

Clarity of the Bible

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[0 : 00] Good evening, everybody. And thank you to those two who read so wonderfully for us, those Bible readings.

Thank you, too, for the invitation to be here with you tonight. It's a joy and a privilege to open God's word with you. And I'm going to pray for us that God would open our hearts and our minds and our wills to hear his word.

So let's bow our heads. Heavenly Father, God in heaven, thank you that you speak to us. Thank you that you are not silent.

And we pray that this afternoon you would be the one who would speak to us. Please, indeed, open our eyes to the truth of your word.

Open our hearts to the sweet riches of it. And open our wills towards the steps that you would have us walk in the light of it. Please lead us to Jesus.

[1 : 10] And please may we follow him. Amen. Saturday, 13th of January, 2018.

Saturday morning. Typical quiet Saturday morning in Hawaii. Until people, millions of people, started receiving a message on their cell phones.

That changed that day quite considerably. The message read thus. Emergency alert. Ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii.

Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill. Can you imagine if that happened in Chatswood? It would change your day, wouldn't it, really?

It changed the day of millions of Hawaiians. Particularly given that it was a time when there were tensions between the United States and North Korea. About the very possibility of incoming missiles.

[2 : 21] Particularly because this was, on one level, a very clear communication. Short, stark sentences. Telling you what to do.

Ah. There was one problem. Have you spotted it? Probably the fact that you realise that Hawaii hasn't been hit by missiles in the last few years.

Is a pointer towards that problem was. It was not a clear communication from the government of Hawaii. As to what the government of Hawaii actually wanted to tell its people.

And for 30 minutes, chaos gently and quite widely reigned. It was followed by hours and days of government inquiries.

Who had done this? Initial excuses ending up with people being fired. It was a clear communication on the surface.

[3 : 20] But not a clear communication from the government. I want to ask you this question. Is the Bible like that?

But possibly worse. The Bible is old. And venerable. It points us to great blessings.

But is it clear? Is it clear? Can we trust it? Can it really tell us a word from God who has made us? Who holds us? Who can in the Lord Jesus keep us? I want to take you back today to the words of scripture.

And ask the question. Is it a clear microphone? For listening to the word of God himself. You see the Bible claims.

[4 : 26] Repeatedly. To be the word of God. If you crack the Bible open anywhere. And you look and see what is written in it. Then what you find is it's God's word.

Over and over and over again. The prophets say. Thus says the Lord. If we go to 2 Timothy chapter 3. Then all scripture is God breathed.

And is good for us. That's the claim of the Bible. That's the claim. But is it clear? Today I want to take us back to ancient worlds.

The worlds of Genesis chapter 3. And Matthew's gospel chapter 4. To ask questions of God's word. That are questions which will apply to Chatswood today.

Ancient worlds yes. But Chatswood is not that far away. You see the Bible makes claims.

[5 : 27] And those claims reflect its speaker. If one of my children says to me. Daddy I love you dearly. It's your birthday coming up.

And I'm going to buy you a new car for your birthday. A new car. Daddy you deserve a new car. Your old one's rusting away. And I'm going to buy you a new car. I'll go that's nice.

Thank you. But I don't believe it. I realize the heart is there. It's heartfelt. But the resources behind it are limited.

Flip side example. What about your politicians? Do you trust your politicians in Australia? I hope in a... Do you? I hope some of them you do.

But it's that case by case analysis. Is this person clear and trustworthy? Or do they millions and billions that are promised?

[6 : 25] Not add up. Well clarity makes claims. Words reflect their speaker. My child. A politician.

God himself. What about God in his word? This Bible. Can we trust it? I want to say several things. Before we turn to our Bible passages. First of all.

God knows how you are made. Why does he do that? How does he know that? Because he made you. If you think of all your machine code.

Not just your physicality. Not just your mental processing. Not just your psychology. He knows all the code that goes into you. Because he spoke it into being.

You are not an accident. You are not just thrown together. But you are the product of God's word. And God knows that he made us for relationship.

[7 : 25] He can accommodate himself to limited minds. Outlooks that can only see as far as a door and no further.

And God can come in and speak to us. Without overwhelming a human speaker. One of the readings we got today is from Matthew's gospel.

Matthew. One of those followers of Jesus. And when we read Matthew's gospel. We hear Matthew's words. As Matthew put it together. As he remembered Jesus.

Whom he'd followed. Who he'd given his life to. God doesn't overwhelm the human speaker. Get out the way Matthew. I'm going to speak now. God speaks through Matthew.

Not this one. The one of 2000 years ago. Who followed Jesus. And God's word doesn't get distorted. By the human speaker. Biases and prejudices.

[8 : 25] Creeping into view. God knows our code. He's able to carry his word. Clearly through the pages of scripture to us. God is able to speak and be heard.

How can this be? Because of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who breathes out scripture. To Matthew 2000 years ago.

And who speaks that word. And even at the point as we hear it. The Holy Spirit who's inspired scripture.

Who also convicts us as we hear it. What does it mean to be convicted by scripture? It means when we're grabbed by scripture.

And it holds us. When the Bible grabs us and holds us. And it's vision becomes our compelling vision. For our lives.

[9 : 22] God's word becomes the word that we will hear. In my work. I read a lot of books.

I write about other people's writings. Sometimes I agree with them. Sometimes I don't. I sit in my study in North London.

And I offer my opinions on them. Sometimes I'm let out. And I go to conferences. And get to give my opinions. Sometimes the person is there.

That's different isn't it at that point. I've stood on a podium like this. In front of 20 people. And one of them. Has written books.

That will pile up high. And at one point. I'm going to say. I disagree with him. And he's in the room. That's when it matters.

[10 : 26] The incredible thing with God's word. Is that we never. Never. Read. Or misread. God's word. And he is not there. The Bible is never read.

In the absence of its author. This has. Play out in my country. And I guess in yours. Sometimes I meet people. Perhaps you do as well. Who say.

Well I like to think. God. Is like this. Or I'm not sure about that bit. Of the Bible. If you're a car driver. Picture it like this. Do you have traffic wardens in Australia? Do you? No? People who come and put tickets on your cars? Yeah.

What do you call them? Annoying. Okay. I'll take that one. But if your heart is anything like mine. And I guess hearts are pretty international at this point.

[11:23] Sometimes I park on the line. And I've got my eye out all around. You know. My wife's popped into the shop. You ever done this? You're looking to see if someone's coming along. Ours have high vis jackets.

So you tend to be able to see them coming. With God. You never read his word in his absence. And you're looking around to see if he's coming or not. With God he's there.

With God. He is always there. It's more like parking your car. On the traffic wardens toes. It's personal. It's intimate.

It's not distant. What does this mean for us? It means God really wants to speak to you.

God really wants to have a relationship with you. When we come to the Bible. It's not just about information. There's a lot of stuff here in these pages.

[12:23] But it's driving towards interaction. To relationship. To God reaching out to you. If I quote one part of the Bible. Which wasn't read to us today.

Romans chapter 10. You don't need to know where it is. I'll say it. Faith comes from hearing. Hearing the word of God. If you're someone who's grown up in church.

Or you're here for the first time. And you're hearing God's word. What is coming at you? What is coming at you? Are the seeds of faith. Of being able to take God at his word.

Being able to trust him. Being able to cling to his promises. With confidence. The whole drive and momentum of the Bible. Heads that way.

It doesn't just say. Thus says the Lord. As some sort of strident statement. I want to say something to you. Listen to me. Rather. God speaks.

[13:21] So that we might hear. And come to faith in him. Not mere curiosity. Not merely a decision. Or a verdict about the Bible. But a relationship.

With God. Himself. And in this. We can't separate. The words of the Bible. From the speaker of the Bible. These paper pages. Or up on the screens.

When we see it shown to us. What we have there. Is God coming to us. Holding out the hand of relationship. Inviting us.

Into. A faithful. A faithful relationship. Where we trust him. Which finally brings us. To Genesis chapter 3. The garden of Eden.

The world. That God. Had spoken into being. A rich. And fruitful place. And a man. Adam. And a woman. Eve. Who God.

[14:18] Had spoken into being. God spoke humanity. Into being. In relationship. Covenant relationship. With him. It's as though God's word. Held them together.

As well as holding. The world together. And they were charged. To tend the garden. And to do. All that God. Would tell them to do.

That was part of being. Made. In the image. Of God. God. But in our reading. Something toxic.

Came into play. Something acidic. Came into play. Have you ever spilt acid. When it starts to burn. That's a battery that's split. You want something.

That will deal with it. Well here. In Genesis chapter 3. Verse 2. God. His good word. Is challenged.

[15:14] By a serpent. The serpent. The serpent. Is Satan. The accuser. And in verse 2. The quiet. Crafty.

Acidic. Counter word. Goes out. Did God. Really say. Did God. Really say. You could trust him. The acid.

Starts. To burn away. At the very fabric. Of that relationship. Between Adam and Eve. The very fabric. Of the world. God. Is he really good. Isn't God. Deceptive.

Isn't God. Holding you. In bonds. That aren't good for you. But would stop you being free. Trust another word. For good food. For good life.

Instead. Look at that fruit. That God told you not to eat. See it in your eye. And see that it's pleasant. And take. Eat.

[16:12] But this serpent's voice. Is the deadly lie. As one songwriter. Once put it. This. Affects all of us.

The claims. Of God. Are on up all of us. And the songwriter. Put it like this. We are all. Like foolish puppets. Who desiring.

To be kings. Now lie pitifully crippled. After cutting. Our own strings. What does God do?

As Adam and Eve. Are cast out of the garden. As relationship is broken. As this counter word.

Comes into play. God. Turns. To adoption.

To Israel. To the Old Testament people. That he chooses. And he's going to nurture. With his clear word. Particularly to their kings.

[17:09] David. And those who follow after him. God is going to. Shape. And call. And tie himself to. Through his words. A people that he's going to redeem.

That he's going to buy back. As God's truthful word. Continues. To go out. Ultimately. Laying its claims.

On all people. Even here. In Chatswood. Today. We come to our second reading.

As Satan. Again. Makes an entry. This time into the wilderness. Of Judea. A crux point. A crucial turning point. In God's plan.

Because God's plan of adoption. Has pointed. To one person. Jesus Christ. God. In a body. In a human body.

[18:07] Taking human form. To come and be. A second Adam. One who will stand up. And if you have. Matthew chapter 4.

Open in front of you. You will see. Just before this. That God has spoken. The last verse. Of the previous chapter. Matthew chapter 3. God has said. This is my beloved son.

With whom. I am well pleased. The truthful word. Has spoken. About Jesus. Luke. In his gospel. Also tells this. And has a family tree.

Of Jesus. That goes right. The way back. To him being God. The son. Just before this. God. So here is Jesus. A well pleasing.

Son of God. And Adam 2.0. Tested. His back. Against the wall. Hungry.

[19:04] Not in a place. Where there's plenty of food. Like the garden of Eden. But a place. That this voice says. This is God forsaken. You hear in this desert. God's spirit.

God's spirit. Has driven you out. Here. Here. You're a loser. If you listen to God. Cut.

On. Your own path. But Jesus. Thanks be to God. Does not listen. In that battle of words. About God.

That we have. Here in our reading. Three times. Jesus is tempted and he's tempted to play against God's word but each time he answers and says God's word is not only clear it's also nourishing is God's word good good for you is God a good father Jesus stands firm and if you're wondering how the story ends Jesus goes through that desert obediently he lives his human life obediently and he dies on a cross obediently dying a death he didn't deserve but one foretold by God's clear word what does this mean for us God speaks and that is the basis on which we are but Adam has gone elsewhere what kind of human being are you going to be this is the purpose of

God's calling what kind of human being are you going to be you're going to be one who listens to God or one that turns away from God Jesus is one who trusts God and this is where Chatswood comes into view because Jesus is not a solo listener he is a listener of God who is also God himself who speaks to us and calls us and invites us with a clear word to follow him remember faith comes by hearing what does that faith brings it brings a union a joining with Jesus himself you ever wanted to get into a place and you haven't got a ticket and you see someone with a ticket and you'd love to be able to say I'm with her or I'm with him and you're ushered in together that's the nature of faith in Jesus Christ all that happens to him happens to you you die to self and to selfishness just as he did that you might rise to life eternal life as he did can you believe him on that or not that's the question it's not an easy question

[22:22] I don't know any of you here I guess there's all sorts of hurts and pains disappointments broken dreams but this clear word from God calls you God comes out to meet you God doesn't just send a distant beep beep beep across the galaxies he comes to meet you in his word and with his word to carry you by a spirit who is given to you his holy spirit who is given to you as you come to Jesus now let me be clear on this the bible's not always simple it's not always straightforward we sometimes need to get together with other hearers other listeners like here in church today these things can take effort the good things of God are dug up but they are true and clear always when we meet together to read the bible to read scripture it's God's rule that's in view his word that is true sometimes some bits are in sharper focus for us than other bits but we're reminded not to set one

part against another any communication can be misconstrued any communication at all we know that in our own lives but God invites us to a challenge a growth challenge to take the clear bits of his word and to then enjoy the harder bits as well this morning 80,000 people lined up to run up a hill that would hurt them heartbreak hill

I was amongst them trust me it hurt but as I stood there in a cold Sydney morning if someone had said guys it's too hard we're cancelling heartbreak hill there's buses at the bottom we'll bus you up it would have been a mutiny sometimes the hard things are the things that make it and God's word is clear even when it's hard and difficult to understand less heartbreak more heart make God makes us anew in that regard as we stand on the pathway of life who am I and who am I becoming each of us are being made each of us are being in our network of relationships our life stories our ups and downs being made into someone apart from God's word we are lost lost to our purpose sometimes even with God's word it is hard and difficult but God is clear and God is good what does this mean for us in terms of application as our lives unfold as the spring of life turns to the autumn of life our formation our shaping comes from where we are pledged 23 years ago next Saturday I pledged myself to my wife just down the road in North Sydney formation formation comes from looking where we are pledged so mind your pledges and pursue them well if you're a follower of Jesus then keep turning your eyes towards him he's the author of your faith the clear author who begins he's the perfecter of your faith he will perfect and bring to completion and conclusion if you're here today wondering what is this Jesus all about then let me put it this way Jesus comes to us even while he is seated in heaven he comes to us clothed not in this stuff but clothed in the promises of scripture and set the eyes of your heart set your desires towards him if that's hard ask that your desires will be changed that God's word will become a clear and life-size narrative for you and for me across our lives for this to be the first priority of our days who do you listen to when you wake up first in the morning is it the pundits or the prophets do you reach for your phone and check the news or do you reach for your phone and check the good news the clear news of Jesus and allow him to shape your life is it your contact checking who's contacted you during the night or is it God's Christ who has held you during the night who has not slept who has watched over you who has treasured you and hold you each day as a first priority if this is a clear word then drink it deeply don't waste time because whatever you waste time on will frame your time and will paint time for you and on you and here in this word is a clear word from a God who loves you and calls you the clear word of God let's bow our heads and pray that it would come to us father in heaven we called upon you your word calls us thank you for your goodness and your trustworthiness thank you for the sufficiency of this bible that is before us in whatever language we read it and love it please draw us to its life and please keep doing so that we would be the kind of person you want us to be that this would be a church that would be shaped by you that this church would be a beacon in this place an oasis in this place where your clear word is heard and where faith in Jesus is grown by the power of your spirit we pray it in Jesus name amen