

23 Pentecost 2003  
"Written For Our Learning"  
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In the last several weeks I've been reading through the New Testament. I haven't done that in several years and I'm finding it a very exciting and revealing exercise. I highly recommend it. Just pick up the Bible and read a chapter or two every day. How many of you do that?

We are Building Christians for Service here at St Peters and a huge part of that is personal Bible study. To grow as a Christian, you've just got to read the Bible. **Every single one of us has a spiritual need to learn and live the Scriptures**, to make them our own. And like eating an elephant, it's a big job that has to be done in little bites, day-by-day, week-by-week.

Paul Theerman and I have big plans to help you in that endeavor by offering adult ed. classes that are rich and varied in Bible content, geared for different levels of knowledge and maturity. We plan on teaching not just the content of Scripture, but practical methods for personal Bible study, as well. We want to equip you to become mature and competent in the Scriptures.

That brings us to our collect and lessons this morning. Did you notice the collect? It's one of my favorites. **We pray for God's help in reading the Bible** – and we need it. "Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scripture to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life..."

We are asking God to help us embrace and hold fast to the truth of his Word, which is one of the most important and life-changing things you can do. It enables you to see yourself and the world around you from a new perspective, from GOD'S perspective. To get this from the Scriptures, we need to "hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them..." We have to study them!

God is there and he is not silent. **The infinite, personal God has spoken to us.** He has "caused all holy Scripture to be written for our learning." He has given us a written revelation of himself that is permanent and reliable and found between the covers of this book. That's why we read it and study and preach it.

He caused ALL of it to be written for our learning, even the strange, mysterious and opaque passages - like our texts this morning from Daniel and Mark. What do these particular Scriptures offer for our learning today?

Our Old Testament and Gospel show us the depth, mystery and wonder of the Bible, by actually **predicting the future and showing how it comes to pass.** Our text from Daniel speaks prophetically, in great detail, of the future and Mark shows us the fulfillment of Daniel's visions.

The Lord promises in the future "a time of anguish such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence," during which "the power of the holy people will be shattered." God tells Daniel the tribulation will last approximately 3 1/2 years. That's the cryptic reference to " a time, two times and half a time," which also corresponds roughly to the 1290-day period and the 1335-day periods predicted later in the passage. The tribulation will begin when "The abomination that desolates is set up" in the Temple on Mount Zion.

Fast forward 500 years to our Gospel lesson, and Jesus shows us what Daniel was talking about. **He's talking about the destruction of Jerusalem**, which Jesus says will happen within that generation. The disciples will witness it and he tells them what to look for. "When you see the desolating sacrilege set up," then it's time to run to the hills because "in those days there will be suffering such as has not been from the beginning of the creation until now."

He's basically quoting Daniel. What Daniel saw in the distant future, Jesus sees in the very near future. The destruction came in 70 AD when the Roman besieged and virtual annihilated Jerusalem. "Not one stone left standing upon another."

The point both Daniel and Jesus are making is that **God will protect and deliver his in the tribulation**. He will bring them through. I guess we can generalize that to all suffering, anguish and tribulation in life. But I think there's more here that is "written for our learning."

I see three things we can learn about Holy Scripture in these passages. They show us that 1) the Bible speaks miraculously; 2) it speaks coherently (though often mysteriously); and 3) it speaks relevantly to real life situations. Let's look at each.

**1. The Bible speaks miraculously.** That's hinted at in our collect. God has "caused all holy Scriptures to be written." This divine causation, this divine inspiration, by which these writings were written, is supernatural. The authors of Scripture didn't just make this stuff up. They were literary agents whom God caused to write what they wrote.

You can see this most clearly in the prophecies of Scripture. The Bible is full of predictive prophecy and it's fulfillment, and we'll see a bunch of it in the next month in the season of Advent. **There's nothing else like it.** Prophecy is one of the great marks of God's inspiration of Scripture and Daniel has some of the most expansive and detailed prophecies and the clearest fulfillments in the Bible.

Now this divine origin of holy Scripture gives it **divine authority in our lives**, in the Church and world. As you read it, always remember that authority, because as C.S. Lewis was fond of saying, "The teaching of Christ leaves no quarter." To submit to God is to submit to his Word in holy Scripture.

**2. The Bible speaks coherently.** The Bible is a Book composed of 66 different books written by different people in different times and places, addressing different situations in different literary styles. And yet it speaks across the centuries with remarkable coherence and consistency. Its themes and teachings echo from beginning to end. This makes it possible for us to gain from it a coherent “Biblical” view of the world. Christian maturity is a matter of adopting that Biblical view more and more deeply.

But coherence doesn't necessarily mean clarity does it? The Bible has many mysteries, unanswered questions and layers of meaning and application and riches that can't be grasped even in a lifetime of study. So that's our calling – a lifetime of studying holy Scripture.

And here's the simple secret to interpreting the Bible. Because Scripture is coherent, **we let Scripture interpret Scripture.** The 39 Articles put it this way. We cannot “interpret one place of Scripture in a way that's repugnant to another.” Or to put it positively, we interpret unclear passages, like our text from Daniel this morning, in light of clear passages like the Gospel of Mark.

**3. The Bible speaks relevantly.** Though it's often mysterious, Scripture speaks clearly *enough* to be relevant to every area of human life and endeavor. Did you know that? Through it God speaks authoritatively into the situations of our life, often addressing the most difficult and distressing realities, like the suffering and tribulation foreseen by Daniel and Jesus.

It gives us wisdom and warning and tells us what to look for and what to look out for in life. It gives us the means to look behind events to the meaning and movement of God in the midst of them. **Scripture allows us to see the big picture**, to see through a situation to the ultimate outcome of it.

This equips God's people to be calm, steady, charitable and courageous and to get on with life in the midst of suffering and anxiety. That's how relevant holy Scripture is. It's ALL written for our learning. It contains “All things necessary for salvation”. As Jesus said, “Be alert, I have already told you everything.”

So there it is. The Bible speaks miraculously, coherently, and relevantly. It brings God's Word into our lives and **it's all here for us.** Are you hearing it? Do you read it, mark it, learn it and inwardly digest it? If you aren't, you're missing out. Stay tuned in coming weeks for ways in which you can begin to learn holy Scripture.

Let's pray.

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scripture to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that our lives may more and more resemble the life of your Son Jesus, the living Word, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. AMEN