

# BIBLE MONTH SERMON NOTES



## Bible reading: John 5:35-40 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>36</sup> “I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. <sup>37</sup> And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, <sup>38</sup> nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.

<sup>39</sup> You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, <sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

What is the Bible good for today? How exactly is it “Good for life,” when even the most recent of the Biblical writings are nearly 2000 years old? Does reading the Bible have any value to us today, when we can just Google anything we need to know?

Depending on *how* we use and read the Bible, the answer is a resounding yes!

The Jewish leaders that Jesus was talking to most definitely *did* know the Old Testament, The leading scholars would have had the Torah (the law of Moses) memorised. And of course, their ancestors had indeed seen God and heard God’s voice at Sinai (Exodus 24:10-11). So how could Jesus say to them you have never seen or heard God and you don’t have God’s word in you?

*(This could be posed as rhetorical question or put it to the congregation)*

Clearly, there is a way of reading, studying and memorising the words of the Bible which can completely (as the Message paraphrase puts it) “miss the forest for the trees.” That is, to be so focused on the words of the Bible that we miss the bigger picture – namely, Christ, who is the Word and our relationship with Him.

Today, we can still be susceptible to falling into the same trap as these Jewish leaders, to reduce hearing from and encountering God to merely reading and studying the Scriptures. Another trap this passage addresses is to (perhaps as a reaction to this approach) believe that you can know and follow Jesus without reading the “very Scriptures that testify about” him.

### Two traps:

1. **Believing *in* the Bible rather than believing in the God the Bible reveals**
2. **Thinking we can know Jesus without the witness of Scripture.**

The first trap is to believe that salvation is found in the diligent study of the Bible. That if we know the Bible, somehow we automatically know God. We make salvation a matter of believing the right things (which we then use as a measuring stick for others: if you believe like us you can join us). But Jesus is clear, we do not find eternal life in the pages of Scripture, but in the One whom the Scriptures reveal.

Practically, this means acknowledging that when we sit down to have a ‘quiet time’, if all we do is read the Bible without trying to listen to what God is saying to us, then it is possible that we haven’t actually met with God. The Bible is good for life, not because we can know things about God, but because we can truly *know* God, and live in communion with God through Christ.

The second trap is to think that we can fully know and understand Jesus without the “Scriptures that testify” to who Jesus is. Jesus said that the Scriptures point to him, and that life is found by coming to Jesus. Seeking to encounter Jesus through the pages of Scripture protects us from a Jesus who looks and talks and thinks just like us. It ensures that we will always be challenged and stretched in some way, drawn out of our comfort zones into the wild territory of costly obedience. The God found in the pages of the Bible refuses to be conformed into an image of our making.

So where does this leave us? It leaves us holding together the two sentences found in verses 39 and 40. Resisting the temptation to separate reading the Bible from relationship, communion, and conversation with God. Acknowledging that the Bible is not the end goal, but the means to the end: communion with God. And also acknowledging that by returning to the pages of Scripture our understanding of Jesus is shaped more by the Gospel than by our own (or others’) ideas.

Many people, young and old, question the relevance of the Bible to their lives today. And if the Bible is presented as something which we must “study diligently” if we are to find “eternal life”, then we may end up just confirming their suspicions.

However, many people, young and old, are hungry to hear from God. The heartache of young Christian New Zealander’s in particular is just the same as the disciples 2000 years ago, “teach us to pray.” We are failing to disciple a generation if our young people are not equipped with tools of hearing from and connecting with God through the pages of Scripture.

There are many ways in which God uses the words of Scripture to speak to us. Each of us are formed in the image of God, yet we are not all the same.

One way of hearing from God through Scripture that has been impactful in my life is...

*Insert practice that you’ve used to dialogue with God through Scripture e.g.:*

- ❖ Meditation/Lectio Divina
- ❖ Praying Scripture
- ❖ Reflection on one word or phrase of Scripture
- ❖ Imagining yourself in the scene, what is Jesus saying to you? (Ignatian reflection)
- ❖ Wrestling with God; asking God hard questions about why certain things are in the Bible/what they mean, through verbal or written prayers
- ❖ Discussing a passage of Scripture in a group to hear what other people feel God is saying to them through it

*Explain in detail what it looks like for you to hear from God through this practice.*

As we understand and present the Bible, not as an ancient set of rules we have to obey, but as a channel through which God continues to speak to his children today, we will find more and more people interested in picking up the Bible, and reading with an open heart. When we enter into the pages of Scripture in order to come to Jesus, for relationship and life change rather than head-knowledge, we will find that this book is very much “good for life.”