

**Bible Sunday. October 24<sup>th</sup> 2010 Ray Slade**  
**Nehemiah 8**  
**Matthew 24**

Today is **Bible Sunday**. The Bible, incidentally, is the world's best selling book by far. Over a million are sold in the UK each year. That's a lot more than Nigella's cooking books or Wayne Rooney's memoirs, or the Girl with the Dragon Tattoo.

Did you notice that the word '**words**' occurred in both readings?

**Words**

A while ago I found a long list of words I had made 3 or 4 years ago while reading a book that was full of words I didn't know. My intention was to look them up but **I never did**. 'Anodyne' was on the list plus 50 or so others like 'pullulated', 'disquisition', 'velleity', 'Sesquipedalian.'

What strange things **words** can be! Annoying when one doesn't know their meaning and yet a bit of an effort to look them up.

Allegedly there are ½ million English words but we tend on average to use just 5000 in everyday speech. These days I have to say words like 'thingy', 'whatsit' etc make up a large proportion.

In today's Gospel we had Jesus saying "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my **words** will never pass away." (Matt 24 v 35) **An astonishing claim.**

In **John's Gospel 6** we read of some early followers deserting Jesus. He says to the 12 'Do you also wish to go away?' Simon Peter gave the group answer in v68, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the **words** of eternal life."

- **Words** that will never pass away whatever may happen to Earth and Heaven
- **Words** of Life

This is absolutely astounding! These are surely '**Words**' we really must look up!

Today is **Bible Sunday**. But hopefully every Sunday, indeed every day is a Bible Sunday or Bible day!! Our Bible has to be at the **epicenter** of believers, members of Christian communities, churches.

If we **really believe** that Jesus' words have the kind of significance Matthew and John gave them, if we really think the Bible is the **Word of God**, then plainly we will make the reading and study of the Bible **absolutely central** to the way we live and work. We will want our own **modern version**, we will secure some **form of guidance** in reading it.

But lots of questions arise about this. I want us to look at 2 of the biggest.

- What exactly is the Bible?
- What do its words actually mean? Can we look them up as it were?

## 1. What is the Bible?

*Apparently it stands for Basic Info Before Leaving Earth.*

No, the word simply means 'books', or collection of books, library. Derived from the same word in Greek and Latin. At its simplest level it is a collection of writings or books. Some are so short that it's hard to say book in the modern sense!

There are **66** of them. They are grouped in 2 halves. **OT/NT. 39 -27. 3s. PIN!** There is law, history, poetry, prophesy, letters..A bit like a day in school with different subjects.

Yet Christians regard it as **God's Word. The writings of people in some way inspired by God.** Add to that what we in our worship say every time we have a scripture 'This is the **Word** of the Lord'. Is this, the Bible, is the very **WORD, or words, of GOD himself.**

Ian reminded us of this last week. Paul wrote '**All scriptures are God breathed.**' Peter wrote of the writers of scripture '**though human they spoke from God as they were carried along by the HS**'.

That is why scripture is paramount to the Christian. Written by humans **but God breathed** (inspired), hence **authoritative and reliable.** Repeat.

## 2. What does it mean?

There is an issue here about how you read it. Often it is transparently clear. Sometimes the meaning isn't quite so obvious.

In the teachings of Jesus **often** the words **are** transparently clear.

- Take judging others for example. In the Sermon on the Mount, Don't try getting tiny specks out of the eyes of others when there is a plank of wood stuck in your own. Not hard to get behind the obvious humour here to see the clear anti hypocrisy message!
- But when he says things like 'many are called, few are chosen' it is not so obvious, harder to interpret. You have to work at it, use other teachings to help interpret, get into the culture and world view of the time.
- In 2 Pt 3 v16 Peter admits to finding some of Paul's writings hard p1157.

It is fascinating to note that elsewhere in the Bible this difficulty is anticipated!

**Go to our OT reading.** Nehemiah 8. (p473) We have an incident where the book of the Law (the then Bible) is brought out. (How often do you read Nehemiah? Time of the restoration with Ezra, rebuilding the temple etc. Last of the OT books)

It was read but people were tearful, upset, maybe confused (from v9). Then we saw in v8 that the Levites did more. They **'made clear the meaning – so the people understood.'** And it ends with that wonderful verse 'the people went off to celebrate with **great joy** because they now **understood** the **words** that had been made known to them'.

That's what sermons, commentaries, study notes etc are for.

Do you do that? After a good sermon! You should be joyful, going off to have 'choice food and sweet drinks' v10. **(there are refreshments after!!)**

So the Bible, God's word. To be read properly and frequently both in public and in private. And we accept that help might be needed to understand.

**PLEASE** talk to us if you would like help with

- Owning a comprehensible Bible such as those in the pews
- Accessing helpful support material
- Maybe joining a group of like minded folk who are really trying to understand.

From this day on make systematic reading of God's word a top priority.

I want to digress for a moment and read something that I picked up in the Church Times. A school chaplain said something like this:

'Anglicanism with its 'threefold core' of **scripture, reason, and tradition, ...**'

This is very misleading. Sadly the different voices within the CE do not speak with just one voice on this most crucial of matters. Let me be perfectly clear where I and I am sure Ian and Simon stand. Reason and tradition play an important role in helping us to understand scripture but **they do not** sit on a par with it. They are not independent sources of faith. Scripture is paramount. And it so because, as Ian explained last week 'To get to God you go through Christ. To know about Christ you go to scripture' You can't reason him out! And tradition does not give anything about Christ that is not already given in scripture.

Finally let me leave you with a 'corner shop acronym'.

**Hence SPAR. Scripture – its primacy, authority, reliability.**

That is what has driven our worship and our preaching over the last 6 years. That is what must be at the core of our Christian journey. That is what we **must secure** in terms of the future leadership of this parish.