

As a church we are in the process of reading through the entire Bible in 90 days! Sadly, I haven't read the entire Bible through since I was in Seminary. I have read entire Books of the Bible through, but since Seminary, never the Bible from beginning to end as we are attempting to do now.

I think the same can be said for a lot of Christians. I don't want to ask how many have read the entire Bible through – maybe some have and some haven't. I do know that it is not really an emphasis in some churches.

I did have a Seminary professor who read the entire Bible through each year, in a new Bible. He would buy a cheap edition, and he would pick a theme each year and look for that as he read through the Bible. And then he would mark the Bible when he found what he was looking for. But then again, he also did his personal devotions using the Hebrew Bible! I wish I was that disciplined.

That's not the same thing that we are doing. We are trying to look at the overall context of God's Word and to see His hand in accomplishing His will, as some saw this week in Genesis and Exodus.

However, it doesn't end there. I used to have a sign in my office that said: "God did not give us His Word for our opinion, but for our obedience." And that is exactly what we see in our Epistle lesson from this morning from James 1, so I ask that you turn with me there. And since it is only 4 verses, I would like to read it again – James 1:17-21 (READ).

It is a short passage, but so important for us. James, who was the step-brother of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ – yes, Mary had natural children after Jesus – was writing to those Christians of the dispersion – that is, those who had to flee their homes because of their faith in Christ, just as Peter did.

As an aside, while this was not pleasant, this dispersion did facilitate the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to much of the known world, in a very short period of time. In other words, even though man's plan was evil, God used it for good. For those who read Genesis, it reminds us of Joseph!

The first thing that James does, according to our passage, is tell us about God – what He has done and who He is: James 1:17: "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*"

Again, as we compare Scripture with Scripture we know that God has given us all things for life and godliness, as we read in 2 Peter 1:3: "*as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,*"

As I have said on other occasions, God has given us what we need to live our lives here on this earth and life in that which is to come – that is, what we need to do to live with Him when this earthly life is over. In short, He has told us that we need to have faith or belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

These gifts come from God – they come from above – from the "*Father of Lights.*" As we read in Genesis, it was God who created the sun, moon and all the stars – stars that cannot be numbered.

Now, I know that because of all the light that we have around us, it is very hard for us to see the stars. But,

when we go to Vermont – at the house on the dead end street – in the darkness of night – we see the stars. I often just stare at them and marvel. Marvel, because the Scripture tell us that God knows all the stars by name! And I don't know how many millions there are of them. Psalms 147:4 say: "*He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name.*"

It is this God, that James continues and says: *with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.* Again, the scriptures say that our God is same yesterday, today and forever. God has not changed and neither has His standards and His requirements, if you will.

That is why I find that people who want to change what God has said in His word reprehensible. In my mind it takes colossal hutzpah to say that God didn't mean what He said, or that He has changed. If God said that it was a sin 2000 years ago – it is still a sin. So get over it, and accept it. If you don't like what God has said – find yourself another religion, but don't call yourself a Christian.

Because as James continues: James 1:18: "*Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.*" It is God's Word – the Scriptures – that has brought us to where we are today.

Think about God's Word – written over a period of 1500 years, by over 40 different human authors, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – and yet there is one theme from beginning to end – the unfolding plan of salvation – prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament.

Jesus said, in praying about his disciples: John 17:17: "*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*" God's Word is truth! As an advertisement, that is why I love the liturgy so much. It is about 2/3 scripture. So what better way to worship God than in the very words that He has given us. And that is why I always tell people that if they don't like the liturgy, they don't like God's Word.

The other day my son's friend was saying that the Bible was written by man. And so I quoted for him a couple of verses – the first was 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

The word translated "*inspiration*" literally means "God breathed" – so those 40 or so men wrote exactly and precisely what God wanted them to say.

And then I quoted 2 Peter 1:20-21: "*knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*"

The point of it all is that God has given us His truth ... His Word ... that we, who are created in the image of God can live as He intended. We know that we cannot do it perfectly – or even come close, for that matter. And that is why we need Jesus.

It is because of God's Word .. His truth, that James continues: 1:19: "*So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;*" Did you ever wonder why we have two ears and only one mouth? I would say it is so we can listen two times as much as we speak.

Proverbs 10:19 says: “*In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise.*” And Proverbs 17:28 says: “*Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; When he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive.*” That has been paraphrased to: “better to be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.” I think you get the idea.

We should listen more than we speak – and in the context of our passage it means listening AND obeying the Word of God. As James continues 1:20-21: “*for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*”

This is all summarized in the next section, which was not part of our lesson – James 1:22: “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*” Again, the saying that used to hang in my office – “God did not give us His Word for our opinion, but for our obedience.”

The conclusion of it all is our salvation. Think about it for a minute. This is the foundation of it all – the salvation of our souls. We are sinners and we need to be saved from our sins.

On Thursday I was talking with my barber – and yes, I go to a barber and not a hair stylist – and he is Jewish. So in the course of talking about a variety of religious things, I asked him about sin. Under the Old Covenant, God had set up a series of sacrifices for sins that the priest would offer – daily, weekly and yearly sacrifices. I saw that in Leviticus yesterday! Wow – God was very specific, wasn’t He? And we also saw what happened to Nadab and Abihu!

There is no more Temple and no more priesthood, so there can be no sacrifices for sin. My barber said that at the synagogue they don’t really talk about sin, which did not surprise me. So I asked him what did they say about sacrifices in the Synagogue and he told me something about sacrificing yourself – that is, doing good works. We know that good works will not save us.

So thankfully, the truth has been revealed to us. We know that salvation is ours through the Lord Jesus Christ. And we also know that God has given us His Word – His truth – to live by and to follow. As we read through the Bible in 90 days, let us not forget what it is – that it is God’s Word from the creator and sustainer of the Universe. And indeed, He has given us all that we need for life and godliness.