

Biblical Literacy

Good morning. I hope you are well.

2 Timothy Chapter 3 v 16 starts with these wonderful, amazing words “All Scripture is God breathed...”. I could stop there. I shouldn't really need to say any more this morning. “All Scripture is God breathed...” Amen.

We are looking today at our Core Value of Biblical literacy. And to me, those words say it all. Here at CJ's City we believe that! We believe that this Book – is not just a Book. We value the wisdom of the whole Bible and it is therefore our final authority – because it is God's very Word. “All Scripture is God breathed...” The Word of God – the Bible.

We are therefore going to spend some time this morning looking at the importance of Biblical Literacy – the importance of knowing the Word of God, knowing, understanding, living, believing our Bibles.

We need to know our Bibles – and by that I don't just mean to know it in an intellectual sense – yes that is where it begins in our minds but we also need to know our Bibles on a deeper level, on an emotional level, a spiritual level. The Word of God should consume our whole being – our very soul.

Woodrow Wilson, the 28th President of the United States of America is quoted as saying “*When you have read the Bible you will **know** it is the Word of God, because you will have found in it the key to your own heart, your own happiness and your own duty.*”

I can't really stand here this morning and preach Biblical Literacy. It is not enough for me to stand here this morning and talk about it – it is not enough for me or you – we can only achieve Biblical Literacy by doing it. In other words we need to read the Bible, take time to understand it, learn it and apply it in our daily lives. One thing that became incredibly evident to me when preparing for today is how much further I have to go, how much more time I need to spend in His Word.

I did contemplate getting up this morning and just saying – pick up your Bibles, open them at a particular passage and spend the next 20 minutes reading His Word. Spend time in the Bible that is the only way to become literate.

Then I thought about all the stuff I bring to Church each Sunday morning – the things for the children, PA stuff, we bring refreshments, flowers sometimes and many other things and I stopped and thought – how often do I bring this? [my Bible]. Where does my time in the Word, where does the Word fit into the equation? If we were to stop and read the Bible this morning – would we have enough copies with us in the Church?

The Bible is our ultimate authority, it is THE manual for life (forget all those self help books – as I've said a few weeks ago on Alpha – if we were truly spending time in the Bible there would be no need for therapy). But not if it just sits on the shelf or if we carry it around for show. We need to be in it. In it! It needs to be in us. The whole Bible – that means the Old and the New Testament. Sometime it can be easy to become a New Testament junkie! We need to be careful to avoid that!

So – why should we read the Bible – why is Biblical Literacy important?

Well:-

1. It covers EVERYTHING. Not a lot more I can say about that – and if you don't believe me – read it – then come back and tell me what is not in there.
2. It is powerful. Emile Caillet said "The Bible is not only a book which I can understand; it is a book which understands me."
3. It is God's Word – as I have said – firstly it is His revelation – He speaks to us through it, "...teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" as **2 Timothy 3 verse 16** goes on to say.
4. It is also God speaking to us in relationship and we can listen to Him and hear Him through His Word. In the Bible we find Jesus – who dies for us, who loves us, who guides us, heals us, frees us and protects us.

If that's not enough then I want to look at 4 important features of Biblical Literacy. That's just for starters. Now we need to look at the main course.

Would you turn with me to **Psalm 119 v 1-24**. We will also be looking at other passages of Scripture this morning but let's use these verses as a focal point.

Psalm 119 v 1-24

<p>1 ^[a] Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD.</p>	<p>13 With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.</p>
<p>2 Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.</p>	<p>14 I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.</p>
<p>3 They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.</p>	<p>15 I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.</p>
<p>4 You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.</p>	<p>16 I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.</p>
<p>5 Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!</p>	<p>17 Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will obey your word.</p>
<p>6 Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands.</p>	<p>18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.</p>
<p>7 I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.</p>	<p>19 I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me.</p>
<p>8 I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.</p>	<p>20 My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.</p>
<p>9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.</p>	<p>21 You rebuke the arrogant, who are cursed and who stray from your commands.</p>
<p>10 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.</p>	<p>22 Remove from me scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes.</p>
<p>11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.</p>	<p>23 Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees.</p>

12 Praise be to you, O LORD;
teach me your decrees.

24 Your statutes are my delight;
they are my counsellors.

POINT 1 – OBEY – purity

Verse 1 “Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.” And verse 9 “ How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.”

We are called to live as Jesus did. How do we do this? Obedience to the Word of God. We therefore need to know our Bibles to obey and be pure. – to be happy – “Blessed”.

We see here that in order to be blameless and pure we need to follow what is written. Verse 1 “Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.” And verse 9 “ How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.”

If we have our Bibles but use them only for show – we will struggle even more to live in obedience and have purity. In verse 11 the psalmist writes “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

If we carry the Bible with us but not in us – then when we find ourselves in tough situations, or facing difficulties or even joys – then what effect will it have – how will it differ from a novel or a newspaper. But if the Word of God is living IN US then we have a resource that can see us through when its tough and help us give expression and praise when things are going well.

That's why we are to hide His word in our hearts, that's why in **Deuteronomy 6 v 5-9** we read “*Love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I gave you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.*”

I hated studying – I found it really hard. I have a rubbish memory and learning all the stuff I needed to know was really difficult. When I started Uni – I bought a postcard which read:

"The more I study, the more I know,
The more I know, the more I forget,
The more I forget, the less I know.
So... why study?"

But I needed to study to pass the exams and what I used to do was write out my notes into fewer and fewer words and in the end I put some words/case names etc on postcards and I used to stick these on the wall. By the end of my finals – my room was covered in them – but it helped me to learn it!

And we need to get the Bible into our system. What we put in – is what comes out – you really are what you eat! If I eat nothing but sugar (and believe me if I could I would) – but if I eat nothing but sugar – I'll get fat – and probably really sick. If I feed

on the Word of God – in other words if I read my Bible – I'll get fat on Him – in other words – I'll be filled with God.

Philippians 4 verses 8-9 says:

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

If we allow God to feed us if we allow Him in we will see great things in our lives. Daniel, for example, chose not to eat food sacrificed to idols but allowed God to work in Him and in the end we see he was not just better – he was ten times better – allowing God to work in him.

As we spend time in the Word and develop our intimacy with God as Julio was speaking about last week we will see our need for Him to purify us and we realise that we need to obey Him. We need to choose life and obey Him and we can do this through Him and through obedience to His Word which has been given to us. But we know we can only do this through Jesus. Look with me briefly at these words in **Deuteronomy Ch 30 v 11-14 and 19-20**.

11 Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. 12 It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 13 Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 14 No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

19 This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live 20 and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

So firstly through the Bible we see how obedience leads to purity.

POINT 2 – GUIDE – protection

The Bible also provides us with a guide for life. And by it we have protection.

Psalms 119 verse 105 says "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

In verse 3 we see that "They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways."

We know that the Lord has plans for us – they are plans to prosper and not to harm us – but how can we know this and know if we are walking in line with His plans for our life and His will if we are not regularly reading our Bibles.

The Bible sheds light on these plans – literally lighting the pathway for each step we take – practical guidance for our life.

William Carey said "To know the will of God, we need an open Bible and an open map." As a multicultural Church we know the truth of that.

If we are regularly in the Word of God we can protect ourselves against confusion and uncertainty. Sometimes as we go through life we think there is a lot of grey – but I believe the Bible is very much black and white. We can trust the counsel of the Word for what we should/should not be doing.

The Bible provides light in the darkness and if we allow it to – through His Holy Spirit God will transform and change our lives. There is no confusion in the Word of God. I think sometimes our confusion comes from not knowing the Bible or taking time to fully understand it.

“You shall not murder” **Exodus 20:13**

“You shall not commit adultery” **Exodus 20:14**

“You shall not steal.” **Exodus 20:15**

21“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder,^[a] and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother^[b] will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,^[c] is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. – **Matthew 5 :21-22**

27“You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'^[a] 28But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. – **Matthew 5:27-28**

1What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? – **Romans 6:1**

Seems pretty clear to me!

In **Ephesians 6** Paul describes our spiritual armour to protect us in the spiritual warfare we face against the schemes of the evil one and at **verse 14** he calls us to buckle up the belt of truth – the Word of God – the Bible is truth and in **verse 17** he reminds us that in the fight we have a means of attack – the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

How did Jesus respond when the Devil sought to confuse and undermine Him – **Matthew 4:4,7 and 10** tells us “It is written...”.

Jesus used the Bible – the word of God. We should too. He knew what it said – the truth – no confusion – do we?

In **John 10** Jesus said – my sheep know my voice. Let's make sure we do.

Who do we look to for guidance in our lives – where do we seek our counsel. **Psalm 119 v 24** reads “Your statutes are my delight; they are my counsellors.” – Is this right in our lives? Do I seek my counsel from God and His word or am I swayed and convinced by what others tell me, what society or the media would have me believe. We need to seek the truth of the Bible for our lives and our protection against things which would lead us away from the truth and the blessing that God has for us.

The world for example would have me believe that there is no harm in sex before I'm married but God's word is clear that I am to wait for my husband.

Proverbs 3 verses 5-6 tell us :

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;

6 in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight. ^[a]

We also need to test whatever we hear against the Bible. Again for our protection from any false doctrine or teaching. As I have said it is our final authority: **1 Thessalonians Ch 5 v 21** "Test everything. Hold on to the good."

Through the Bible we also find a guide and protection.

Thirdly:-

POINT 3 – TREASURE – passion

Where is your treasure?

What is it you treasure?

What are you passionate about – what is your passion?

In what do you delight?

What do we allow to consume us?

What do we hold as precious and valuable?

In Psalm 119 the psalmist writes:

Verse 2: "Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart."

DO WE SEEK GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART?

Verse 14: "I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches."

SO WE REJOICE IN HIS WORD AND FOLLOWING HIS WORD OR DO WE REJOICE IN OUR RICHES/OUR WEALTH (OR LACK OF IT)/OUR JOBS/OUR....

Verse 16 "I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word."

DO WE DELIGHT IN THE BIBLE OR DO WE NEGLECT IT?

Verse 20: "My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times"

DOES THAT DESCRIBE US? WHAT AM I CONSUMED WITH – RIGHT NOW WHAT IS ON MY MIND – WHAT DO I THINK ABOUT?

Verse 72: "The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold."

Wow – if I put thousands of pieces of silver and gold in the middle of the room today – and said here's a gift for you – I think you might just get up out of your seat and come and get some.

Well – here's a gift for you [the Bible] – are we in such a rush to get up and get it!!?!!

This [the Bible] is treasure. We should be passionate for it. The Word of God is a treasure beyond compare. Do we desire it above all else as we should?

Anyone ever been in love? It consumes you – 1st thing in the morning until last thing at night and even into the night sometimes in our dreams. If you get a letter or I guess these days an e-mail, or a text from the one you love – you read it again and again – well the girls do anyway! God has written us a love letter and its right here! [the Bible]

Its also – well the Word of God is life. If I don't eat and drink – well I'll get thin (maybe I could do with eating a little less) but if I stopped eating and drinking all together – what would happen to me?

I'd die! It's a gradual process – it wouldn't happen right away but I would die. And if the Bible is the Word of life if we stop eating and drinking from it – or we don't eat and drink from it – well...you know what will happen.

Romans 15 verse 4 says:

4For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

The Bible is a treasure – we should have a passion for it – we gain hope and encouragement from it because the one who inspired it is passionate about us. Psalm 119 v's 49 to 50 the psalmist again encourages us to put our hope in God's Word to us – the Bible. It will comfort us in times of suffering and affliction. His Word gives us life.

"Remember the word to Your servant, upon which you have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, for your Word has given me life." (NKJV)

So do we give Him and His word the correct place in our lives - and I'm very much speaking to myself at this point – or I, have we allowed other things to take that place.

D.L. Moody said "the Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible."

And finally

POINT 4 – TIME – practice

This is the application. Biblical Literacy – obedience = purity; guidance for protection; treasure it passionately; and we need to make time to practice what it says.

Psalm 119 verse 13 says "With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth."

Memory verses are not just for Children's Church. We should be learning the Scripture. Like I said before – it is only if we know His Word – if it's hidden in our hearts that we will be able to call upon it in the good times and the bad times. READ IT MEMORISE Scripture so it begins to guide our thinking and affect our speech. I could quote many episodes of Friends and sometimes use the lines in my every day language – but can the same be said of the Word of God in my life?

My Mum is an excellent example of this. When ever I have a problem or something is up – invariably she has a Scripture about it. It is hard but the more time we spend studying the Bible the more familiar it becomes and the more we will be able to recount it.

Song is also an awesome way of learning the Bible – if you work with children long enough – singing their songs helps – Bible based. [*Singing*] "Love, Joy and Peace"; "in the 16th verse of Chapter 3, in the Book of John..God so loved the world that He – gave His only son"; "We believe in Hebrews 13:8... Jesus Christ is never out of date..."

Then look with me at verse 15 of Psalm 119 "I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways."

Do we meditate on the Bible – spend time in it? We need to be doing this learning and listening. A few weeks ago Julio spoke on **2 Timothy Chapter 2 verse 15** which was the verse I was given at my baptism which says "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." If you missed Julio's sermon you need to download it from the website and listen to it. Because this is what we have to do – to work – work hard studying and understand what it is saying. I have a lot of work to do – I get lazy and I have been lazy – I need to work – otherwise I am not doing my best.

I do my best to watch TV every night, to talk to my friends, to sleep in but I need to be doing my best to correctly handle His Word!

I need to be asking myself as I read the Bible and seek to understand it: what does it say, what does it mean and how do I apply it?

Now don't get me wrong – its not dry and boring – it is hard work but it is not without great reward. If all we do is study on an intellectual level and get detached and use the Bible like a text book then we've missed the whole point.

John chapter 5 verse 39-40

39You [SPEAKING TO JEWISH LEADERS] diligently study^[c] the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, 40yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

No point following to the letter but missing Christ.

We need to be looking for the person – looking to meet God in the Bible. Let's not miss Him. It is relationship! His love letter – we meet Him in the Bible – let's make a date – no let's make many dates with Him – and don't stand Him up! The Bible will transform, heal and lead us into a deeper relationship with our Lord and Father.

So seriously do we make time. Ife's great at holding us accountable in the office. He often just asks us point blank – how much time have you spent reading the Bible. Lloyd always does better than me at answering that one I have to say. But Ife is an example to me because his head is always in the Bible – spare time – in the Bible.

Often we let other things crowd out our time in the Bible – TV is the big one for me – I stick my head in front of that – rather than spending time reading.

Verse 18, Psalm 119 “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.” – we should be praying for insight as we read the Bible. The Holy Spirit is able to work in us as we read the Word to help us understand it. There are a number of aids or resources we can use but we shouldn't get bogged down in these or hide behind them – commentaries etc are all very helpful and useful but we also need to wade into the Word and allow God through His Holy Spirit to speak to us.

The Bible is “living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” As **Hebrews 4:12-13** tells us.

We therefore need to be prepared to be changed and transformed by it. **2 Timothy 3 verses 16 and 17** tell us that Scripture teaches, rebukes, corrects and trains us so that we are fully equipped.

As we've seen the world has a different standard by which it operates so in following the Word of God we may meet those who ridicule us or challenge us, it may not be the “cool thing to do” but as the Psalmist says in verses 22 and 23:

22 Remove from me scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes.

23 Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees.

So we need to make time – Jesus did – and as Lloyd said a few weeks ago – if it was good enough for Jesus it is most certainly good enough for me.

So we should hunger and thirst to spend time in His word but we must also DO what it says. We see this throughout Psalm 119 and **James Chapter 1 verse 25** we read:

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

So – I hope you can see why Biblical Literacy is important and why it is one of our core values.

Jesus understood the centrality of the Word – In **John 17 v 17-19** He prayed:

17 Sanctify^[b] them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

- here we see the Word and the command to go into the the world and the importance of purity – that we be sanctified vessels through Him.

It is important to have obedience to the Word of God – for purity; the Bible provides guidance and in that protection; it is a great treasure which should stir up our passion

and we should make time to practice what it teaches us: we need to hide the Word in our hearts, follow it, learn it, digest it, be consumed by it.

Let's read together Psalm 19 v 7 – 11 as we close:

7 The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

8 The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

9 The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The ordinances of the LORD are sure
and altogether righteous.

10 They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the comb.

11 By them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

Sources:-

1. New International Version Study Bible, Compact Edition
2. New Spirit Filled Life Bible, New King James Version

Quotations:-

1. Woodrow Wilson
2. Emile Caillet
3. William Carey
4. D.L. Moody
5. Souvenir Postcard from Oxford