

Sermon preached by David at St Alban's on Alpha Sunday 17.11.19

## How is the Bible relevant to me?

### The Bible is uniquely precious

I am old enough to remember seeing the Queen's coronation. About fifteen of us were crowded around a small black and white television screen. During the service in Westminster Abbey the Queen was presented with 'the most valuable thing in the world.' It was not the golden orb studded with jewels, dating from the coronation of Charles II in the seventeenth century. Nor was it the gold sceptre containing the Star of Africa, the largest diamond in the world. Nor was it the solid gold St Edward's Crown placed on the Queen's head. It was simply a copy of the Bible, given to our Queen with these words: "We present you with this book, the most valuable thing that this world affords."

People have given their lives for this book. It has been translated into every language and is a perennial bestseller. People have constantly smuggled it into countries that have tried to ban it.

Why is it so precious? Jesus gives us the answer in today's gospel reading. "You shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." What could be more precious than words that come from the mouth of God? Yet you can easily purchase a copy at any bookshop and this morning you can receive a New Testament free.

At first glance you might think the Bible just contains human words. It is composed of 66 books telling the human stories of people like Moses and Miriam, David and Solomon, Mary and Paul, Jesus himself. But they all had one thing in common. They were moved by the spirit of God to bring us the words from God. (2 Peter 1:21) This is what makes the Bible so special and so precious.

*"I rejoice in your word like one who discovers a great treasure." Psalms 119:162*

### The Bible is uniquely powerful

A sea captain was once caught in a terrible storm so violent that he despaired of his life. Above the raging of the storm he heard the voice of God calling to him and in that moment he promised that if his life were spared he would serve God for the rest of his days. That captain's name was John Newton and on that day his life was transformed from being a slave trader to being a Christian pastor. He wrote our first hymn: 'Amazing Grace... I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.'

Through reading the written word of God, we can hear the powerful voice of God. This voice has tremendous power to completely transform an individual. It has the power to heal, to forgive, to bring new direction, to give new life - as it did for John Newton - as it has done for many of us here today.

But the voice of God also has the power to transform a nation. Through William Wilberforce the slave trade was abandoned not just by individuals like John Newton but by the British Empire as it was in those days. The voice of God in this book has the power to transform individuals, families, communities and nations.

*"The voice of the Lord is powerful." Psalms 29:4*

### The Bible is uniquely personal

How often do you get close enough to someone to feel their breath? Perhaps when a child or grandchild climbs onto your lap. Perhaps when you kiss a friend or are close to a husband or wife. Feeling someone's breath is an exceptionally personal experience.

It is this personal aspect that is emphasised in our first reading when we heard that “All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is no ordinary book. God breathed on those who wrote it. God also breathes on those who read it. For each person it becomes intensely personal. This is so apparent in our home groups when we look together at a passage of scripture. As God breathes on the words we read, he speaks to each one of us in a different way and meets our own personal needs. It’s amazing how the words come to life and are so often just right for each individual on that particular day. When we hear God speaking to us personally like this, He feels so close.

*“Jesus breathed on his disciples” John 20:22*

In the interview this morning, George shared one of his favourite scriptures “Ask and it will be given to you, search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.” This scripture took on a new personal meaning for him and Christiana last year during their battle for citizenship.

Today we have some free New Testaments with Psalms which we would like you to take away, given to us generously by Gideons International. Sometimes we know that we need a word from God, but we don’t know where to start looking. In the front of these books are pages to guide us:

- **Where to find help** when... anxious or worried, lonely, needing comfort, afraid of the future, ill or in pain, sleepless etc.
- **Guidance in life**... thoughts and conversation, love and marriage, forgiveness and friendship, old age and death etc.
- Some written **prayers** to help you when you can’t find the words to pray.
- Some **suggested readings** to help you explore the New Testament and also some suggested readings from the Psalms.

## **So how can we make the most of this uniquely precious, uniquely powerful and uniquely personal book?**

The simple answer: open it and read it!

Sadly it often lays unopened on a shelf at home, in a drawer in hotel or in a desk at school. We can read it at three levels, each one going deeper: the head, the heart and the hands.

### **Read it with our heads...**

The Bible does not require us to abandon reason and commit to blind faith. Rather it challenges our thinking. Jesus asked searching questions of the religious leaders in his day. Paul entered into lively debate everywhere he went. That’s why I enjoy home groups so much. We can grapple with the questions of life and faith together.

### **Read it with our hearts...**

In the Bible God is not so much telling us something as showing us himself. The more we read the words of God, the more we come to love God. In common with people of the past and present we can find our hearts “strangely warmed” as we encounter Jesus, our Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit. We grow to love Him more and more.

### **Read it with our hands...**

The Bible is livable! It leads to action, involving our hands and feet. By reading the Bible we can follow Jesus, walk in his steps, become more like him.

This morning we would like to “present you with this book, the most valuable thing that this world affords.” By reading it, each one of us can find our lives changed as we follow Jesus.