

What Do People See in the Bible?

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[0 : 00] Okay, well, good morning everyone. Lovely to see you today and brilliant to see so many new faces as well. My name is Graeme, I'm the pastor of the church here and here's what I'd love you to do.

I'd love you to turn back to those verses in John chapter 5, if you have them there in your Bibles. And know that as you're doing that, you are looking at, according to the Guinness Book of Records, you're looking at the best-selling book of all time.

Three quick fun facts for you. Five billion Bibles have been sold to date. Apparently, 1.6 million Bibles are sold around the world every month.

And somebody's worked out and calculated that that works out as something like 6.4 Bibles per second around the world right now are flying off the shelves.

Now, longevity like that, you have to say, is pretty extraordinary. And maybe you hear those stats and to be honest, you're completely baffled. Why would anyone be interested in this dated, cold and constraining book that Christians call the Bible?

[1 : 17] Surely in 2023, we've moved on from all that kind of religious stuff. What was it Boris said to us? Every night during lockdown, we'll be guided by the science.

Why do we need this book? Why do people get into this book? Which is a great question. Maybe it's one you've got here today. It's a wonderful question. And because it's a wonderful question, my invitation to you is to come to this passage today and see the wonderful answer that's there for us. You see, if all this was a self-help book, the kind that offers us pearls of wisdom, the kind of book that provides almost some spiritual caffeine to propel us into our days, honestly, this book wouldn't get past the publishers.

And the answer, because of that, is because it does a pretty lousy job at being a self-help book, if we're honest. Okay, no one's asking themselves, should I take that new job?

And it's going to find the immediate answer in one of the genealogies that you find in the Bible. It's not a self-help book. If that's what you're after, then can I recommend you flick over to Oprah, because she does a far better job than the Bible does at that.

[2 : 35] Let me put it to you that the answer to the question, what do people see in this book, is not primarily what it says. It's primarily who it reveals.

For if you come with me to our passage today, here is Jesus' claim about the Bible, and it's a biggie. And taking these five words in English, verse 39, the scriptures testify about me.

Which is either the most vain thing I think I've ever heard somebody say, right, like something that someone on an audition tape for The Apprentice would come out with, it's all about me, or he's right.

It's true, isn't it, in our own Christian walks at times, that so often our problem is that we go looking at this book, we come at it, thinking it's about us.

When actually, the way more satisfying, eye-opening, and life-changing experience is to come at it looking for him. Or more precisely, how he, Jesus Christ, the great king, is the glorious climax to God's promised plan to rescue guilty, sinful, clueless, and weary human beings like you and like me, win them to himself, and bless the nations of the world.

[4 : 11] Now, let's we think that this is simply a matter of facts, as if comprehension is the barrier, like to be a Christian is to find yourself entered in some kind of biblical spelling bee.

Come with me to this passage, and be sure to see that Jesus is here speaking to people who have all the Old Testament biblical knowledge they could ever need at their fingertips.

So when Jesus says, and look at it with me, verse 39, that you study the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.

That's what he means. These religious leaders are committed to learning what the scriptures say. I'm sure they could have said it to us, recited it almost verbatim.

Okay? Like, if you think about it, if Bible knowledge came up as a category and mastermind, these guys were sitting in a chair, they would be rubbing their hands with glee. They're committed to learning what it says.

[5 : 15] And they're committed to doing what scripture says. And yet Jesus, as in this passage today, says you've completely missed the point. See, here's what these men teach us.

That you can have both of those things, learning and doing, and still miss the point that's the central point of the Bible. I wonder if that rings true for you.

I remember playing football at university with a ton of boys who were from the western isles of Scotland. And they put me as a new Christian to shame because they knew their Bible off by heart. They tried their best to live according to it. They were cracking guys. But let me just tell you, they had zero interest in knowing the God at the heart of it. It is possible to do it. And Jesus knows it.

You see, according to him, when it comes to life, it's not so much what we know, it's who we know. In immediate context, Jesus has just healed a man and told him to carry his mat on the Sabbath.

[6 : 18] That's where we've been as a church over the last couple of weeks in John chapter five. And that's the thing that's caused a stir in Jerusalem. So again, we've been thinking about the fact that Jesus hasn't just posted a blog post about who he is.

Okay, he's in conversation with creatures. Again, you think about that, that's incredible. The creator of all things come down in the person of Jesus and he's dialoguing with people. And in so doing, verse 18, because he's healed that man on the Sabbath and because he's told that man to lift up his mat and walk, verse 18, he's made a claim to be equal to God.

And we saw that Jesus went on to explain who he is, right? The son of God, the apple of the father's eye, the one who has seen the father since before the beginning of the world.

And he's come to reveal him and his heart to a dying world that's lost in the sinking sand of our sin and death. Which is why if you're here today and you're wondering who is this God and what he is like, our passage last week said to us, clearly, look at Jesus.

He reveals the father. Look at Jesus. And now Jesus gives them almost three bits of evidence to give that claim, credibility, credibility in the eyes of the watching world.

[7 : 39] And I guess this is what we might know today as corroborating evidence. You heard of that? Corroborating evidence. You know, I've got a friend called Bob. Bob is a lecturer at Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

Bob is also a chaplain at Edinburgh's biggest prison out of Sotten. And I remember vividly him once telling me, he said, see when three guys come up to me in his lovely New Jersey accent, okay, when three guys come up to me and they give me precisely the same tale of events, precisely the same running order of what happened, I'm immediately smelling a rat.

Okay? And that's where corroborating evidence is very persuasive and convincing because it's evidence that's been gathered from different sources but comes together to provide you with a consistent and full picture.

It's very persuasive. It's why when I was in law, remember, this is what you looked for for evidence, corroboration. Corroboration. And that's what we have here. And in keeping with Jewish law that looked for exactly the same thing, Jesus says, here are three bits of evidence that back up my claim to divinity.

Now, we'll go through these really quickly, but come with me and you'll see that this stuff stacks up. Here's the first one. Jesus says, verse 33, how about you trust the man who announced me? Okay?

[9 : 05] John the Baptist is here. This great and predicted forerunner to Jesus who would come on the scene just before the Lord himself would come, according to scripture.

And we met this guy back at chapter one. He arrived on the scene in the region causing a stir because he was telling people to leave behind their old sinful ways, come out, allow God to transform your heart and like a moth to a flame be led towards the light.

That was John the Baptist. And Jesus calls him here a burning and a shining lamp. You see it? In other words, this guy, John, was a man in the pitch black with a flashlight in his hand and he was shining it straight at me, says Jesus.

And secondly, says Jesus, how about you trust the works that affirm me? You see, every single miracle that Jesus does, the type that defies all human logic and expectations is a megaphone

announcing to the world the breaking in of God's rule and reign.

And not only are they wonderful foretastes of what will be true physically and emotionally for every believer one day when Jesus returns, but every work is also the Father's stamp of approval on the person of Jesus and his claims.

[10:44] And thirdly, Jesus says, how about you trust the voice that adores me? You see verse 37? Jesus says, the Father bore witness about me.

Genuinely understood there to be a reference to Jesus' baptism when the Father's voice thundered from heaven and when he came up out of the water said, this is my son.

With him I am well pleased. So there's your three bits of evidence says Jesus, the man that announces me, the works that affirm me, and the voice that adores me.

Now what connects those three things? I've been thinking about this all week. What connects those three things? Well, I take it it's that all three of these things are not like random shooting stars we would see in an evening, right?

Never saw that coming. If only someone had said. I take it all of these three things are right there in the scriptures. Okay, John the Baptist that the voice in the wilderness saying make straight the path for the Lord.

[11:53] Again, he's not come out of nowhere. It's Isaiah chapter 40 you read about him there. The works that the one God's promised one would come and his arrival would cause the lame to leap for joy and who would take the infirmities of God's people on himself.

It's Isaiah 53. The father who delights in his son his heart is bursting with emotion as he looks at him and considers what he's come to do. The servant is talked about in Isaiah 42.

It's all right there which makes you wonder if these guys have all the Bible knowledge at their disposal why are they not seeing it? And you see it's not a matter of them not having quite joined the dots yet.

It's more that they won't join the dots. I think this is really insightful. And why? Well John gives us two reasons. They're kind of wrapped up in this one verse.

And here's reason number one verse 44. That they love the glory that comes from men. Okay. If these guys were around today they'd be following each other on Twitter they'd be liking each other's tweets they'd be retweeting each other's tweets in some kind of religious echo chamber.

[13:20] They love and they exist for their own glory. You get this description of the Pharisees as we move through the Gospels. Right? Just think about two longs.

They have long robes so that everyone can see how important they are and they love long prayers so that everyone can hear their eloquence. They live for the praise of men.

They love the praise of men over and above the praise of God. So they're glory stealers. And reason number two verse 45 is that they love self justifying.

And if you listen carefully enough you'll see how both of these things line up in what Bogdan has just shared with us. That's why verse 45 they love the law of Moses which I take it is code there for the Ten Commandments.

How God had told his people having saved them by his power by his grace to live for him and said that's how I want you to live for me. They had become not a means by which they saw the brokenness of their own hearts.

[14:26] How just our inability to live up to this holy life that God has called us to and their desperate need of him. But actually they resorted to being a tick-tock exercise by which they could say done that, not done that, not done that, not committed murder today.

And they give the impression that they're good with God because they haven't done those certain things. And Jesus sees straight through it. And there's maybe something you've got in your mind today.

You say well religion Christianity is full of hypocrisy. And friends, know how God feels about that. When you read the Gospels, what you'll see is that Jesus has some of his sharpest words of rebuke, not for the moral failures, but rather for the religious hypocrites.

He sees straight through it. And Jesus outs them on it here. And he outs us on it too. Because here's a confession. I love my own glory. I love my own praise.

I love it when people speak well of me. And I so often trust my attempts at trying to make me good. And dear friends, if that is the hamster wheel that you're currently on, living for the praise of others, trying to get your identity from what others think about you, then I'm sure you'll know that that is a

lonely and exhausting place to live your life.

[15 : 53] And the message of the gospel, which is why we're here today, to celebrate yes, what God has done in Bogdan's life, but more so the Savior who loves us all. Jesus comes along, and you've got to get this straight, he doesn't like me just the way I am.

That is the gospel to Lady Gaga. It doesn't work. He doesn't love me just the way I am. He doesn't like me just the way I am. No, Jesus goes so much better. He loves me despite of who I am. And that's the gospel today. spend any time with Jesus and you'll soon discover you are dealing with a God who doesn't just tolerate people who don't like him. You're dealing with a God who came to die for his enemies.

To the extent that he will offer his life on the cross in the place of death that you and I deserve to die to save us from our sin, from an eternal existence, facing his wrath.

And so if that's how you and I are saved, then we've got to understand that Jesus outed us on the cross as people who are in need of that salvation. He outs me as a sinner and he saves me from the vain exercise that is self-justifying.

[17 : 11] And this is a place where I can be honest about my complete spiritual need before anyone in the world. Because it's Jesus that saved me. It's not just like he topped up my attempts at good works.

No, no, no. Jesus saved me completely. And he saves me out of that lonely self-absorbed existence where I live for my own glory.

He saves me out of it and he puts a new heart of flesh in me and he turns me and he's shaping me so that the way I want to live my life, the very reason that you and I were made was to exist for and bask in the glory of Jesus who loves us.

You see, here's what Jesus knows has happened to their hearts. Verse 42, he says, you do not have the love of God within you.

Right? Their hearts have gone really hard. It's like if you've ever left the lid off of Play-Doh for any length of time, spot the life stage I am at what happens to it, what happens to it?

[18 : 24] It just goes hard. Right? Can't do anything with it. It just goes brittle. And that's what Jesus is saying about their hearts here. I'll be honest with you, here's my greatest fear for my Christian life.

And Bogdan, make this your greatest fear as well. That my heart just goes cold and it goes brittle to the point where I just don't have the love of God in my heart.

That my heart grows callous and stops being thrilled with and molded by the Jesus who loved me and who gave himself for me.

it was late 20th century American theologian J. Gresham Mackin who once said that Christianity is the religion of the broken heart.

You see, the human heart will find itself in losing itself. And when you discover the life that's in Jesus, it is the most liberating place to be.

[19 : 35] And so my question to you as we begin to wrap up is do you know him? Have you considered him? Have you read about him? Have you spent time with him?

The one who can give you and I living in this world hope in the midst of despair and purpose in the midst of confusion. That's Jesus.

So what do people see in this book? I take it the answer is that the spirit of God through the word of God does the work of God in satisfying our thirsty and needy souls with the Christ of God.

Who as we encounter him here says verse 40 come to me whoever you are come to me and have life. you know just as we close and maybe to help convince you of the truth of this let me just tell you a story I heard recently from a man who works down in London called Richard Burgonan and he travels around the country telling people about the word of God and why they should read it and I was hearing him talk and he was telling me about this Chinese woman who once ran up to him and proceeded to tell him the story about how she became a Christian.

Now I don't know if you know the history of China but it was in the part of that country's history when Mao was in power and he wanted to put an end to the influence and the spread of Christianity and one of the ways he sought to do that was to order all the Christian missionaries to get out and so the Christian missionaries left and they took everything with them except can you guess it their Bibles so no missionaries there but tons of Bibles there and the locals being quite resourceful people they found these Bibles and they found that they were made of really good quality paper so

what they did again being resourceful people is they ripped the pages up and this one lady was telling us telling him about her family used it to use it as wallpaper on the family home and she was the fifth generation of someone in her family to become a

[21 : 55] Christian because they'd first read about Jesus on the wallpaper in the family home what they nicknamed the Bible room convinces us doesn't it that the power is in the word of God as the spirit of God takes the word of God and reveals to us the glorious Christ of God that's right at the centre of it see people why do people love this book Jesus says it's because the scriptures testify about me it's him for God who said let light shine out of darkness made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ and that's the call this morning as God speaks to us through his word have you met his son do you know his son friends today would be a great morning as we've heard as we've sung and as we've prayed and we've heard from

Bogdan just about the difference that Jesus makes today would be a great day to explore him if you haven't done that already we'd love to do that if you want to explore him you want to read the Bible with someone there's tons of them at the back please take one that's our gift to you but if you have any questions about any of this stuff please do come and speak to anyone you've seen up the front today it would be our joy to introduce you to him let me pray and so father we're just so thankful for Jesus today there is just simply no one like him who's in the business of saving people from their sin and transforming them so that they become more like him and so father we thank you for this morning where we've just been enjoying hearing about the new life that Jesus gives and so lord I pray that in this moment now as we finish up our time together and as we spend some time together afterwards that your spirit would be moving amongst us and would be in our conversations in our minds and as we go on from here and meditate and think about these things may your spirit reveal to us a glorious Jesus and it's in his wonderful name that we pray amen