

Book Binding

Sunday, July 1, 2007

Read 2nd Timothy 3:14-17 Do we believe this?

A couple of weeks ago Stacia asked a very interesting question, “Do you suppose people take their Bible on vacation?” What a silly question, of course Christians take their Bible on vacation; I mean I take my Bible on vacation...doesn't everybody. Then I thought not everybody brings their Bibles to church, which seems like an odd thing doesn't. This past week our family was in Sanibel and we took Bikes so we could go Bike riding, we brought fishing poles so we could go fishing, I even brought tooth paste and deodorant, because I had to be around other people. I had a plan and a tool for every vacation contingency. Are we planning on spiritual contingencies?

Why is it that we are so reluctant to make the same applications to our spiritual lives? If we were going to take our Bible anywhere, it probably would be to church and yet few of us do, I know I didn't when I sat where you are sitting today, Deedie did but I didn't. Have you ever wondered why we are so scarred of this book, I think down deep we know that if we ever get into it...it simply would not leave us alone.

Cultures and communities are bound together by common beliefs and even struggles. On Wednesday we will celebrate the birth of this nation which binds us together as Americans. So all of this had me thinking about what **Binds** us together, you and I and our community of faith, what holds together the pages and stories of our life, what influences us, are we a people of the Book or are we a people of the World?

Now before I go any further I want to make an observation: Do you ever wonder why there are no Moabites or Amlekites or Jebusites living these days? Have you ever noticed that there are hardly any Philistines at your place of work or living in your

neighborhood? When you look at the nations and tribes from Israel's day... any that were the size of Israel are all gone, merely memories of recorded history. Egypt and Greece huge vast civilizations are still around, but even their influence has diminished. But not so with the Israelites!

How is it a tribe of desert nomads changed the way the world thought and felt? What is it that distinguished Israel from all the other peoples who no longer exist?

It wasn't power, during most of its history; Israel was a vassal of far more powerful states. It wasn't wealth; Israel was never a player in the world's economy. It wasn't size; Israel was so insignificant in size that countries like Mesopotamia, Rome, Egypt and Greece virtually never even mentioned Israel in their historical records.

So why did they survive and how did they ever change the way the world thinks and feels? What did Israel have...I'll tell you...Israel had a book! They called it the **Tenakh**. This word is from 3 letters; T for **Torah**, which is the first five books of the Old Testament, N is for **Nedi'im**, which is the Hebrew word for prophets and K is for **Ketugim** which is the other writings Psalm, Proverbs etc.

They had a book that was unlike any other book that had ever existed before and it contained truths and ideas that had never hit the world prior to its arrival. This book said, instead of there being little tribal gods all over the place, there was one God and that this God is Holy and Just and loving and good and that He created all things and plans on redeeming all things. This book unlike the any of the mythologies or religions of the people that surrounded Israel, said that human existence was not just an endless cycle of repetition over and over again, it was not an accident but that it is an ongoing story, God's interactive story with all of creation.

The book said this story had a beginning, a divine ideal, it said it had a middle, that there was a fall and God began His work

of redemption and one day it will reach its summit and there one day is going to be an end to this story, and God's story gives us something to look forward too.

The book said that this God created human beings in His own image and that means we have an indescribable splendor about us and that we are accountable to this just and Holy God. Because of this Book, it means that we carry an indescribable responsibility and no longer are we confused about how to live and what is right or wrong for us. Because of this Book, the world is not stuck in darkness anymore; Because of this book people have faced trials of all kinds with a sense of joy and trust. Because of this book the world has never been the same.

This book so defined Israel that they called themselves simply, **The People Of The Book**. Other peoples were known for other things...their power, their armies, their industry...Israel was a people of the book. And in that day it was every Parents greatest responsibility to make sure their sons and daughters learned this book. To grow up and teach this book----to become a rabbi--- that was the greatest ambition, not a lawyer or engineer or a dentist but a rabbi, a teacher of the Book!

Let me give you an example of how seriously they took this book. When a young man fell in love and wanted to marry a young woman, in order to ascertain whether or not he was worthy of their daughter, the custom was that the family would give this prospective, wannabe groom a test for his knowledge of the Tenakh, to see if he was worthy of the bride. The more desirable the girl was considered to be...the more beautiful, intelligent she was, the wealthier her family was and so on...the higher the score he had to get on the Tenakh test. Now I know some of you fathers of daughters are thinking a test, that's a great idea. Now this was a pretty good incentive to know the scriptures. I picture it like this you're a newly wed on your honeymoon and a guy passes you as you and your new bride are walking by and he looks at your wife and says, wish you'd studied a little harder huh!

Anyway, they took it all very seriously! Look at what Moses told them long before they even had Kings in Israel. **Read Deuteronomy 17:18-20.** Interestingly, scripture records that when Israel's Kings followed the Book all was well and when they deviated from the book things went poorly.

The truth is that there is a lot in this Book that is hard to understand, some of it can be confusing, but there is a whole lot that's not and those who have engaged this Book have had their lives permanently altered by the words in this book. There have been some that have become prisoners and endured torture and even death rather than utter a single word against the book; and as hard as it is for us to believe, there are places in this world were it still happens today.

Jesus Came

One day a child named Jesus is born, a child just like you and I once were. And he studied this book, the first time we see him as a boy is at the temple and we see he is talking with the Rabbi's about the Book. He's asking questions about the book. The first time we see him as an adult, he is being led by the spirit into the wilderness. Satan tempts him there three times and three times Jesus quotes the book and withstands the temptations. Throughout His earthly Ministry Jesus quotes and teaches from the Book and on the last day of His life, hanging on a cross His last words are from Psalm 22, he cries out a passage from the Book! He is a man of one Book, do you suppose he thought it was important, this book?

For three years Jesus poured himself into the disciples, teaching them shaping them and then he dies, is resurrected and the first thing we are told about this new community in Acts 2 is that they devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching...they had the Book.

Today

Now it's our day. The book has never been more accessible; I just learned this past week while standing in line at the check out aisle that the number of translations, of L Ron Hubbard books on Scientology has now been translated into 65 languages, that should make Tom Cruise very happy. Most sacred texts have not been translated a whole lot; the Koran is intended to be read in Arabic. Most Muslim scholars don't consider it authentic or official if you read it in another language, so the translations are limited. The Book of Mormon has been translated into 100 different languages.

Now how many languages has the Bible been translated into, any guesses? Correct answer, best estimate comes from The Wycliffe Organization; 2656 languages. Let me tell you something else, some of the greatest heroes of the faith are the nameless missionaries that went to foreign continents to get to know their culture and their tribes and have spent years studying their language simply so they could give people a copy of the Book.

There has never been a book like this one, every year 65,000,000 copies of this book are bought in the US or given away by churches. Nothing is a close second. The average home in our country has three of these books. It's a strange thing; a lot of people cheer the Bible, buy the Bible, give the Bible and own the Bible. They just don't actually read the Bible!

- According to a Gallop poll two-thirds of the people in this country could not identify who it is that delivered the Sermon on the Mount; many thought it was Billy Graham. It was Jesus by the way.
- Fewer than half of all Americans could name the first book of the Bible-its the book of Genesis.
- Eighty percent of Americans believe in the 10 Commandments. We have big fights over them and we get down right indignant at the thought of having them removed from our Courthouses and schools, but the vast majority

- cannot name four of them. We'll fight about them, hang them up and believe in them. We just don't actually know them.
- Eighty percent of born again Christians, not the general public but committed believers, believe the phrase "God helps those who help themselves" is in the Bible. It is not; in fact Ben Franklin said that.
 - 12 percent of Christians think Noah's wife was Joan of Arc.
 - Thirty percent of those surveyed believed that the Epistles were the wives of the Apostles...actually I just made that one up but the others are all true

The book of Acts says a little community of believers was formed and they found that when they were devoted to the book, they came to know God and God used the book to change them. The change was so dramatic that thousands were coming to faith each day. I believe it is what is happening around here all the time.

Not long ago a man from our church came by the office with some money. He said God told him to give it to someone, a young person for new shoes or something they couldn't afford. He said, I knew it was God because a) I have never done anything like this before and b) I didn't want too. He said, God just kept putting this thought on my heart and I have been carrying this money around for more than a week. Please find a good home for it. So I called a local elementary school and asked if they had a little boy who was a trying hard in life but didn't have much and if they could get me his shoe size. I had the privilege of turning the burden of one mans heart into the hope in a child's life and that little boy got the first pair of brand new sneakers he had ever received and new socks to go with it. The word of God measured a man and he became good news to someone else.

I got an email from someone who doesn't go to our church about someone who does, basically it said had I known this person before they started coming to church I would not recognize them, that there whole life had changed and God was so evident in their life, she had become a person of the book.

The book causes us to be a different kind of person, it causes us to be Jesus in countless number of circumstances and it all happens because this book simply will not leave us alone. A month ago we took an offering for a little girl who had Leukemia and God's gift got doubled because one of you was changed by the Book. This book transforms us. This morning our offering will go to spread the Gospel on one of our States college campuses, and you know that's of God because its going to FSU, what's great is we get to be a people of the Book and you and I get to be good news to people that don't yet know the Book or its author...but they will.

Soap

Some of you are going to think this is weird but it's me and you have grown to expect it sometimes. When I was at Shiloh a few weeks ago, I heard the boys talking about taking showers, the problem was is there was some evidence that they had missed some spots and when you got near them the smell was not Irish Spring fresh and they were far from Zestfully clean. Come to find out they didn't use soap the first night.

All right here is the strange thing; our dirty smelly boys got me thinking about how the Bible is like Soap. I wonder if God looks down in my life and sees that I missed a few spots or that there is a stench upon me? The cool thing about our children's and youth ministries is that we are teaching our young people early on that when we read the scriptures it's like using soap. Here's how I got there, those boys all owned and had soap, but didn't use it. Scripture is the same way we all own and have it but it is only when we use it that it has the possibility of washing us. When we are apart from the Book, our minds can get cluttered with false beliefs and bad attitudes, twisted intentions and misguided perceptions. Apart from the Book I know this world would equip me for bad works. It makes bad feelings and bad behaviors inevitable. The truth is we live in a world that requires us to have our minds and spirits renewed, as Paul tells the church in Corinth

we need to be washed by the word. What would it be like to have our minds cleansed of all the garbage that weighs us down?

A transformed life is all about application, when we apply the Book into our life everyday, it allows us to bring our thoughts before God, we allow the thoughts of God to filter our thoughts and our actions. Imagine when you are with another person, your first thought is to bless them. Even if they're difficult, that's your first thought. Imagine that you're having a challenging day and instead of your first thoughts flying to frustration, and our own inadequacies or our embarrassment or our fear our first thought would be: I've got a great big God and nothing can separate me from his love.

A lot of people say they believe in the book, but they never read it. They're not devoted to the Book. Sometimes in churches, people can become superficial with it and they measure spirituality in goofy ways like...

- How much of the Book have you read?
- How much of the book do you know?

But this is the myth, it's not just about information it's about transformation. God's goal is not for you to get all the way through the scriptures but rather God's goal is for the scriptures to get all the way through you.

In the early days of the church they were a community of the Book, they read the book, knew the book, loved the book, did the book, lived the book and even died for the book.

So how will Georgianna be remembered? Are we committed to being a community of the Book? Now the measure of this will not be weather you bring your Bible to church or take it on vacation, although these are good things, the measure is weather or not we are transformed. I get to see it every day, those whose lives have risen from the ashes of brokenness to become a person of the Book, to be transformed.

Let me close with this...

A number of years ago the University of Wisconsin historian Thomas Reeves indicted popular religious belief and service saying, "Christianity in modern America is, in large part, innocuous, it tends to be easy, upbeat, convenient, and compatible. It does not require self-sacrifice, discipline, humility, an otherworldly outlook, or a zeal for souls, American Christianity lacks a fear as well as love of God".

As we approach the celebration of our Country's freedom, Perhaps we have been so busy pursuing the American Dream of the good life that we have neglected to nurture the faith on which the Dream was founded. If so, our only fault is inattention. If we find our common faith has faltered, or has shriveled from lack of nourishment, or has been supplanted by Shallowness, I pray that we do not succumb to cynicism. Faith has not been lost, only misplaced. As a people, we can retrieve it together.

I think the greatest legacy that we can leave our community is what Binds us together, that one day a hundred years from now, the people of Georgianna this community's grandchildren and great grandchildren, will have known our generation as a People of the Book!

Amen