

Christ Presbyterian Church
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Jake Kirchner
Jesus Sounds Good, but . . . The Bible is no Longer Relevant
Luke 8:5-8

If you would, I'd ask you to just try to remember for a moment the first memory you have of the Bible. Think back—maybe it was a long time ago or maybe it wasn't that long ago. Maybe it was a family Bible, a big Bible, maybe it was something you saw in church one time, maybe you don't have much memory of the Bible. Just think. I'll give you 5 seconds to think of your earliest memory that you can recall of the Bible.

I was recalling some of my earliest memories of the Bible and there was one memory that came to mind. I started going to church probably around 2nd grade or somewhere in there. For some reason, I remember a story about King Solomon. King Solomon had an opportunity to ask for whatever he wanted and it would be given to him, and he asked for wisdom. I remember thinking as a young kid, *wisdom? He could have asked for other stuff!* I thought, *wow, that must be really important*, so I started to pray, *God, give me wisdom . . .* still praying that prayer! My parents will attest to it. That's one of the memories. The other memory I have is a song and it goes like this:

The B-I-B-L-E, yes that's the book for me. I stand alone on the word of God, the
B-I-B-L-E. BIBLE!

I think we were excited because we got to yell and scream in church. Anytime we could do that was an exciting time. Some of you remember that song—you were about to sing with me, you were ready to shout, I know you were! It's a fun song, but what is interesting is to look at what has happened with the Bible in the past 2000 years. It's one of the most reproduced, quoted, memorized, and studied books of literature ever, and yet, we find ourselves in an unprecedented time when more and more people are feeling less and less compelled to read it. There was a time when it was like, *okay, the Bible says it, I believe it, it's good enough for me*, and it seems like we've entered this time where it's kind of like, *if the Bible says it . . . maybe? If you believe it, that's okay for you, but for me I'm going to seek experiences, and sources of truth, and reality, and beauty in some other places*. How did we get from there to here? I suspect there are a lot of reasons, but maybe some of the reasons have to do with how we use the Bible or at least how the Bible has been used recently or is used currently. I think for the most part the Bible has been either overused, misused, or it goes unapplied. Think about that for a second. Could be overused—somebody who just seems to find a way to use what they know about Scripture or some part of Scripture any opportunity that comes their way. Maybe it would look like this comedian who did a little impersonation of a woman who maybe overuses the Bible and how she would do that in a mall.

Video shown to congregation: <https://youtu.be/cLD83jvbyz4>

Maybe we don't go to that extreme, but there may be circumstances where we overuse the Bible.

Or, maybe we misuse the Bible. It seems we have fragmented the Bible into Tweetable statements, or these kind of refrigerator magnets, these Pinterest projects—I love Pinterest projects—I have one on my wall, it's a verse and it's great.

There's an author and a thinker, Philip Yancey, who calls these things Moral McNuggets. Moral McNuggets. They taste good, they feel good, but you're really not going to sustain any life in consuming them that way. Maybe that's not all that harmful, maybe, but if we take it to a different level and we dip those McNuggets, McJudgements, McSentiments into our favorite flavor of Christianity, or politics, or religious agendas, all of a sudden we have the opportunity to do some real damage. Overused, misused, unapplied.

There's an author named G.K. Chesterton—he's a guy that wrote around the time of C.S. Lewis. He and C.S. Lewis would go back and forth—really great thinker and writer. Here's a quote that might need to be tweaked a little bit, but he says, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried." Maybe we can substitute this: the Bible has not been tried found and wanting, it's been found difficult and not tried.

I've got some church-planting friends, and before I came on staff here I was a church planter. I helped start new churches, reproduced churches, and got to interact with church-planters and reproducers from all around the world—guys in India and Africa—and I started to find out that the way we view ourselves as Christians in America isn't really how the rest of the world understands and views us. They have this definition of what it means to be a Christian in America today and they were almost hesitant to tell us, but now it's kind of going around the block a little bit and people around the world kind of look at it this way: a Christian in America is someone who has been educated far beyond their level of obedience. Some of us are feeling that. It's not that these are all bad things. There's nothing wrong with being able to recall Scripture for circumstances in our lives and using that to encourage people. There's nothing wrong with these sentiments that are encouraging and inspiring. There's nothing wrong with studying. But when that's the only way or the primary way that we use Scripture, it can reinforce the misconceptions that leave us where we are today. This is especially true for people who are uncertain about the Bible, don't know much about the Bible, or are unfamiliar with the Bible. The idea of the Bible can intimidate and overwhelm us.

Our goal today is not to convince you of the relevancy of the Bible; I can't do that even if I tried. We hope that all of us—whether you know Scripture, or think you know Scripture, or know you don't know Scripture—we hope all of us would desire to have a deeper relationship with God by interacting with this revelation of who He is that He's given us through what we call the Bible.

Three stories I want to share with you today. The first story is the story of everything.

Really, the Bible is the story of everything. It's not just a book; it's a collection of books written by over 40 authors over 1,500 years that collectively gets at this overarching narrative. We might call it a through-line or a meta-narrative that brings cohesiveness to the complexity of the Bible. And for me, I wanted to share this because it wasn't until I started to understand the Bible as the story of everything that the individual parts of the Bible started to make more sense. The parts inform the whole and the whole informs the parts. The story of everything is the story of us. It's our story, and it's God's story, and it's my story, and it's your story, and it's how those stories intersect. Lots of ways that we can talk about that arching story, lots of different authors and thinkers that have gone about doing that.

There's a guy named Jared Stevens who's a pastor in Chicago and he talked about, and wrote in a book, four simple words...four words that can really help us understand and frame up this overarching narrative of the story. Here's the four words: **Of. Between. With. In.** So if somebody says, "Hey, what's the Bible about?" Just say, "The story about of, between, with, in. You're good. Have fun." So really this is how the story unfolds. The beginning is really the first two chapters of the story. It's a story **of** how God creates mankind, human kind, in the image of Himself. You and I are made in the image of God. A story that goes on for a little while in this section is a story of what happened **between** humankind and God. That something came in-between God and us and that's a thing we don't like to talk about too often, or it's a word maybe we avoid or just choose not to use—it's the word sin. Brokenness entered the world. The choices that were made, and that we continue to make, cause brokenness in our relationship **with** God, our relationship **with** each other, our relationship **with** creation, and our relationship **with** ourselves. That something that happened between us that disintegrated being made in the image of.

And then the story continues and Jesus shows up and Jesus is the part of the story—this movement in the story where God is with man; He is with us. God takes on flesh through the person of Jesus, and in this life of living with mankind, this life of understanding what it means to be human, we see that God has provided a way—through Jesus' life, and death, and resurrection—God provides a way for us to be with Him starting now and forever. It's not just that God came to be with us, but He provides a way for us to be with Him. And as Jesus leaves the scene, a new movement starts. The next movement is that God is **in** us. He sends His Holy Spirit to be a part of our very beings. We get to interact with and partner with God in such a way that we're empowered to live out this life that He's called us to. The Holy Spirit allows us to live in the fullness of all He has created us to be—not just for ourselves, but so that together we're empowered to display this love to the world around us. **Of. Between. With. In.** The story of everything.

The second story is a story that Jesus told. Jesus loved to tell stories and one of the reasons is because stories get at really deep and profound truths in simple ways...in ways that a group of kids can understand, even while we, as adults, contemplate and are going to still wrestle with. Here's the story; it's found in Luke 8. The story is set up well by understanding that there are lots of crowds following Jesus. There's something

relevant about who Jesus is and He shares this story about interacting with His word. He says there once was this sower, a farmer...Now imagine that the disciples and the crowd are probably seeing a field not far off. They aren't fields like our fields—there aren't tractors and everything isn't set out perfectly row-by-row. It's a field that might have paths running through the middle because people like to take shortcuts; people might stay off the main road because it could be dangerous, so there are small short paths through the fields. And parts of the field are cultivated well, but some of the rocks from one spot kind of get thrown into other spots, and there are parts that maybe the gardening didn't get done that week and weeds are popping up, and so that's in the field too. And there's good soil on the field. This sower, this farmer, reaches into his bag and just grabs seed and generously sows the seed throughout the whole field. Some of the seed lands on the path, and some lands on the rocky soil, and some lands by the weeds, and some lands on good soil. Stuff that lands on the path is taken away, it's snatched away, it's crunched under people's feet. The stuff in the rocky soil doesn't grow, and neither does the stuff in the thorns. Jesus goes on to describe the meaning of the different soils. He describes to them . . .

¹¹ This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹² Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³ Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. ¹⁴ The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. ¹⁵ But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. [Luke 8:11-15]

My hunch is, and I'd submit to you, perhaps the reason we sometimes find the Bible to be irrelevant has less to do with what's happening *around* us and more to do with what's happening *in* us. Maybe the relevancy of the Bible isn't determined by our circumstances, but rather by the condition of our hearts. I know for me that when it comes to this good news that I talk about and who Jesus is—that God is with us and we get to be with Him—that's taken up in good soil in my heart. I can share that story and how that's happened for me...the life that that's produced for me. But I also know that there are parts of my heart God is trying to get to, and He's trying to spread His word so generously in my life and in my heart because He wants good for me, but my heart is a lot like a worn path. Something happened—maybe somebody hurt me or hurt somebody I love, or somebody didn't meet the expectations I had—and because of that there are parts of my heart that are much more like packed down soil, and parts of my heart that are a lot more rocky than I'd like to admit at times. For some reason, there are parts of my heart where the moisture, the thing that's going to nourish and give me life, isn't attached to good things—it's more attached to things that don't really bring the life that God promises. Maybe it's acceptance, or achievement, or an appetite for things that actually don't have longevity. I'll say for me—you can say for you—when it comes

to times that God is trying to sow something in my heart and it's just not growing, there are some rocks there and usually it's because of acceptance. It's because I'm not seeking to be found in the identity of who God is calling me to be—made in His image. Instead, I'm trying to find identity in how I'm accepted by my wife, or kids, or family, or colleagues, or my boss, or my professors, or my classmates, or by my neighbors, or by my friends. And what God is trying to do in my life, if that is where I'm trying to find nourishment, *oh it sounds good what God said...* but it doesn't take root. And there are other parts of my heart where there's a bunch of thorns and weeds growing around what God is trying to do. I have these worries of the world: I have to do something about making sure my kids can get into a good college, I have to do something to make sure they can play on that sports team or this sports team and have all the opportunities I want for them, I have to make sure I have enough money in my bank account by the end of the year to make sure I'm going to be okay for a certain amount of time. God's word starts to take root, but the other stuff in life chokes it out. Then there are parts of my life when God says something, and for some reason—there's good soil there in my heart—it's so fruitful and so abundant that I can't help but share that with other people.

Last story. This took place a few years ago, right when my son Dylan (he's six-and-a-half now) was born. Something happens when you have kids—you don't sleep! I had had this routine down where I'd either go online and find some Scripture to interact with and reflect on, or I would journal and see what God had for me that day. So that changed after Dylan was born and I thought *I'm not doing what really brings life to me, what am I supposed to do?* So I download this YouVersion app on my phone, it's a Bible app, and I signed up for daily text messages that had verses. So I would get these verses and read them and reflect on them in the car on my way to work. I had 15 minutes or so. And here's what happened one time . . . I get this verse, it pops up, Philippians 4:6. It says, "Don't worry about anything, instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has done." Some translations say, "Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything, in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, offer your prayers to God." Here's the thing: I've read that verse a lot of times. I had it in the context of the letter, I've understood it, I've Tweeted it, I've done all those things, but that day something stuck out to me, and it got to the condition of my heart. Be thankful about ALL things? Hmmm. I'll offer up prayers because I'm anxious, but at that time I had this thing going on with some people I thought didn't meet the expectations and had kind of hurt some people I loved, and I was about to go into a place where it was likely I'd bump into them. I remember starting to pray and reflect on this verse, and I got through my kids and my family and I'm giving thanks for all these good things God has done, and then He brings to mind this person, let's call him Dave...because that's his name. I started giving thanks for all the ways that he had taught me leadership and the ways he had blessed the things that I had done in the past, and the way he had supported and encouraged me, and by the time I get to this meeting there were some other people there that were on the list too, and I'm just a wreck. I'm like weeping almost the whole time. Tears are coming down and I'm thinking *thank You, God, for*

these people, and I start to realize, I've got really good things in my life despite what I thought was not so much. I get into the meeting and they're asking, *are you okay?* And I'm like, *I'm great!* And I was! I was happy and I was joyful and I had this weight lifted off of me. And what happened that day in the car was that I got in that car with a hard heart, worn out on this path, trying to find nourishment other places, and chocked out by other worries—and I got out of that car and there was fruitfulness in my life.

So here's the question I have for us today: how's the condition of your heart? Maybe a follow up question is: are you willing to lean in differently, or step into more than you have before, exploring what God might have to reveal for you? Are you willing to allow Him to heal and bring fruitfulness to your life through interacting with His word? Let's pray.

Jesus, thank You for Your word. Thanks for stories that can get at the realities of our lives. God, I pray that in this place, even though there are some of us that have hardened hearts or worn out hearts or rocky soil or thorns and worries, God, I pray that Your word, so promising, will be sown over us. I pray God that You will work on us, and in us, and through us. I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.