**Truth**

***Reasonable Faith***

**Prodigal Message # 4**

**Memory Verse for the Week:**

**II Timothy 3:16**All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking and correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

*29 years ago, I had achieved what I thought all the world had to offer and I found it lacking. That yearning sent me on a journey seeking truth as I had not made Jesus Lord at that point. As a scientist I sought all religions and options. A great Christian friend noticed my journey and invited Ginny and I to a conference in Washington DC. There were 6 plenary speakers and 400 guests at the opening dinner. Each speaker was randomly assigned to one of the 40 tables of 10. Even if a speaker sat at your table the chance was small you would be sitting right next to him or her. Well randomly or miraculously, you decide, at a time of great searching for truth one of the speakers sat down beside me for the entire night. I did not know who he was at the time, but he had a presence and a knowledge that was mesmerizing. He had answers to all my questions. I don’t remember anything but our interaction for the next three hours. I would find out later that he was one of the most reknowned Christian apologists in the world, Ravi Zacharias. As I got comfortable and bombarded him with questions he said something that I have repeated hundreds of times in lectures and in one on one discipling opportunities. He said, “God has given us enough facts to make our faith reasonable, but He will not give us enough that we might live by reason alone. It is by grace that you believe and are saved. “*

**Is our faith blind, or is it “reasonable”, as Dr. Zacharias claimed?**

Some have questioned the role this message has in comforting the hurting souls that enter the Prodigal ministry. I would only remind them of words of CS Lewis. To paraphrase his quote from the lesson on Hope, he purports that the only hope we will find will not be found in seeking hope for its own sake, but only by seeking Truth. If we find Truth then we may find comfort as well.

We also use the Bible as our guide because we believe that God himself inspired the truths that it contains. II Timothy 3:16 states that *All scripture is God breathed and useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking and training in righteousness so that the man of God will be equipped to do good works.* Since this manuscript is our rulebook, its reliability and “reasonableness” is worth looking into in a critical, serious, and logical way. The more certain we are about the Bible’s reliability and usefulness, the greater confidence we can have in the truths it contains.

Finally such exploration is important because the Bible has given us a warning predicting and explaining modern social-cultural paradigms.

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths*. II Tim 4:3,4

“Post Truth” was the word of the year in 2016 by Oxford Dictionaries. It is defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” The concept of post truth ties in perfectly with political correctness. The current “PC culture” holds high the concept of moral relativism, which holds that in disagreements, **nobody is objectively right or wrong,** as there is no **absolute truth**. In such a paradigm we ought to tolerate the behavior of others even when we disagree about the morality of it. Absolute truth should be self-evident. If anyone claims there is no absolute truth, they should be asked if they believe such a belief is absolutely true. This is called the law of non-contradiction. With the obvious conclusion that there is absolute truth, lets explore if we can define what that truth actually is.

**Do All Roads Lead to God/Heaven? Are their multiple “Truths”?**

The Bible is an ancient manuscript written thousands of years ago. Many Christians believe it should never be questioned but the world criticizes such an approach as blind faith. The Christian faith is a very reasonable faith in Jesus, who claims in John 14:6 to be the Way, the **Truth** and the Life.

Other religions believe just as fervently that there beliefs are Truth. Some even believe that there are many truths and that all paths lead to God. This common worldview is impossible however if you look at it logically and reasonably. Let’s look at some commonly held beliefs of the most popular world religions.

* **Buddhism**:
  + No god.
  + Avoiding all material desires eliminates pain.
  + Noble truths and paths are the key to enlightenment
* **Hindus**
  + Thousands of territorial deities, but not one Lord
  + Brahman is the divine force which sustains the universe, but is not a personal God to be worshipped
* **Muslims**
  + Allah is God
  + Quran is Allah’s self-revelation through Mohammed and the only book that is untainted and contains the very word of God
  + Jesus was the Messiah, but was
  + NOT GOD; NOT RESURRECTED
* **Jews**
  + God revealed himself through the Laws and the prophets
  + Jesus was NOT Messiah and NOT God
  + Hope of heaven is in God’s mercy in response to their lives of obedience and morality
* **Mormonism**
  + God revealed himself in the Bible, but also through the Book of Mormon
    - Joseph Smith translated from golden plates received from Moroni
    - See *Doctrine and Covenants* and *The Pearl of Great Price …*writings by Smith
  + Jesus
    - God’s son but distinct from God in personage
    - He is a god, but not God
    - He created us and earth
    - He died for us
    - Belief in Jesus is necessary for eternal life but works are also required
    - We are all God’s sons and will be gods in heaven
* **Christianity**
  + Trinity: Triune God
  + **Jesus** 
    - fully human and fully God
    - perfect substitutionary atonement for our sins
    - died, buried and was resurrected in bodily form
    - virgin birth through Mary
    - salvation by Grace through faith
    - **the only way to the Father (John 14:6)**

**Comparative Conclusions**

There are many ways to approach evaluating the various merits of each world religion. Everyone has the right to choose his or her own religion. However a few things are clear. Since they all make claims that directly contradict each other, they cannot all be true. Furthermore, if Christianity is true and Jesus is God and who He said He was, then Christianity is unapologetically narrow minded as Jesus clearly proclaims that He is the only way to life and to heaven. He states in John 14:6 that He does not proclaim the Truth, **He is the Truth**. Therefore it is critical to pursue your faith with honest vigilance. It has been said therefore that every man must answer the question of who Jesus is. No answer, unfortunately, is an answer.

**What is the Basis for the Christian Faith?**

Is Christianity **“Christocentric**” or **“Bibliocentric**”? In other words, why are we Christians? Are we Christians because we believe the Bible is inerrant? No. We are Christians because we believe God intervened in history a little over 2000 years ago to come to earth in the fully human form of His Son, who then died on a Cross and was resurrected in bodily form. *We base our Christianity on a historical event, not the Bible per se.*

Therefore, the **Christian faith is Christ centered (Christocentric), first and foremost.** When Christ walked the earth there was no New Testament, but yet people believed in the person and deity of Jesus Christ. The Christian movement exploded in growth because Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection proved Jesus was indeed God come to earth to save us from our sins. Therefore, **the Bible becomes paramount because of what Jesus said about it.**  The Bible then becomes reliable as life’s instruction manual. It is then the most useful and wise teaching tool ever written. The Bible is not only our guide for the Prodigal ministry but also the guide for our individual Christian lives.

To summarize, our faith is not in the Bible. Our faith is in Christ alone. The Bible is important as it testifies about Christ and explains His teaching. The importance here is that if we can make sure that our “Christology” trumps “Bibliology” then we don’t have to explain or understand every historical event in the Bible. That paradigm of truth allows the core things to be of utmost importance and the secondary arguments to remain secondary. To continue the practical application of that paradigm, let’s review the basic core Christian beliefs that we cannot compromise. They are listed below.

* Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
* Sin
* Virgin Birth
* Jesus, fully God and fully human
* **Bodily resurrection: Jesus was raised from the dead in human form**
* Substitutionary atonement: Jesus died to cover our individual sins
* Salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-10)

We cannot leave any of those “CORE” beliefs out and still be Christian, however the single, most important tenet is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**Evidence for the Resurrection**

Let’s spend some time reviewing the evidence for the most important event in human history. A great way to remember the evidence is to follow the acronym HEART.

**H-E-A-R-T**

* **Honorable burial**
  + Mark is the earliest gospel, written around 50 A.D., very close to the time of Christ’s life.
  + Mark 15:43
    - Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, who was himself waiting for the Kingdom of God, boldly asked for the body of Jesus to be buried in his own tomb.
  + Highly unusual as it was customary for only family members to bury their own. Jesus was just convicted of high treason, so he would have not have been buried. Typically he would have been left for the birds of prey.
  + A Jewish member of the Sanhedrin burying him is highly unusual since they just convicted and killed Jesus. We don’t know Joseph’s motivation but it is stated that at least he was hoping and awaiting the new Kingdom in Jesus.
  + There is no significant reputable competing story. Almost every historical story confirms that he was indeed buried.
  + *It is important that the documentation of the burial* ***gives us a location that was known***
* **Empty tomb**
  + Women find him first. Women’s testimony had no value at all at this time. If Christians were fabricating this story, they would have never placed women’s testimony at the centerpiece of the discovery.
  + Toledot Yeshu –6th century Jewish manuscript that attacks Christianity because of the Jewish conversion. It tries to explain away the empty tomb. The arguments in this manuscript, in and of themselves, weigh strongly that there was an empty tomb to be considered and dealt with.
  + Matthew 28:12-15 – the Pharisees come up with a plan to tell everyone that the disciples stole the body. Again, if nothing else, such a position is strongly supporting that the tomb was indeed empty.
  + Note: *even strong critics to the resurrection agree that there was a dead body and empty tomb*.
* **Appearances**
  + I Cor. 15:3-8 (6 appearances)
    - Peter
    - The 12 disciples
    - 500 of the brothers
    - James
    - All of the apostles
    - Paul
  + NOTE: When Paul mentions those people who Jesus appeared to, he states in verse 6, “ most of whom are still living, Paul is asking his audience to go ask them. In essence, he is boldly proclaiming that if you don’t believe him, go find them and confirm this message yourself. This is an extremely strong apologetic.
* **Rise of Christianity**
  + **This is often overlooked but may be the strongest argument for the resurrection**.
  + Fishermen, tax collectors to **martyrs**! Ask yourself, how that could have happened.
  + Jewish Shamah : “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One”
    - This was the central tenet of the Jewish people i.e.…they worship a monotheistic God. The Jews strongly believed there was only one God. Out of that group of people, there arises a huge group of people who are now worshiping and believing in both God and Son. The Jews would logically be the last people who would make such a mistake and the most difficult to convince.
  + It is hard to explain the rise of Christianity out of the Jewish people in any other way than the risen Christ.
* **Transfer of the Sabbath**
  + The Sabbath was one of the 10 commandments! It is a huge deal in any church to change anything, much less an Old Testament command from God.
  + This new group changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. This implies a tremendously significant event occurred on Sunday.
  + In fact, our calendars got changed to center around his death. Eventually the world saw this in the same significant light?

**These facts, taken corporately, provide strong evidence for not only the resurrection but also for a REASONABLE faith in Jesus Christ and Christianity itself.**

**How is the Martyrdom of today different than that of the Christian martyrs in the first century?**

It is worth pausing to reflect on this commonly asked question. The common ground of almost every martyr is that martyrs will not go to their death for a lie. Martyrs believe whole-heartedly in what they are doing. The Muslim suicide bombers of today believe strongly in what they are doing and that Allah is good and that killing people is his desire in certain instances. The Martyrs in Christ time believed just as strongly that Jesus was God incarnate. The question is if their beliefs are true. Unlike Biblical disciples, the current suicide bombers are not eyewitnesses to Allah or Mohamed. They have simply been told something passionately and they have been convinced enough to act.

*Early Christian disciples and martyrs were* ***eyewitnesses***. They either saw the resurrected Christ or they didn’t. The 12 disciples knew what Jesus said and the promises he made. One would think that the only thing that could have made them go to a martyred death was seeing the risen Jesus Christ. There is strong evidence that Paul, along with each of the 12 disciples, except John, died a martyred death. John died in exile on the isle of Patmos as the exception. Their lives after Jesus’ death on a Cross is hard to explain outside of an eyewitness account of his resurrection.

**If the Resurrection is True, then what?**

***Then Jesus is Who He said He was and Christianity is the Truth***

If the resurrection occurred then Jesus was unique in human history. He was God and man and died for our sins. Paul sums it up in I Cor 15:1-3

*Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared…..*

Our faith is Christo-centric and we believe because of Christ’s life, but because we can believe reasonably and convincingly in that life after weighing the evidence, the Word becomes incredibly valuable and useful because of what Jesus said about it. He quoted it almost constantly.

* He stated in Matt.5: 17-18 that he did not come to abolish the law but to uphold every letter of it and uphold it.
* John 5:37 Jesus explains that the father has testified about him
* John 5:39 Jesus explains that the scriptures testify about Jesus
* The opening of the gospel of John places the Word of God in the proper perspective in light of the truth of Jesus resurrection. John 1:1

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning*. John 1:14 *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The breadth of this point is exhaustive but beyond the scope of this discussion presently. Suffice it to say that we can rely on Scripture and it’s authority because the Word Himself died and was resurrected. The Word is inspired by God himself as stated in II Tim 3:16. **In a complex but true paradigm the Word of God was written to testify about Jesus, while Jesus himself is the incarnate Word.**

***Then the minor arguments can remain minor***

There are many stories in the Bible that cannot be proven reasonably. There is more evidence for the resurrection by far than for the feeding of the 5000 and the Virgin Birth. Did those events occur? I believe they did because of Jesus support of scripture. However, there aren’t as many facts to support those stories as we have for the resurrection.

Many refer to the story of Jonah as nothing but a big fish story. Even if this story and others remain unproven, they are insignificant, by comparison, if Jesus Christ died for our sins and was resurrected in bodily form. These questions can be debated and discussed, but if the resurrection is true, then they do not shake your faith or the truth of Jesus Christ. If the resurrection is true, then other perplexing stories and questions are easier to accept or to live with this side of heaven, because the only thing that is truly important is well known and the evidence as to its validity is compelling.

**Additional Evidence for the Bible’s Reliability**

There is reasonable evidence that the Bible is God’s inspired word based on the arguments made above. However, how can we be certain of its reliability and usefulness for teaching, correcting, rebuking and training the man of God for good works? Let’s look further at other evidences that attest to its reliability.

* What does the Bible say about itself?
  + II Timothy 3:16 says all Scripture is “God breathed”
  + Word of God used 394 times in the OT
  + 40 authors with a single common theme over 1200 years…God’s pursuit of a loving relationship with us.
  + Prophets clearly state that the word of the Lord came to them
* What does Jesus say about it
  + Matt 5:18 not one letter will disappear
  + “It is written”
  + Matt 26:54-56 all events are so that prophecy is fulfilled
  + To believe in Christ would be contradictory to not believe Scripture is God’s word
  + He fought Satan in the desert with the Word of God (Deuteronomy)
* Prophecy fulfilled: true prophecy from the Lord is proven when it comes true (Deuteronomy 18:21-22)



There are 100’s of detailed prophecies and 60 related to Jesus alone. Mathematicians evaluated 48 of these prophecies about Jesus, all of which are widely accepted as proven true. The chance of one man fulfilling all of these is 1 in 10 to the 157th power. Even more amazing is that they were made 1000 years before Christ and 500 years before crucifixion even existed.

* Textual criticism
  + This is the study of how reliable the scriptures are today to the originals. We critically look at the text. The following facts are very helpful in supporting the accuracy of the Bible we read today.
    - The Oldest complete Hebrew copy of the Masoretic text is a copy around 900 AD.
    - The Dead Sea Scrolls found it 1947 proved reliability of the Masoretic text to 150 BC to AD 70.
    - The majority of the New Testament was written by AD 100 by eyewitnesses OR there were eyewitnesses to disprove or approve it.
    - The NT has 5500 copies dating to within 30 years of Jesus death. **There is no historical manuscript, either secular or theological, that even comes close.**
* Archeological support
  + Archeology confirms the biblical accounts in more than 25,000 sites connected to biblical history
  + Sites and Kings in question have become known facts
    - David
    - Ahab
    - Hezekiah, etc.…
* **Transformation of the Human Heart**
  + An often-overlooked evidence of the usefulness and power of the Word of God is the transformation of the heart that leads to changed lives. Believers in Christ are truly born again.

**The Bible is Truth and Our Guide: Summary**

*“God has given us enough facts to make our faith reasonable, but He has not given us enough facts where we can live by reason alone”*

Ravi Zacharias

God will not give us all of the facts we need because if we could prove our beliefs with 100% certainty, then it would no longer be faith, but instead an obligation. An obligation makes choice impossible. Love demands a choice and God clearly states that all he wants is for us to choose to believe in HIm and love Him in faithful relationship. Therefore, God makes our faith reasonable, but our path to God will always require faith, by His design.

***Based on the arguments and evidence above, Prodigal leadership believe that the Bible is reliable and useful to be used as our guide, not only in dealing with the Prodigal chaos but for our instruction book in life. We believe God inspired it, using faithful men to write it, so that it can instruct us and correct us in order to be equipped to do good works. (II Tim 3:16, Romans 15:4)***

*It can be said in another way****. Our high view of Christ is the reason that we have such a high view of Scripture and is therefore the reason we use it as our guide.***

The Scriptures not only testify about Jesus but testify about itself as being worthy to use as our life guide. Please look these up to encourage you

* **Hebrews 4:12** ,**II Tim.3: 16, Romans 15:4** ,**2 Tim4: 2, 2 Tim 2:15**

**Final reminder**

As a surgeon, trained to think with logic and reason, the arguments above encourage me personally as I have facts to make my faith more than reasonable. However, I must admit that early in my faith journey I wanted to see a miracle. Little did I realize that I was constantly walking among the miracles of transformed lives. A miracle is the only explanation for hardhearted men and women having their eyes opened to see the truth of God and have their lives radically changed both now and for eternity.

*Years ago, I was asked to co-lead a mission trip supported through Watermark with Dean MacFarlan to Burundi. 5 men and 5 women headed to Burundi for a 3 day conference in which we taught reconciliation, leadership, and conflict resolution to a country in which neighbors had killed neighbors based on tribal affiliations with either the Hutus or the Tutsis. Before the last day of the conference, we asked the 100 or so participants, made up of religious and political leaders of their region, to ask any questions they might have in regard to the teaching they had heard. We received 41 such questions. I will never forget Dean telling us that we would eat as the interpreters translated these questions for us. We were to meet after dinner with our headlamps (no electricity after hours!) and our Bibles to work through the answers to their question. Sadly I must admit that although a co leader of the group, I was skeptical at this point in my life that ALL of the answers could be found in the Bible. These questions were difficult. One example was. “ You have stated that we must submit to our husbands but what if our husbands beat us?”*

*One by one we processed those questions with Biblical truth through our community of 5 men. Many times I felt that the answers would not be found, but one man would comment with a scripture that might prompt me to remember another and before we knew it, every single question was not only answered but was answered so soundly and reasonably supported by God’s truth that I couldn’t wait for the next day to relay the answers.*

*In my naiveté I imagined that I could go to impart some wisdom to the people who lived in the poorest country on earth. Not surprisingly in efforts such as these, I was the one who learned a principle that would serve as a cornerstone for a ministry that was not even a thought in my mind at the time. I learned a principle that night that changed my life forever. The Bible is our guide. God in His loving plan has given us the wisdom to guide our lives and to work through every issue we face. Little did I know that this paradigm would be the foundation for guiding hurting people who walk through the doors of Prodigal, a ministry that was not even a thought in my mind at the time. God has a plan. He is faithful, sovereign, always working for those who believe in Him, good, and enough. This is but one example.*

**Questions for Discussion**

1. **The world tells us that there are many paths to heaven. How would you**

**respond and defend your answer?**

1. **The world would say Christians are narrow minded. How would you respond to that lovingly but logically in a way that might Glorify God?**
2. **What does having a Christo-centric faith vs. a Biblio-centric faith mean to you and what are the implications of both points of view?**
3. **Explain the evidence of the resurrection using the HEART analogy.**
4. **What evidence discussed this week encouraged you and why?**
5. **Do you use the Bible to guide you in every and all circumstances? Why or why not? Will this weeks message and/or your prodigal experience change the way you use the Bible in your life ?**

**Notes**