



TIME OF GRACE®

Skeptical Faith: Can I Trust the Bible?

Study Notes

Summary

What makes the Bible believable? How do we know it's unique among all the beliefs, books, and religions of the world? In this sermon you'll be reminded that Christianity is based not on blind faith but on historical facts.

- **Acts 17:17:** So he *reasoned* in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.

- **3 Reasons to Believe in a “Holy” Bible:**
 1. The _____ knowledge
 - **Isaiah 53:2-11 (select verses):** ² He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. . . . ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter. . . . ⁹ He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death. . . . ¹¹ After he has suffered, he will see the light of life.

 - **2 Peter 1:21:** For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

 2. The _____ witness
 - **1 Corinthians 15:3-8:** ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

- **Acts 26:22-26:** ²²“I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—²³that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.” ²⁴At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.” ²⁵“I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. ²⁶The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.”
3. _____ uniqueness
- **Isaiah 53:5:** He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Points to Ponder

1. What questions have you had over the years about God, the Bible, or the Christian faith? Were you able to discuss them instead of dismiss them? Why or why not?
2. Read the apostle Peter’s message in Acts 2:14-41. Find all three reasons from today’s message that Peter used with his skeptical audience.
3. Read the apostle Paul’s message in Acts 13:13-43. Find all three reasons from today’s message that Paul used with his skeptical audience.

Homework for Next Week

Read Romans 8:7; Romans 5:8; Revelation 21:5.

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Acts 17:17; Isaiah 53:2-11; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Acts 26:22-26
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When I was a kid, I had lots of questions about God. That's why during my teenage years, maybe sophomore or junior year in high school, I challenged myself to actually read this entire book from cover to cover. And after I did, I had way more questions about God. The questions bothered me so much that I actually wrote them down in a notebook that I had in my bedroom, and one day I took that notebook to my pastor's office, I opened it up, and I threw every skeptical, tough question I had at this man of God. And in that moment my pastor had to make a really, really important choice to either dismiss it or discuss it. I mean, he could have just dismissed it. I was just some kid from a pretty big church. I wasn't super involved or active or generous. He was the guy with all the degrees on the wall. I was a young man who had just read this book for the very first time. He could have been too busy and blown me off and dismissed it, but he didn't. Thankfully that day he was willing to discuss it.

In fact, I remember at that meeting my pastor recommended to me this book called, *When Skeptics Ask*. And it was the first book that really led me on a journey to explore the tough questions about the Christian faith, and the solid answers that we can find. You know, this book led me to that book, which led me to another book. And I took all the books off my shelf that are really about skeptical, hard questions and I counted I think 33, maybe a couple more. I've read questions about where the world came from, was it an evolutionary process or was it a creator God? I've read books about the problem of evil and suffering, how can that happen if there's a good, all-powerful God who loves all of us? I've read books that question the identity and the existence of Jesus. Did he really think he was God? And other books that would defend it. I read the *The Da Vinci Code* which said that the Bible is kind of handpicked by people who wanted power and I read responses to the *The Da Vinci Code*. I've read famous atheists like Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins and books that refute their teachings including one called *The Dawkins Delusion*. I've read books by former pastors who turned into atheists and former atheists who turned into pastors.

My pastor that day really launched me on a journey to see if the Christian faith was defensible and reasonable among all the options. And I'm so glad that he did. Because having all that knowledge and having read all these books I can tell you that the Christian faith is not a blind faith. And it's not a belief that you have to turn off your brain to follow and can embrace in its entirety. There's something beautiful and true and reasonable about Christianity. And essentially that's what I'd like to share with you over the next few weeks. Because I'm guessing at some time in your life, you're going to have to do the exact same thing as my pastor. You're going to have to make a decision to either dismiss a hard question or discuss it. You know, when that hand comes up in class, or your teenager gets the boldness to ask, "Mom, why are we

Christians?" Or, your friend or your roommate or that question in the comments sections kind of challenges traditional Christian belief. You can dismiss it, but I can tell you what's going to happen. Because I talk to a lot of people who used to be Christians and who used to go to church and who used to be there every Sunday, but they had a tough question that no one was willing to answer. They were simply dismissed and told to, "Just believe." But in the end, they did the opposite.

That's why today and for the weeks to come instead of dismissing tough questions I want to discuss them. I want to throw out three to five of the toughest questions that Christians face and see if there are any true and reasonable answers for us to follow. And so, there is going to be times today and in the weeks to come where I'm going to say things that aren't really like bullet pointed, fill in the blanks, look how reasonable this is. But what I'm just going to share with you is the thing that actually changed my heart. The unstoppable love of Jesus that seeks out unreasonable people. So, you can expect that in the weeks to come. This mixture of logical points and illogical love and grace from God. Now, the warning for you is that as you listen you have to promise me that you'll be reasonable.

There's something else I've learned over the years, when I see those people who aren't Christians just yet and I think about all these books that I've read and these good answers that I've found. I've sometimes assumed that skeptical people are skeptical for a good reason. But the truth is sometimes tough questions are just a cover. Sometimes when truth kind of pins you in a corner it asks you to change your previously held beliefs or your commonly practiced behaviors. And I found out that sometimes when people feel that uncomfortable, instead of being logical and rational and reasonable, they throw the trump card called, "whatever". And they want to think that they're really logical, intelligent people who've rejected Jesus for rational reasons. But that's not always the case. Sometimes it's emotional and sometimes it's deeply spiritual. And so, I want you to promise me in the weeks to come that if God challenges you, and if reasonable truth asks you to change, you'll refuse to play the whatever card. And instead, you'll think and you'll pray and you'll continue the discussion. Because the truth is, Christianity has some incredibly reasonable, powerful and supernatural claims. And this is the kind of teaching that Jesus' friends and followers have been doing for centuries.

Let me prove it to you actually, in Acts chapter 17, the apostle Paul showed us how he reached out to people who had skeptical questions. It says in this verse, "Paul reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there." So, that's our goal for the next few weeks. We're going to tackle questions like, "Why would we read and trust the Bible? Why would we think that people aren't good and innocent by nature? Can science and religion sit in the same boat? Or, do you have to choose between one or the other? How could God be good and loving if he sends some people to hell? And why should you keep coming to church even though hypocrites walk through the doors every single day? Five hard questions and we hope to give you five good and Godly answers.

So, let's launch out with the first questions about this book, the Bible. Why do we put on the cover of this book, not just that it's a Bible, a Greek word that means Book, but a Holy Bible.

Holy means set apart, different, wonderful and unique. Why would we read this book? Teach this book every Sunday? Why would you have Bible stories with your children? Why would you turn to this book in times of trouble? You know, why would you cycle through on your night stand many other books, but open this one every day until the day you die?

In essence, that was a question a young man posted to me last Sunday after church. He came up to me as I was shaking hands afterwards, and he said, "Pastor Mike, you know there are other religions, other books and lots of them kind of say the same thing, don't they? That we should be nice to each other, we should love our neighbor as our self, we should treat others as we'd want to be treated. So, Pastor, what do you think about all that?" He asked. And I thought, "Now that is a perfect introduction for next week's sermon." You know, because it's the question, right? Why prioritize the Bible?

There are many religions, there are many good people, there are many different cultures, many beliefs. Why would we think this one -- it's not a holy book but the Holy Book to be trusted and followed? How would you answer that question? If your roommate said, "Hey, I see you on your Bible app all the time, why do you read that?" Could you give a better answer than, "That's how I grew up?" If you're challenged in world religions or comparative religions class in college. "Why are you a Christian instead of a Buddhist, or a Hindu, or nothing at all?" What would you say? Or if your kid had the courage to say, "Dad, like, why do we go to church?" Why do we read this book? Why do you believe the Bible? Could you give an answer?

Well, today I want to share with you three of what I think are the most powerful answers to that question. Why we should believe the Bible is not just a book, but it is the Holy Book. It's the Holy Bible. So, grab a pen because I'm going to give you the first answer right away as we kick things off. The first good logical reason I think for you to trust the Bible is this - the prophet's knowledge. The prophet's knowledge. Specifically, what those B.C. prophets knew about the A.D. Jesus is a persuasive argument to believe that this book actually comes from God.

To prove it, though, I suppose we have to talk about Jesus. You know the basic story of Jesus? He's conceived in the womb of a woman named Mary, born in a little town called Bethlehem. He's raised up in Nazareth, this dinky little village up in Galilee where he grows up. And there's nothing about the way that Jesus looks, he doesn't glow, he doesn't float, his appearance is totally normal. He's not majestic or glorious, he doesn't look all that divine. But then when he was just a little bit younger than I am today, Jesus started to teach and to preach publicly. And even though he taught with authority, people for the majority didn't accept him, instead, they rejected him, and they dismissed him, and the oppressed him. Actually, history tells us that Jesus was arrested, and he was mocked, and he was abused. "And he was tortured he was crushed, and he was pierced, and he was put on a cross. But he didn't defend himself. Instead of opening his mouth to defend his innocence Jesus just stood there and took it. He said that he had to for you and for me.

Look what Isaiah wrote in chapter 53 of his prophecy. Referring to Jesus he says, "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. But he was

pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death. After he had suffered, he will see the light of life." Wow. That's crazy huh? That's incredibly specific of what would happen to Jesus. But here's the crazier thing. Isaiah was not a first century eyewitness reporter who saw that happen to Jesus. No, Isaiah lived 700 years before Jesus was born. So, how did he know that? And how did he know all the other stuff?

In Isaiah chapter seven, Isaiah somehow knew that Jesus would be born of a virgin. In Isaiah chapter nine he somehow knew that Jesus would bring light to a dark place called Galilee, where he grew up. In Isaiah chapter 11 he knew that Jesus would come from the family of Jesse and King David, which is Mary's family line. How did he know that? And how do the rest of the prophets know that? How did the prophet Micah, hundreds of years before Jesus, know that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem? How did the prophet Daniel know the time and history when the Savior would be born? How did the prophet Jeremiah know that Jesus would be betrayed by one of his closest friends? How did the prophet David know the very words that Jesus would speak from the cross? That he will be pierced in his hands and his feet and that his body would not stay in the grave and decay? How did he know that? Now reason with me for a second, was he like a good guesser? Or, did he have a connection? A connection with...God. That's what the apostle Peter said, in a rather famous passage from his second letter Peter said these words, "Prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." The prophet's knowledge is the first really good reason why Christians believe the Bible is a holy book.

And grab your pen because here's the second. Not just the prophet's knowledge, the second reason to trust in this book is the apostles' witness. What the apostles Peter, James and John saw and touched and heard is incredibly unique and persuasive. About a decade ago I read this book *The Quran*. The sacred text of the Muslim people. And as I read it, I also learned the origins of where this book came from. You know, who came up with these words and how were they written down? And here's the story that Muslim scholars will tell you, that in the early 600s A.D., well, 600 years after Jesus, a guy named Muhammad was in a cave near the city of Mecca. And there the angel Gabriel spoke to him, he revealed the word of Allah or the word of God. And that was the first in a series of revelations that ended up as this book. Now, Muhammad himself was illiterate. He couldn't read and he couldn't write. So, he spoke the words of these visions and revelations to his friends who memorized them and eventually put them down in the Arabic language, which is where the Quran comes from today. Now, the challenge with that is we can't prove it. Did God speak to Muhammad, or didn't he? I don't know, I wasn't in the cave. And neither were you. There was no one that saw, no one that heard, no one that touched. This entire book lives and dies on the single experience of a man that simply can't be repeated or proven.

And when I heard where this book came from it made me really interested in where this book came from. Because when the apostles talked about where these messages came from it wasn't some dream or revelation or experience. No, instead it was what they...witnessed. I love how

the apostle Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15, he said, "What I received –" So this is the Christian message. "What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the 12. After that he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, although some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born."

And if you'd open the Bible today after church, you'd find out that this is exactly how the early Christians shared the message. In Acts chapter two, Peter gets up to preach and there's a bunch of skeptics who think he's drunk. And he says, "No, no, I'm just telling you about Jesus, the one that you saw." In Acts 13 Paul gets invited to speak to some skeptics who don't trust in Jesus, and he's in a synagogue. He does the exact same thing, "Let me tell you what we saw, what we heard, what you witnessed." My favorite though happens at the end of the book of Acts. Paul's been arrested, he's awaiting his trial in Rome, and he actually gets to speak to a King named Agrippa and a very powerful politician named Festus. And here's Paul, his hands are chained and he's trying to explain why he follows Jesus. And I want you to look at what he says, "I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen," that's point one, right? "That the Messiah would suffer and as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles. At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. 'You're out of your mind, Paul!' He shouted. 'Your great learning is driving you insane.' 'I'm not insane, most excellent Festus,' Paul replied. 'What I'm saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I'm convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.'"

So how would you explain that? What happened 2,000 years ago to turn our world upside down? Why do these Jewish men start to believe in Jesus? Why were they willing to suffer, even to the point of crucifixion and death for their message? Why would they change their day of worship from Saturday, the Sabbath that had been pounded into their little Jewish heads since they were kids, and they'd flip and call Sunday the Lord's Day? Unless...something really happened on a Sunday. Something that gave living hope to people who are dead in sin. When Jesus stepped out of the grave and saw the light of life. You put those two things together, what are the odds that the prophets weren't helped by God? And what are the odds that Jesus didn't actually appear to the disciples -- the apostles? And you have powerful proof that this book written by the prophets and the apostles themselves comes from God.

And I thought that was a pretty good argument until he told me it wasn't. There's this guy I know, a fellow pastor, he's read this many books on this topic. He's a philosophy major and professor before he decided to get into ministry, and he knows so much about all of the arguments for the Bible and against the Bible. So, I called him up and I gave him my pitch for today's message. "What do you think? The odds, the prophets' knowledge, the apostles' witness. That's pretty good right? And he said, "Is that how you became a Christian, Mike?" I'm like, "Oh, I hate you now I have to rewrite my sermon." Like, "No it's not." And I actually wrote down his quote. Here's what he said. He said, "I think it's great that God gave us all that evidence, but we trust the Bible because Jesus did." So, the reason Christians cling to this book

is not just because there's great evidence. What gives us hope in the first place that this is the word of God is that Jesus believed it was. He read this book, he quoted this book, he looked at this book, he obeyed this book. He said, "The word of this book cannot be broken."

And the reason we trust Jesus that much to hold onto this book is because Jesus is unlike anyone. His teaching and his offer is unlike anything. In fact, the third is probably the most powerful reason I think you should trust the Bible. Now here it is, it's Jesus' uniqueness. Because Jesus offers a beautiful and unique answer to the hardest and most frequent questions we ask ourselves. If you're anything like me you might be bothered on occasion by creation and evolution or, where the Bible came from? Or, did Jesus really rise from the grave? But I bet you're hounded by a more frequent skepticism. The question, is God still for me? And, is God still with me? And, does God still love me? And, does God have a plan for me? As you sit in your bed at the end of the day and you wonder -- as you think about your life and the things that you've done, and you question the biggest question of all. Is God still with me, for me, and on my side?

You know what this book would tell you? (The Quran) If you broke it, you better fix it. That's what Allah told Muhammad. "That on the judgement day giant scales will be dragged out and everything good you've ever done will be placed here and everything bad, and God knows, so you better be good." You know what the teaching of karma would tell you? "You better fix it. What goes around comes around. And the universe knows what you think, the motives of your heart, every word that's come out of your mouth so if you don't fix that fast, the universe is going to get you." You know about reincarnation? Good people are brought back and given a better life. Bad people are not. So, are you sure that you're good and not bad? All these different philosophies and beliefs get back to the same place if you messed up. And come on, we're all messed up. How are you going to clean up the mess? Where Jesus offered something radically different. Jesus offered something that we call grace. No strings attached love. Free forgiveness. We fall on our knees we reach out to Jesus, and he does what no one would expect, what's almost unbelievable and irrational. His love isn't logical, but he still gives it. I love how Isaiah said it in chapter 53, he says, "He, Jesus, was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we're healed." Right. If he wasn't wounded, crushed, pierced and died we would not have hope and life, and an eternity with God.

And so, I speak respectfully to people of other religions, other backgrounds, other cultures. But you have to know that isn't apples to apples, there is something unique and powerful and magnetic about the teaching of Jesus. And that's what I said to that young man last week. Like, he launched that tough question on me in the lobby when I thought I was going to shake a hand. And not to answer what makes Christianity different. He said, "Pastor don't all sorts of books tell us to love each other and keep the golden rule?" And this was my response to him, "Yes, but only one book helps when you don't." There's only one book that gives you unconditional love from a crazy good God, and it's the teaching of this one. "That God so loved the world he gave his only Son, that whoever would believe in him would not perish, but have eternal life." Because by the wounds of Jesus we have been healed.

I read a lot of books. Next to my bed stand right now I think are six more that I'm trying to read before the end of the series. And those books will be read and put back on the shelf. But there's one book that will always stay by my side. The book that gives me hope, confidence, peace, joy and forever with God. And you can read it too. The Holy Spirit inspired this so that you will never have to live with fear, regret or shame, but to know that eternal life is yours. Because this is not just some book, it's a Holy Book, a book from God. Let's pray.

Dear Lord, thank you so much for your grace. If you treated us as we deserve to be treated, we couldn't make it. We have to lie to our self, God, and we could never find rest in your presence. So, thank you for mercy, thank you for salvation, thank you that it's by grace that we're saved and not by works. So, that we don't boast and so we don't have to be afraid.

God, help us to hold on to this book, help us to believe that it's a lifeline, it's a power source. Your word is living and active, and faith comes from hearing this message. We want our faith to be stronger so in the midst of our chaotic and busy lives, God, help us always to prioritize and carve out time for this. That you would strengthen our faith and we find joy and peace because of it.

Jesus, thank you for the evidence. You could've whispered to the apostles and prophets, but you didn't. You gave us something so powerful and logical that we can be like Paul and say to people who think we're insane that this is true and reasonable because you hung on a cross and didn't hide in a corner.

We thank you for the evidence that backs up our faith and we thank you for the uniqueness of grace. We ask it all in your name and all God's people say amen.