's Word.

[ 5 : 53 ] And the second half is about the promise of God's Word. So, let's start with a proposition of God's Word. When you hear the word proposition, maybe a number of thoughts come to your mind. Maybe it's the marriage proposition.

Flood your imagination. You have really kind of good thoughts about what that might look like, thinking about that proposal. Or maybe it's the proposition of work. You're coming up with some thoughts about bringing some change in the workplace, and there's kind of excitement that's associated with that.

But the proposition of God's Word or Scripture is a bit similar, but different to those kinds of ideas of what a proposition is. A proposition basically is this. It's just a plan of action.

So, we talk about proposition, the plan of action of God for salvation through Scripture. And the proposition of God's Word in verse 6 through 9 runs like this. I won't read it out loud, those four verses, but just stick with me for a second.

It runs like this. Even though God's thoughts and ways are not ours, if we forsake our way that is returned to Him, then we will know salvation.

[ 6 : 57 ] We will know what the Christian life is to look like. So, the prophet Isaiah asserts this, that we're not at all like God. We may think and act like God's, but we're not.

While we may be created in the image of God, God is not opposite. Actually, we're opposed to Him, but He is other. How other is God?

He's holy other. So, from the beginning to the end of this book, this prophet Isaiah, all the chapters, Isaiah is just referring to God as the Holy One again and again and again.

And it's unique to all the prophets of the Old Testament. His perspective of God as being holy. So holy is God that we, by comparison, are described in verse 7 as, you can look down at this with me now, as wicked and unrighteous.

You probably didn't think of yourself like that when you were coming through the doors tonight, I gather. And you may not actually like the idea that we are wicked, but if we don't define that, then others will.

[ 8 : 01 ] I learned this recently when I went to a musical in London called Wicked. I kid you not. Some of you have maybe seen it. The musical takes up one of the most wicked figures from some of our childhood, mine, maybe not your generation, and then makes her out to be good.

Scripture is saying that the wicked are not good and don't think or act at all like God. Well, despite that, God is holy and God is so gracious, Isaiah tells us, that if we forsake our way and return to Him, what will He do?

It says right there in verse 7 that He will save us. He'll have compassion on us like a father to a wayward child, but He will also pardon us.

He will pardon us like a judge treating a justly convicted criminal with a pardon. And how does He do this? Isaiah says that He does it like this, with His word, by a declaration.

And then He invites those to seek Him and call Him and forsake their way and come to Him. And that seeking is expressed in the first five verses of this chapter as looking and listening and beholding who God is as He holds us in the grip of His grace.

[ 9 : 21 ] So the proposition or plan of action of God is, when we return to Him, we will know His salvation through His word as He speaks that into our life, a matter of declaration of our pardon from sin.

Isaiah then turns from the proposition of God to the promise of God. He does this using the image of rain, snow, water, seeds, and bread. But driving home this point that God's word, His scripture, is full of promise.

Because why? Because His word is reliable. Isaiah is telling us we can rely on God's word. As sure as rain, snow, and water falls to the earth, as sure as seeds go into the ground and bread satisfies the stomach, God's scripture, His word, is utterly reliable in our lives.

And as far as salvation and discipleship is concerned, scripture alone is then unique in showing us what that's all about. And here's how it works. Excuse me just a minute.

Here's how it works. Just imagine that you'd never read the Bible before.

[ 10 : 44 ] That may apply to some of you, but certainly not all of you. If you're going to read the Bible, where on earth do you start? Some of us might say, well, let's start with Genesis.

Others say maybe one of the Gospels. Let me suggest that the place to start in this day and age is actually Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes because it raises the question, what is the meaning of life? What is the purpose of life? And draws the conclusion, actually, that life is actually meaningless. It's just full of vanity apart from God. And then the rest of the Bible, from beginning to end, Genesis to Revelation, tells us what the actual answer is to what actually is the meaning of life.

What does a whole life, what does a saved life, what does a secure, significant life actually look like? The Bible is actually showing us then that God's word to us to speak into this is utterly reliable. And the Bible is actually a library of literature that, as verse 11 says, look down with me at this, shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

[ 11 : 53 ] That's what God's word does in our life. Full of purpose. Full of the reliability for God to accomplish that which he intends in our life. And so that's God's first promise.

Scripture. That's God's word is completely reliable in accomplishing his saving acts in our life for following him. Christian discipleship. But not only is this word reliable, it's also personal.

Which means it actually reveals God's name. And where does it say that? Look down with me at verse 13, the last two lines of that. Isaiah says this, it, he's referring to God's word, scripture here, shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Now that's a really big promise. So, so what you may ask? Why does it matter if God's word makes a name for the Lord? Well, it's a big difference because what are names about?

Names actually reveal nature, the essence, the substance of something. So, Brennan and I, when we were naming our children, it was really important for us to pick names that actually had names, sorry, meaning, significance to them.

[ 13 : 05 ] We were careful actually not to name our children after biblical names. It's hard enough to be a PK, so we didn't actually want to do that. But just for example, Elise, her name means God's promise.

It reveals something about a picture that we were setting out for the future for her. And so, when we read in verse 13, that it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off, God is actually saying that he's going to reveal something about his nature, who he is.

He wants to reveal something. And the name he will make or reveal is, I think, not said here, but as we read the whole of the Bible, Jesus Christ. And that name reveals two things about God.

First of all, the name Jesus means Savior, and Christ, which is a title, means Lord. So, as you read through the Old Testament, we hear Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord. In the New Testament, we see that that name is revealed as Christ.

Jesus, the Christ, Jesus is Lord. That's what he's revealing, and he promises that he will do that, which is very significant. And it's Scripture that tells us that he is the one who will save us.

[ 14 : 15 ] So, even though life is like thorns and briars, only Scripture reveals Jesus is the one who makes life like cypresses and myrtles, really fruitful and beautiful trees.

And only Scripture reveals that Christ is the one who takes the worst that we can offer, our sin and our evil, and God turns it into the best for his glory. And how does he do that?

He does it through the cross. He does it through Jesus' death and his resurrection. So, Scripture is not only reliable, but it reveals God's nature through his name to us, which is Jesus Christ, the one who saves.

And that's really, really personal. So, that's the promise of God. That is sola Scripture. Scripture alone does this, but it's also the proposition of God, what he's doing.

And these two points, the promise of God and the proposition of God, are like doorways that we move through under Scripture and learn the salvation of God as we follow Jesus Christ as Lord.

[ 15 : 21 ] Let me finish this evening with just two points, pretty simple ones. And I think it is, we can think about what the problem was back then in the Reformation, but what might be the problem for us as we come to Scripture these days and read it?

And I want to suggest that we can misuse Scripture in these three ways. Sometimes we can misuse Scripture in treating it like a map. That is, the Bible is something that takes us from point A to point B.

Where faith is a journey from earth to heaven, there's no doubt that that's the case. But before long, what you hear is the destination actually isn't important, just the journey. Well, the destination is important.

And it is important because of the person who's actually there. That is Christ. But we can also misuse it by treating it like a manual. That is, you know, we use it to fix something that's broken. We pull it out of this Bible like it's an operator or an owner's manual. And so when we get sick or have a broken relationship or we're dissatisfied with work or facing adversity, well, we consult the Bible to get back on track.

[ 16 : 28 ] I know it's helpful for that, but it's not a manual. Sometimes we'll then mistreat it by using it as something that's magical. So we'll quote a verse to get ahead or change circumstances.

The Bible kind of becomes a book of spells. And the Word of God is something we use then actually to get what we want. But the Bible, in fact, is actually God who's using that to relate his, reveal his salvation story.

To give us what he wants and knows is best for us. So let me just say this in closing then. Those are some misuses. But I think the best way, and this is my goal for us to read the Bible.

I really want us to come out of this doing that. Is this. And this is just to know that the Bible is a miracle. Scripture is an utter miracle. Now I know we want miracles sometimes of healing of illnesses or restored relationships.

Maybe change of employment. Maybe justice in the world that we live in. But every time we take the scriptures up, and the scriptures only are like this, like no other book, God is speaking to us through them.

[ 17 : 37 ] We encounter Christ through his Word. It is an utter, utter miracle. It is fully human and fully divine. It is God's Word in men's mouth on their pens on these pages to us.

So here's the quandary, I think, though. C.S. Lewis observed this in a letter to a friend. He said, Have you ever noticed that the more the Bible is translated, the less that it's read?

Probably read, maybe not in worlds outside of the Western world, but less and less it's read in the world in which we live in. I don't want you to come away tonight feeling guilty, though.

But I want you to come away tonight feeling this great desire and compelled to read the Bible, God's Word to us, which is this fabulous miracle through which we encounter God.

God brings his Word and his life actually to bear on us. I started with Calvin. Let me finish with him then in this way. Calvin said this about scripture.

[ 18 : 44 ] The first step in true knowledge is taken that is knowledge of our salvation when we reverently embrace the testimony which God has been pleased to give of himself.

For not only does faith, full and perfect faith, but all correct knowledge of God through the scriptures originate in obedience. So may we grow in the grace of Christ as we're not only hearers of his Word, but doers of it.

Amen. We speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.