

6 things about the Bible

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, St. Marks. As always, it's great to be with you and to come and share God's Word. Most of you know my name is Mark. I am lecturing at the Georgetown College in Nusenberg, where we train up ministers to minister in Reet South Africa in our denomination.

It's always a privilege, as I've said, for me to be here. All right, well, we're looking at a two-part series today and next week in which I'm going to be discussing the question, can I trust my Bible? And essentially what we're going to be doing today in part one is I'm going to be looking at six things the Bible says about itself.

So that's on the agenda for this morning. Now, I take it that you are at church today, whatever your beliefs or whatever your interest, you're here today because you have some fascination with Christianity or perhaps the Bible itself.

But that, of course, leads us to ask the question, can we trust the Bible? We've all, at some point or another in our lives, for various reasons, have grappled with that question because, after all, we do live in a skeptical world.

[1 : 23] You might be somewhat skeptical when it comes to the claims of the Bible yourself. Many folk today ask questions like, well, is the Bible true?

Does it really matter? At the end of the day, if I get stuff out of the Bible, the Bible helps me. Does it really matter whether it's true or not? Others ask, well, are there contradictions in the Bible? And still others say, well, what about the fact that it was written so long ago? If the Bible was written so long ago, how can I know that the Bible I use today is the same text that was composed hundreds or thousands of years ago by the original writers?

I'll be dealing with some of those particular questions next week, so make sure that you come along. But what I'm going to do today, again, as I've said, is I'm going to have a look at what the Bible says about itself.

I think that's the best place to start. Now, for my purposes, when we look at the Bible as Christians, we are talking about 66 books written by multiple authors over more than a thousand years, and yet there is a remarkable unity to it all.

[2 : 30] And so if we want to know something about what the Bible is or what the nature of the Bible is, we need to start with the question, well, let the Bible speak for itself.

What does the Bible say about itself? And as I've said, there are going to be six remarks that I'm going to make today. Six things that the Bible says about itself. Firstly, the Bible or Old and New Testament themselves state that they are no normal book.

They state concerning themselves that they are inspired by God or literally God breathed out. We see that, for example, in Paul's letter to Timothy in the third chapter, where Paul speaks about the sacred writings able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ.

And then Paul goes on and writes to his young prodigy and says, all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching and so on.

[3 : 39] It is God's word. It is breathed out literally by God. It is inspired by God. God inspired the original writers to write down his word, ultimately not simply human words.

Now you might say that's interesting, but why is that important? Well, for example, if you choose to read the Cape Times as if it is a children's poem or a legal document, you're going to get completely confused because it isn't either of those.

You can only benefit from reading the Cape Times or any other newspaper if you accept that it is a newspaper. That is the kind of literature that it is.

If you acknowledge from the start what the Cape Times purports to be about, well, then you will get something out of it.

If you don't do that, you won't benefit from what it seeks to do. It's true, isn't it, when you read any document. If you don't acknowledge from the start what this particular document purports to be or what it claims to be about or what it intends to do, you will not benefit from it.

[5 : 02] The Bible does not claim simply to be another interesting ancient document with some practical wise advice to offer. It claims to be a divine word.

It claims to be the word of God. And if you refuse to accept the inspiration of the Bible, well, you might find some interesting things in it, fair enough, but ultimately its power will be lost on you because that is the first thing the Bible says about itself.

It is inspired by God. It's not just another beautifully written document like Shakespeare. That is not what it says about itself. Now, the second thing the Bible says about itself is that despite being the word of God and despite being inspired, God employed human authors to write Scripture.

We see that in the second letter of Peter in the first chapter where Peter says that his audience must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things.

For prophecy never had its origin in the human world, but prophets, though human, spoke from God. And so when you read the Bible carefully, sure, fair enough, it was composed by writers like us who lived in different times, come from different cultures, even had different writing styles and different personalities.

[6 : 26] God did not override the author's personalities when he inspired them to write his word. But it is still the word of God, but composed by humans under inspiration.

But folk have asked me and they've said to me, but how is that possible? Well, if God can create the heavens and the earth out of nothing, I don't think it's going to be too much of a problem inspiring Peter or Paul or John or Isaiah to write down his word.

By the way, it's important, isn't it, for us to acknowledge the gift of words. Have you ever thought about how wonderful words are? You see, when I was in primary school, I used to catch the bus every day and I used to walk to the bus stop not too far from my folks' house.

And one day I was 10 years old and there was somebody else at the bus stop for the first time and I was quite convinced she was the girl of my dream. She had these wonderful brown eyes and this wonderful smile.

And my strategy was to get her to know her more. And so I started out by saying hello and every day when I went to the bus stop and she was there, I began to speak to her, but she offered me no words at all.

[7 : 41] She was very, very shy. All I got was that wonderful smile week after week, but no words. I did everything in my power to get her to speak, but she just smiled and smiled because she was so shy and I realized I wasn't going to get anywhere.

I was so frustrated about the whole thing. But in my frustration, I learned something and that is without words, there can be no relationships. Isn't that so? I'm sure gentlemen, your wives will tell you that regularly. Okay, without words, there are no relationships.

If I meet someone but they refuse to speak, I can learn nothing about them and I cannot really have a relationship with them. That is why the Bible is so precious. You can't have a relationship with God unless you have a sure word.

If you have no sure word from God, you can't know God. That's why the Bible is of priceless value. It is God's words to us. Why? Because he wants a relationship.

Some people say, well, I'm interested in the Bible, but I'm not interested in having a relationship with God. Well, that's crazy, isn't it? It's pointless coming to try and understand the Bible if you don't want a relationship with God.

[8 : 47] And, of course, words, if words come from God, what do they tell us about God? They tell us that God is a relational being. Isn't that wonderful? God is relational.

It's crazy when one chats to folk today who are religious, who are very, very religious, but they don't really have a personal relationship with God. They never pray. They never see themselves as being in a relationship with their Creator.

Perhaps you're one of those folks. So the second thing we learn about the Bible is that God employs human writers to write down His Word because He is a relational God.

He didn't use angels to write down His words because He wants us to understand His words, and so He used human beings. You can appreciate the genius of it all.

It's wonderful. Now, the third thing we learn about the Bible is its purpose. If you open your Bible on a Saturday morning because your motorcycle doesn't work and you want to repair your motorcycle and you're looking for that particular book in the Old Testament that discusses motorcycle maintenance, well, you'll be disappointed.

[9 : 59] You don't understand why the Bible is there. If your fridge breaks down and you're looking for a chapter in the Bible on refrigerator repair, you will be disappointed because the Bible is there to bring us eternal life and to help us to enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

That is what the Bible is there for and that is what it says about itself in many places. For example, in John's Gospel, chapter 20 and verse 31, John says these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and by believing have life in his name.

And by the way, as we've seen in our service today, it's fascinating to notice that the Bible points to Jesus. We saw that with our readings from both the Old and the New Testaments.

I'm fascinated by that reading from Isaiah written almost 800 years before Jesus was born, talking about his death. In other words, Jesus is at the center of the Bible as the Jewish Messiah.

By the way, if you want to understand the nature of the Bible and its 66 books, but you don't really believe necessarily that Jesus is the Messiah, well, then you're going to have a problem. For those of us who don't believe in Jesus but want to believe the New Testament, well, that's going to be a major problem because the New Testament message completely collapses if Jesus isn't the Christ.

[11 : 26] It's all a lie. And nothing Jesus therefore did or said makes any sense. There's no longer any unity now between the Old and the New Testaments. If Jesus is not the Messiah, then the New Testament falls apart.

Of course, on the other hand, we meet folk who want to respect Jesus as a man, as a prophet, but not as the Messiah, but you actually can't do that. There's no middle ground. If Jesus isn't the Messiah, then you have to reject the whole of the New Testament and you have to reject Jesus as some kind of a madman or somebody who's self-deluded.

And of course, if Jesus is not the Messiah, having the Old Testament alone isn't really enough either, in my opinion. If we try to hold on to, say, only the Old Testament without believing in the arrival of the Messiah, it results in having a testament that is somewhat without real fulfillment. It is a testament without real fulfilled hope. It's a sad form of faith. Because without the Messiah, without the Messiah in the presence of his people, without the Messiah ruling over his people, you don't really have fulfillment for your faith.

Sometimes I chat to folk and have done so over the years who accept the Old Testament but don't accept the New Testament. And I say to them, when last did you sacrifice? And they look at me as if I'm a bit crazy and I will point them to various passages in the Old Testament and say, well, you know, there isn't really any forgiveness for your sins unless you sacrifice.

[13 : 06] Are you sacrificing? And of course, I don't know of anybody that really does that nowadays except perhaps some traditional African religions but we learn from the Bible that Jesus is at the center. That Jesus brings the fulfillment of the Old Testament to a reality.

Without Jesus, the Old Testament doesn't really make any sense. And of course, others would ask, well, how do you know that Jesus is the Messiah? Well, I don't have much time to talk about that.

There are so many different passages of prophecy that are fulfilled in the New Testament. Passages that prophesy about the coming of Jesus in the Old that are remarkably fulfilled in the New.

I don't have time to talk about all those passages but I will perhaps make one remark that I made last year when I came and shared with you over Easter and that is what really amazed me about the message of the New Testament is Jesus' resurrection.

And I shared with you last year, you'll remember that nobody ever found the body. It seems to me that the resurrection of Jesus Christ pulls the whole of the message of the Bible from Genesis through the Revelation into one reality, into one fulfillment.

[14 : 20] If you go away and prove that Jesus never rose from the dead, if you find the body, that will be the end of Christianity. Of course, on the other hand, if there is no body, if Jesus did rise from the dead, well then he must be the Messiah because the God of the Old Testament is constantly talking about bringing life from the dead.

And so the resurrection of Jesus really just confirms that Jesus is the Messiah and he pulls the Bible, he pulls the message of the Bible together. It's purpose. Thirdly, the purpose of the Bible is to

bring us to Christ and to see that he is the true Messiah and that God wants to have a friendship with us.

It's not about motorcycle maintenance or repairing your refrigerator. It's much more exciting than that. It's about knowing God. Right, point number four.

What is the Bible saying about itself? What does the Bible say about itself? Number four, it's complete. From the earliest days, the church came to see that the Bible or the gospel is exclusive. In other words, it includes some things, but it excludes other things that some writings and some books would be part of the Bible, but others would not. And there are some various references that I can refer to.

[15:38] For example, Jesus in Matthew chapter 5 speaks about the fact that there is the law, the Torah instruction. Not many laws or you can make up whatever kind of law you want, but I've come to fulfill the law.

I haven't come to abolish them, but I've come to fulfill them. For truly, I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter nor the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.

The law, God's instruction, is a specific body of knowledge. It includes some things and it excludes some things. In other words, the Bible is complete.

Now, why is that important? Why is it important for us to accept that the Bible is complete? Well, gentlemen, have you ever been sent to the shop by your wife?

And now you go to the shop for your wife and she gives you the shopping list and you arrive at the spa and there's this little voice in the back of your mind, is the list adequate? Did your wife actually want you to buy other things and she forgot to put them on the list or did she not?

[16:47] I don't know. Maybe I should just assume she wants milk but then if I buy milk and she's got milk she might not want that milk and there might be trouble. So you phone her on your cell phone and she's not picking up.

And you're in a flat spin because you don't really know whether you have her true will. Her instructions are not complete.

Are they complete? Maybe they're not. Sometimes you know that the ladies will phone us and say, I've changed my mind while you're there get something else. So you go home and she says, did you buy the stuff and you said, I bought nothing?

She says, are you crazy? Why did you go to the shop at all? I said, I didn't know if the list was complete. So what do you mean that you don't know if the list was complete? I gave you the list, didn't I? But maybe there was something else that you wanted to add to the list that I didn't know about.

You see, if the Bible, if God's word is not complete then potentially anything can be the Bible.

Potentially anybody can come along and just add to the Bible and put anything into the Bible and then anything becomes the Bible, everything becomes the Bible, we're just confused.

[17:55] It just becomes confusing if we live in a world where we don't really know whether or not God's word is adequate and God's word is complete. We believe in Jesus as our Savior. If the Bible is not complete maybe there's going to be a new Jesus tomorrow.

Thank God there won't be because the Bible is complete. There isn't going to be another gospel, so please don't hang around and wait. There isn't going to be another Savior, there isn't going to be another Messiah, the Bible is complete which is a wonderful thing.

So when I wake up tomorrow morning I wake up with a wonderful sense of confidence. I have everything I need from God. I have a completed word. I have a completed work for my sins and the part of Jesus Christ.

I have a completed work on the cross and I have a completed word. I have everything I need to be the man or the woman that God wants me to be. Isn't that wonderful? It's so important folks to believe that the Bible is complete, that it is adequate, that we're not going to get another gospel tomorrow.

That's the fourth thing that the Bible says about itself. Right, number five. Now the fifth thing that the Bible says about itself flows from number four and that is it has authority.

[19:02] Well, of course it must have authority if it is the word of God, if it is inspired by God, if it's adequate, if it's complete, if it's everything we need, it must have authority. There are various verses in the Bible that remind us of that.

For example, Psalm 119 verse 4, you have commanded your precepts, it's another way of speaking about your word or your commands, to be kept diligently. Now the challenge here, of course, is very straightforward.

A lot of people will say, I believe that, oh, I believe the Bible, I believe the Bible is God's word and then they quietly just go through their lives ignoring it. Now that's not on.

If it is God's word and if you believe that it is God's word, if you believe the gospel is true, well, then you must obey it. The Bible commands us to obey the gospel.

We are commanded, believe it or not, to repent of our sins and turn to Jesus Christ. We're commanded to do that in Acts chapter 2. Right, number six. Number five, it has authority.

[20 : 02] We need to obey it. Number four, the Bible is complete. Number three, the purpose of the Bible is to bring eternal life. Number two, the Bible states that God employed human authors to write scripture.

Number one, the Old and New Testaments are inspired by God. They're no normal book. They're God's book. Now let's go and have a look at number six. What is the sixth thing that the Bible says about itself?

It's true. It has no mistakes. I think that's very, very important and I need to just talk about that for a little while. You see, to explain why it's important that the Bible has no mistakes, let me start by pointing out that our words reflect who we are.

Is that not so? You really want to get to know what's going on inside a person's heart. Listen to their words. This is what Jesus once said in Matthew 15 verse 18, but the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart.

So in other words, if the Bible or God's word is self-contradictory and full of mistakes, well, then God is a liar and you can't have a relationship with him anyway.

[21 : 14] Isn't that so? You know, I had a friend when I was in the Navy. He was a real funny guy. In fact, he was too funny. In fact, he joked all the time. In fact, he was never serious. Yeah, it was nice hanging out with him.

He was a nice guy, but everything was a joke. Everything was a joke. And everything contradicted everything else because he thought that was funny. So you never really knew what he thought about anything because he kept on joking and he kept on contradicting himself.

In the end, I decided I didn't want to be friends with that guy anymore because you can't have a friendship or a relationship with somebody who isn't consistent in who they are and what they believe. Can you?

No, you can't. If the Bible is full of mistakes and contradictions, that means that God is not God. If the Bible is the word of God and if the Bible reflects God's character, it must be true.

People say the Bible isn't true. Well, then we might as well just go and become a Muslim because then God is the devil. If God deliberately gives us this word on which our eternal life depends and the word is full of mistakes and contradictions, well, then we're not going to heaven and it turns out that God then becomes the devil.

[22 : 24] Now, God doesn't lie and therefore the word of God can't lie either. Over the years when I found alleged contradictions in the New Testament or in the Old Testament, when I sit down and study them carefully, I actually realized that I'm the one that's confused, not the Bible.

So, for example, we read in Numbers chapter 23 and verse 19, God is not man that he should lie or the son of man that he should change his mind. Jesus says in John chapter 17 verse 17 as he prays, he says to his father, sanctify the disciples, sanctify them in the truth.

Your word is truth. No, the Bible is true and the Bible is reliable and it has no mistakes. By the way, that is why the Bible or the word of God always achieves the ends to which God puts it.

We see that in Isaiah 55 where we discover that when the Lord God puts out his word, when the word goes out from the mouth of God, it never returns to him empty.

It always accomplishes the purpose to which God sets it. In Isaiah 55 from 10 to 11, it always achieves the ends that God sets out to achieve and that means, well, if it's full of mistakes and contradictions, well, then the word can't succeed in what it's doing and you can't know God.

[23 : 46] Just as if your wife suddenly tomorrow morning starts contradicting herself and saying things she doesn't mean and then saying things that she thinks she means but she's not sure whether she does, at the end of the day, you can't have a relationship anymore with that wife.

You don't really know what she's thinking about, how she feels. Same with our husbands. Sometimes our wives think that our men are like that but we're not really, are we? We just don't communicate things as well as our wives do but you get the point, don't you?

That at the end of the day, if you want to have a relationship with somebody and they lie all the time, well, then you can't have a relationship with us. It must be like that with God. It must be like that with the Bible.

Right, I need to close. I want to make one or two little practical applicatory points as I close. Jesus claims and God himself claims and says to us today that he speaks to you reliably through the Bible and the Gospel.

So if you leave here today and you decide, well, I don't believe the Bible and I don't believe the Bible is true, that's fine, you can leave whatever you like but your belief system contradicts what the Bible says about itself.

[24 : 55] So I think at the very least you need to sit down and spend more time reading the Bible and I think coming to St. Mark's and certainly going to Bible study might learn a few things. You know, there's a story that I read of a very arrogant, self-confident but capable ship's captain and one day he was standing on the bridge of his big tanker.

He was the captain of this big tanker, one of the largest ships in the ocean. 500,000 tons. He had a long, illustrious career in the Marine Navy. He was proud of himself.

He was proud of his invincible ship. In fact, he was a very powerful, proud, and an arrogant man. But things were not going very well that night because a great and a terrible storm had come upon him and his ship.

It was dark, it was windy, massive waves, and he knew that she was moving towards the rocks. He found himself in the mother of all storms and slowly his arrogance and his self-confidence began to falter because he began to realize that despite the size of his ship and despite his rank and experience, he was losing control.

[26 : 12] And that slowly things were starting to come apart. The engines were in full of stern trying to pull the vessel, this massive vessel, away from the rocks.

But he knew that the engines were not strong enough to keep him away from pending doom. But he was a very proud man. He was too proud to radio for help. But the rocks lay ahead.

He became more and more frustrated and he became more and more afraid and he was at the same time consumed with rage because for the first time in his life he knew he was powerless. Because he knew that the alleged foundation, the alleged strong foundation on which he was standing was now at risk.

Then all of a sudden the strongest, brightest light that he had ever seen pierced the darkness. And at that moment his radio crackled into life. And a voice came over the radio and said, this is Seaman Johnson, give way, you're in danger of striking rocks.

Follow my directions and I can save you. You know, in that moment the captain forgot about his fear and his insecurity. He was furious. He would not swallow his pride and ask for help.

[27 : 31] And he radiated back immediately without even thinking. He said, how dare you seaman? How dare you seaman? I am a captain of 35 years experience standing on the deck of a 500,000 ton tanker.

How dare you order me around? I am a captain on a tanker. Just crackle on the radio for a few seconds and then the radio comes into life and the reply comes back, yes, I know.

I'm a seaman and you're a captain. You're a tanker but I'm standing on a lighthouse. You know, in 2016 the Oxford Dictionary, I kid you not, came out with a new word.

Now that's a big deal by the way. When the Oxford Dictionary comes out with a new word, that is a big deal for the English language and people who speak English all over the world. You know what the new word was?

I couldn't believe it. I thought it was a spelling mistake. But when I began to think about it, I realized, yeah, it probably makes sense. You know what the new word was? Post-truth.

[28 : 40] Post-truth. It's now an acceptable word. It's an acceptable truth, ironically. In other words, the Oxford Dictionary is saying that we no longer live in a world of truth.

We're post. What does post mean? Afterwards, after truth, post-truth. And I can't help think of that poor, silly captain on a sinking foundation and then think about our society today, perhaps a society in which you live of post-truth.

Because we are, aren't we? We are living in a world that is without any foundations any longer, other than what we feel or what we think or what we're going to eat for lunch. other than human appetites and human pleasure, there are no foundations anymore.

Now, you might say, well, you know, what's the point? What's it got to do with the Bible and our silly captain on his tanker? Well, at the end of the day, real hope, real meaning in life is only as good as the foundation you stand on.

Like our captain friend, you might also have earned a certain amount of status and success and respect, but if your faith or your philosophy of life has no sure, stable foundation, you are doomed.

[30 : 03] Because when the storms of life come along, and they will, you'll know all about it.

Without a foundation, without a Bible, a completed Bible, without a Messiah, there are no foundations.

Without a reliable word and a reliable Savior, without a reliable word for our hearts and a work on the cross for our sins, there are no foundations.

We are at sea. It doesn't matter how big our tanker appears to be. We are without hope. Because the gospel alone and Jesus alone is God's true lighthouse.

Only the gospel, only the complete Bible, Old and New Testaments, can offer us real hope, real foundations.

I'm going to close with the immortal words of Jesus himself from Matthew 7 from verse 24 to verse 24. 24 to 27. Therefore, writes Jesus Christ, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

[31 : 18] The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house.

and it fell with a great crash. Let's pray together. Father, as we go through life ourselves in an uncertain world, in a world full of storms, we realize that without foundations we'll sink with so many others.

Lord, thank you today for Jesus. Thank you that he is the true Messiah who unites Old and New Testaments. Thank you that you've given us a sure and a certain word, a word that is inspired, a word that is complete, a word that is reliable and true.

Thank you that you've not only given us a sure word, but you've given us a sure work on the cross for our sins. And that word and work come together perfectly in Jesus Christ.

[32 : 36] Thank you for this time together, Lord. Fill our hearts with joy. Help us this week and for the rest of our lives to take our stand on the sure foundation.

Amen.