

Sermon Transcript from January 17th, 2016
The Origins of the Bible
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Happy Sunday, you guys. It's really good to be here. I was telling someone a few minutes ago that you guys are just one of two – that I'm aware of – church communities that are doing right now the Read Scripture experience. So, you're guinea pigs, in a way. So, thank you for doing that. Dave was really instrumental in the idea once we got the idea rolling of, "Whoa, what if we did something like what you're doing with Read Scripture."

So, Dave was really helpful in helping me think of ways that we could craft this as an experience that a whole church could go through. And then he volunteered you all to do it. So, that's kind of how it happened. So, it's really great to be here. There's another church that I know of. It's in Portland. It's called Bridgetown. They're doing it this year. I'm a pastor at a church in Portland, Door of Hope, and we'll do it next year once you guys work out all the kinks. That's kind of my plan. So, thank you for being guinea pigs.

It's great to be here. My day to day is I read my bike to the studio and we work on videos and I meet individuals who are doing it. But, this is the most amount of people I've met at once who are reading through the Bible with the Read Scripture experience. It's really humbling. I'm not quite sure how it all happened, you know? Like, if you've ever had an idea and then, somehow, that idea becomes kind of reality, it's really a remarkable process. I'm really humbled to be a part of it. And, I'm excited to be here with you guys.

So, one of the things that Dave and I were talking about is if you were to take a whole church through the Bible, one of the coolest things that you could do is provide experiences, educational or in the worship gathering, to just stop and, while you're doing it, to just reflect on like, "What is the Bible," and, "Why on Earth would you read a thing like the Bible?" Because we don't often actually talk about that very much as church communities and it's really important. And here's why: if your neighbor or coworker knew that you were giving a year of your life with a whole church community to immerse yourself in this ancient book because you believe that it's somehow a source of divine guidance or authority for how you live, can I just predict what your coworker would tell you? Your coworker will say, "You're stupid." Right? "You're kidding me. This ancient text from the other side of the planet, written in another language in ancient people's history, you really think that that provides some source of guidance or authority for your life in the modern world?"

Anybody? You haven't told your neighbors you're reading through the Bible? Yeah. Apparently. Because that question will come up. And, if that question hasn't occurred to you, I really encourage you to talk with your coworkers about what you're doing, because that is exactly what they're going to say to you. And, if the question hasn't occurred to you, my hunch is that it's because you're used to the Bible being that kind of thing. But, if we're honest with ourselves – and I think many of us, even if you've been a follower of Jesus for a really really long time, our relationship to the Bible is kind of like your relationship with your weird uncle in your family that you were just at at Christmas, you know? And it's kind of like, "Yeah, we're related. And we're family. So, I'm supposed to like you. You know? But, when I'm actually around you, you creep me out half the time. But, sometimes you give me nice gifts, you know, at Christmas. But, for the most part, I just don't know what to do with you."

Anybody? Will anybody please be honest and say that that's your experience with the Bible? Come on. It's odd. It's really odd. And so, part of it for me is just the heartbeat behind this whole thing of Read Scripture and getting people to read the Bible for themselves, but in a guided, community-oriented way, is to help us be able to articulate for ourselves, "Why do you think this ancient book is a source of divine guidance and authority for your life?"

So, that's really just the simple question and idea that I want to unpack today. To do that, I need to share a bit of my story. Like, how on earth does someone end up giving their life to drawing Bible cartoons or something like that? How did that happen? So, I need to share a bit of my story and my history in relationship with the Bible.

I became a Christian when I had almost turned 20. I was 19 about to turn 20. My parents were Christians. The Bible didn't play a significant role in our family or home growing up. I never really liked church. As soon as I learned the art of sneaking out of the house, I would do that every Saturday night to avoid having to go to church in my teens. And then they chose to pick their battles and quit forcing me to go. So, here was my journey to Jesus:

there is an outreach ministry to skateboarders in Portland, Oregon and it's called Skatechurch. It's a large skate park, huge warehouse skate park. It's in the back lot of a church in northeast Portland. The park is open five nights a week and you can come, pay a couple dollars to help with the upkeep of the park, and you can skateboard in the park. Then what they do is they shut the park down halfway through the night at 8 o'clock. You skate from 6:30-8, and then one of the staff or volunteers who runs it will get up and give a Jesus talk every night.

If you want to skate for the second half of the night, you have to sit through the Jesus talk. It's great. And, if you skip out on the Jesus talk, which happens regularly, you can't skate in the park until you come next week and sit through the Jesus talk. And then you can go through the thing. So, there you go. And it's really remarkable. You know? Skateboard culture doesn't have the – it attracts all kinds of people. I'll just say that, alright? But, people respect the rules at the Skatechurch park. It's an amazing skate park. So, people sit through the Jesus talk, and so did I for three years. Sitting at the back and thinking this was all silly and stupid and so on.

But, something happened over those years and it was just the stories about Jesus and His words and His teachings, you know? I'm sitting at the back and it's like who Jesus is starts becoming unavoidable to me. And I'm getting older, I'm out of high school and living in my parent's basement, working a very low-paying job, and smoking way too much pot. You know, I came to this point in my life where I realized I have to do something with my life and I have to do something about Jesus. Like, I can't put off who He is anymore. I had a couple wonderful friends who were really great skateboarders and they were followers of Jesus and they worked there.

So, there you go. It was a Wendy's restaurant by the skate park in August of 1995. You know, not everybody has a story where they're following Jesus and there's a point they can remember. It's more of a slow burn process for some people. But, for me, it was a decision, a conversation. I drive by that Wendy's on a regular basis. It was one of the most life-shaping events in my life story. So, here's what happened after that: I'm down for Jesus, you know? And so, I start getting involved with Skatechurch and I'm asked to give the Jesus talk every once in a while. So, as I'm learning and reading about Jesus, first of all, you just notice right away that He's just really concerned about the Bible.

It's His Bible. You know, He's constantly quoting from it and alluding to it. It's like He has it memorized or something. You know? Like, He really really cares about the Bible. In fact, He says if you really want to understand who He is, you need to understand the story of the Bible leading up to Him because He's here to fulfill it and carry the story forward. So I'm like, "Okay. I'm down for Jesus. I need to reckon with this book now."

So, here I am. I'm a young man in my early 20s and I'm reading the Bible for the first time. And I'm just, "Whoa." You know? It's very bewildering. You guys, there's a talking snake on page 3, for goodness sake. Don't tell me that's not weird. Like, that's very odd. You know? The floods and plagues and all of the sex scandals. There's a lot of sex scandals in the Bible. What do you do with this thing? It's like the weird uncle. Like, I'm half repulsed by it, but the other times I'm strangely drawn to it. You know?

But then I'm like, "Jesus, He's awesome. I want to follow Him. What do I do with this?"

So, thus began my long, complicated relationship with the Bible. So, across the street from the skate park is a Christian college. It's called Multnomah University now. It was called Multnomah Bible College back then. And I didn't have any aspirations, but I wanted to know how to teach the Bible to these junior high skateboarders. So, I'll go to college, I guess. And the career arch was skateboarding to "I'll sign up for Ancient Greek and then I'll sign up for Ancient Hebrew."

I don't know what happened, you guys. Fourteen years of school went by. That's what happened. And four educational institutions later. First it was just the content of the Bible. But then, it was these questions about like "Where did this thing come from? What are the historical origins of the Bible?"

And I just became fascinated with it and the whole journey. I just got obsessed with it and became a bonafide Bible nerd. That's just who I am and I've come to accept that fate. Alright? That's okay. But, it's been a wonderful journey and it has given me only a greater love and appreciation for the beauty of who Jesus is and for the beauty of the Scriptures. Now, here's what's interesting: eventually, the last educational institution was the University of Wisconsin. I did a PhD in Hebrew Bible and Jewish Studies. I had this cup of coffee more

times than I can even remember, and it was with other university students, people in the Jewish Studies department, people taking Intro to Biblical Literature class and, you know, they grew up as Christians or something and I met them at the church we were going to.

And they are taking Intro to Biblical Literature and they're learning the same exact history of the formation of the Bible and it's complicated, fascinating, wonderful story of the Bible and how it came into existence. And they're having a crisis of faith. They're learning this history and the whole – I mean, sociology and geology and language and so on. And they've come to this point where they think there's no way that this book is God's Word. Like, it's so thoroughly human. Right? It has a public human history that we can trace.

And I remember I just didn't know what to do with these conversations because I'm learning the same exact history and it's bringing me to the exact opposite conclusion. That the Scriptures are so beautiful and Jesus is so amazing and how they are a divine and human word to God's people. Are you with me here? Same facts led to completely opposite conclusions. So, what's going on with that?

Here's what I think the root issue is. There's a glitch in the system that's producing this paradox. The glitch in the system has to do with some of our basic assumptions about what the Bible is, where it came from and what it's for and what people are supposed to do with it. So, here to illustrate what I think the root issue is, I need to show you an M.C. Escher drawing. Any Escher fans? Anybody? Excellent. Yeah. Great.

So, my dad – this is a good Portland story. If you've been in Portland, part of the center hub of east Portland is Hawthorne Blvd; the Hawthorne district. It's changing now, but it has been kind of the Bohemian center of the city. And that's where I grew up. Right in the heart of the Hawthorne district. Of course, you know? And he ran his painting business out of our garage, of course. That's very Portland, right?

But, I grew with art and books everywhere, all over our home. And I remember, as a young boy, being just fascinated with the M.C. Escher coffee table books. Because, most of Escher's work is exploring visual paradoxes and optical illusions and playing with 2D and 3D in the same drawings. It's brilliant. Go Google "Escher" and you'll be better off for it.

So, here's what he's doing here. This is exploring a different kind of paradox. There are some realities that exist as one. It's one thing, yet two. Right? So it's called the drawing hands and it's a visual exploration of this concept of chicken or the egg. You know? Which came first? Of two distinct things, yet they exist as one. Which hand is drawing the other? Yes. Okay? So, there you go. That's what's happening there.

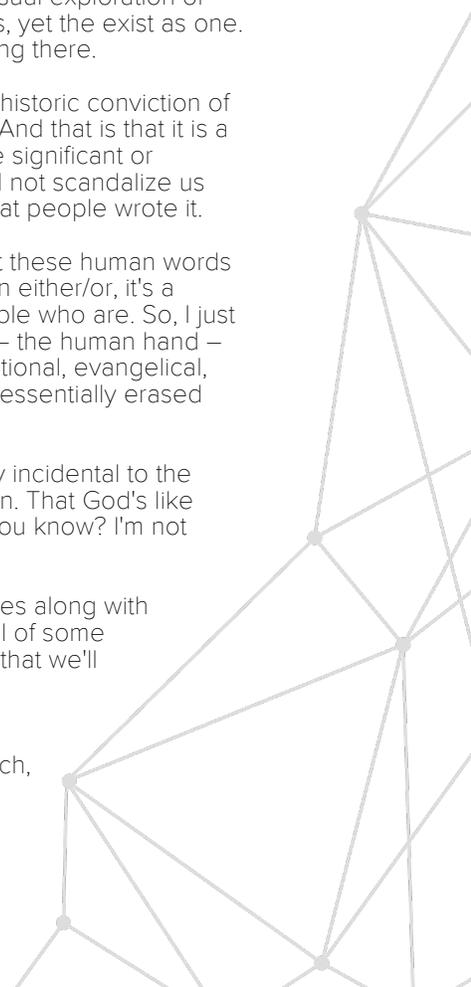
For me, this drawing has helped me put language to and flesh out what has been the historic conviction of the Christian orthodox tradition and Jewish orthodox tradition about what the Bible is. And that is that it is a divine book and a human book at the same time and that neither one of those is more significant or overpowers the other. It's both. It's a human book. People wrote the Bible. This should not scandalize us one bit. It actually says it quite a few times in the book itself where it came from and that people wrote it.

And yet, the Bible and Jesus Himself makes this claim about these human words. That these human words speak God's Word to His people. Through these human words, God speaks. It's not an either/or, it's a both/and. And I'm not good at Photoshop. At the Bible Project, I work with a lot of people who are. So, I just give it to them now. But, if I were good at Photoshop, I would erase one of the hands – the human hand – and just leave the divine hand and I would say, "In American..." – call it whatever. Traditional, evangelical, orthodox – "...church communities, people are raised with a view of the Bible that has essentially erased one of those hands and it's just the divine hand."

And it's a view like, "Yes, of course the Bible was written by people. But, they're mostly incidental to the process." And usually this comes along with a view of maybe how the Bible was written. That God's like beaming thoughts and ideas into a human's brain and they're in a Holy Spirit trance. You know? I'm not joking. That's a very common conception of how people think about the process.

So, I called this the golden-tablets-falling-from-heaven view of the Bible. It usually comes along with a vision of what the Bible is for and what it is. It's a divine rule book or behavior manual of some kind and God wants us to have correct beliefs so that we'll have correct behaviors so that we'll go to the good place and not the bad place after you die.

Anybody? Does anybody want to say I'm wrong and say – I'm caricaturing it, I know. I know it's a caricature. But, it's true. Like, that's the view of the Bible that most, if not much,



of American Christianity has. I think it's a problem because it's actually not true to what the Bible says about itself and its own origins. It sets people up for a fall. It sets people up so that when they go to Intro to Biblical Literature class in university or you watch a self-proclaimed expert on YouTube, right? And they tell you the very public, accessible, complicated history of the making of the Bible and then you go, "Oh, it didn't fall out of heaven. Surely it cannot be a divine word."

Do you guys see the problem? That's the glitch in the system. So, we need a new framework. It's actually not a new framework, it's the old framework that somehow we abandoned and that we need to recover. And so, what is that framework for seeing the Bible as a human word through which God speaks to His people? It's divine word and a human word. They don't cancel each other out. And actually, the story of the origins of the Bible is crucially important to understand that reality.

So, here's what we're going to do: I'm going to, just for the rest of the time that we have here, kind of walk us through an extremely abbreviated version of what the Scriptures say about their own human origins through which God speaks to His people. Tomorrow night, at the lecture, we'll get more into the final stages of the collecting of the Bible and the manuscripts and Dead Sea scrolls and it's going to be awesome. So, you should come. But here, I want to hit on the issue of where the Bible comes from and why on Earth would you see this book as a source of divine guidance and authority in your lives. And knowing where the Bible came from and how it came into existence is crucial for understanding why you would do that.

So, there you go. That's the problem and that's what we're going to move towards right now. How are you guys doing? Great. Okay.

So, pop quiz. I'm a professor, too. I'm too many things right now in my life. Right? But, I teach classes at Western Seminary up in Portland. So, pop quiz. You know, there's no consequences for failing. We'll deny you communion. I don't know. Whatever. No. I shouldn't joke about that. That's not what I'm going to do.

Pop quiz. This is good. Use this Bible trivia fact at a get-together this Friday night. People will love it.

In the Bible, where is the first mention of the writing of the Bible? So, as you're reading through the Bible, when, for the first time, is the writing of the Bible mentioned? It's a wonderful fact to know and to tuck away. Any guesses? I hear a lot of Exodus. Oh, Ezra. I'm hearing a lot of Exodus.

Alright, winners of the pop quiz: Exodus. But, where in Exodus? It's not – trust me. It's kind of a trick question, because it's not where you think it's going to be.

Exodus 17. And, if you want to open up, we're going to look at a couple passages in Exodus. Or, it's going to be up here on the screen. Open up, turn your phone on or look on the screen. Whatever you want to do. Exodus 17. And you guys are starting, right? You're into the book of Exodus now. It's a thrilling book to read.

So, at this point of the story, Exodus 17, is where the Israelites have already been rescued out of their slavery in Egypt and gone through the sea and so on. You know. Sea to dry land and they walk through. Pharaoh and his armies are destroyed. And then the people are wandering through the wilderness. So think: you have a large population of escaped refugee ex-slaves, right? And all they've known is slave labor in the land of Egypt. Now, you know, they have some leaders at their helm and they're wandering through the desert. They have a lot of resources that they took with them.

And so, if you're an inhabitant of the region that they're passing through and you've got swords and bows and arrows and you see a people loaded with resources and no weapons, what are you thinking? You're thinking "plunder," right? "Let's get these people."

So, that's where the story is right now. The people who attack them, it's a south Canaanite people group called the Amalekites. So, the Amalekites came and acted the Israelite's Rephidim. And so Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites and, tomorrow, I'm going to stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."

Do you guys know this story? Maybe some of you are familiar with the story. It's actually a very odd story, because what happens is he goes up to the hill and then when Moses raises his arms and the staff, the Israelites are empowered and are winning. But then, you know Moses, he's quite an old man by this point. So, his arms get tired and his arms start to go down and then they start to lose. I told you it's an odd story.

They start losing the battle and so Joshua and Aaron come along and they bolster up his arms and they win the battle. Rescued. Right? So, after the battles over and they're rescued, God says this to Moses:

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered.'"

There it is. That's the first mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible. Are you with me? So, let's reflect on this here. What is Moses writing down? "Write this." Write what? The story, right? Write the story. For what purpose? Remembering. These are basic questions. Basic Bible study happening right here.

So, write this. This. This refers to that. And then remembering. So, you're writing a story about how God just saved and delivered His people. And that story needs to get written down and enshrined at the center of the public cultural memory of this people as to who our God is and that He's in the business of saving and delivering us.

Now, this is interesting. Is this the first time that God has saved and delivered His people? No. Right? Why are they in the wilderness? Well, they just escaped out of Egypt and that was a whopper, you know? The slavery and then Moses confronts Pharaoh. "Let my people go." You've seen the movie, probably. Then the plagues and all this horrible stuff happens and they're protected and then they leave Egypt.

So, that whole story, God has already rescued them, hasn't He? Yes. But, how do the Israelites remember that story of rescue and deliverance? Were they called to remember that story? Yeah. With a book? No, not at first. With a meal. Isn't that interesting? An annual meal where everything at the table is a symbol retelling the story of how God rescued and delivered His people.

So, we have two ways that God's people – first of all, there's an annual meal, a ritual meal, a symbol of the story. And now, this first mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible is about writing the story so that it can be remember through the meal and through these writings. Are you with me?

So, whatever you think the Bible is for, it has to include room for this, because this is the first mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible. Any golden tablets falling from Heaven here? Any Holy Spirit trance happening here? He just says, "Moses, write this down."

"Okay. What happened again? Oh, yeah. The arms and the staff."

Moses is writing the story. The message of God's character and His commitment to His world and His people is communicated through this story. God speaks to His people through these words that Moses wrote.

So, there you go. That's the first mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible.

Second pop quiz. You're like, "Really?"

The joke's tired by now. And maybe it is. But, the second pop quiz nonetheless: what is the second mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible? It happens not long after this. The Israelites, they're in the wilderness and they make it through and they come to the foot of a mountain. What's the name of this mountain? Mount Sinai. Or it's called "Horeb." There's some regional dialect differences and so on. Mount Sinai or Mount Horeb is how it gets referred to in different places.

So, at the foot of this mountain, the people are invited together and God appears in a very powerful way with cloud and thunder and fire and so on. And God invites these people into a covenant relationship. And there's a key moment in the story that happens in just two chapters. Chapter 19. God says, "Listen, if you all enter into this covenant relationship that I'm going to invite you into, if you obey the laws and the terms of the covenant that I'm going to give you, then here's what you will become: you will become my unique, special people who are a kingdom of priests."

Some of you guys maybe know that line. So, this is where that happens in the story. In other words, God has rescued a people and now He wants to bring them into proximity to His power and glory and goodness. And He wants to enter a relationship with them and that means that they'll come under the terms of this relationship. For what purpose? To become priests. What do priests do? Priests are go-betweens – not just in Israel, in

many cultures. Priests are these representatives of God to people, but also of people to God. So, what He's asking this rescued people to do is to enter into this relationship so that they become these reflective mirrors of who God is to all of the nations.

So, these terms of the covenant, they're going to involve things about justice and about how they form their communities and how they do business and how they do family and how they think and practice sexuality and money and how you treat your neighbors. Right? It's going to be this body of laws and actually, right at the foot of the mountain, they receive the first set of terms of the covenant. What do we call these in our culture? We call them the Ten Commandments.

Then there are 32 more and then there's a total of 613 in the first 5 books of the Bible. Get ready. Get ready for this. Six hundred and thirteen. You can do it. You can do it. But it begins with 10. Just ease them into it, right?

So, the people, they hear the terms of the covenant and here's where the story goes. The second mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible. When Moses went and told all the people the Lord's words and laws – the Ten Commandments, some other body of commandments – they all respond with one voice.

"Everything the Lord has said, we will do. Everything God said, we're going to do that."

Now, if you know how the story goes, you know the irony, right? Because they're going to go on to do precisely none of that. They're going to break all the terms of the covenant. But, they're eager. They're eager at the beginning.

And then here you go. Moses wrote down everything the Lord had said. The second mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible. Now, what is Moses writing down now? What's he writing down? Everything the Lord said. What's that? The terms of the covenant, right? We call them rules or commands and they are called commands and laws right there. But, they're the words and the laws. They're instruction. They're guidance.

Israel was to be formed as a contrast community to all of the other nations. Every realm of life and existence and family and society was to be shaped by their proximity to God's generosity and God's justice and God's holiness. And so, the second mention of the writing of the Bible in the Bible is writing up the terms of the covenant relationship.

Okay. So, here you go. In these first two mentions of the writing of the Bible in the Bible, first of all, this is the origins of the Bible. The first time it's mentioned being written. But it also gets us to the heart of the meaning of the Bible. Do you see this? What can we conclude about what the Bible is and what it's for based on these first two mentions of the writing of it?

Well, we know that first of all its main purpose is to tell a story. To tell the story of the gracious God who has rescued and redeemed His people. For what purpose? What's the second part of the Bible? It's that this God wants to invite those redeemed people into a covenant relationship. And He asks those people to come under His guidance and under His care and to be faithful to the terms of the covenant – not just because this God's uptight about controlling how people behave. No, because He wants them to become new and different kinds of humans who more closely mirror God's own justice and character. Humans that are being healed and transformed by their proximity to the gracious and holy God so that they can become priests to all of the nations.

You guys, this is the story that the Bible is telling about its own origins; its own purpose. And I haven't used the word yet, but do you see? We're talking about the Bible's authority right here, aren't we? But, it's very different than golden tablets falling from heaven. Do you see how it's totally different? Beware of people claiming that they have books that have fallen from heaven. You know what I'm saying, right? Because that's called power play. Right? They are trying to trump reason. They are trying to trump any excuse that you might have.

This is a divine word with authority. And what is authority in the golden tablets view? God's more powerful than you, He can tell you what to do. Shape up or you're going to the bad place after you die. And that is not the way the Bible presents itself. Are you with me? The Bible's presenting itself as something very different. First of all, it's telling the story of a God who exudes love and justice. A God who is so disturbed by what we have done

with His world and what we do to each other that He will confront evil and name it like He did with Pharaoh. And He'll also give 10 chances to Pharaoh to stop doing what He's doing to destroy other human beings.

And Pharaoh, most as we can tell, Pharaoh's friends and advisors are all like, "You're crazy! We want to go with the Israelites!"

You know? So Pharaoh, he's like this image of the hardened human heart that's gone so insane with it's own selfishness. It's ruining itself, it's ruining others and it's ruining God's world. And so, the portrait of God in this story is a God whose passion compels Him to acts in moments of history to bring His justice and to save and redeem people. That's the story of this God. And then what this God wants to do is take those redeemed, rescued people and form them into a covenant people and invite them into a relationship. That's when God starts giving laws and commands to His saved, redeemed people.

Are you with me here? It's a very different story. And why is He giving these covenant terms to these saved and redeemed people? So that they become these reflective mirrors to the nation. How are you guys doing? Do you see? This is just a very different way of thinking about what the Bible is and where the Bible came from. And I think it's what the Bible is actually trying to tell us about itself, right?

So, what does it mean to be one of those covenant people coming under the authority of the Scriptures? We have a perfectly good parallel to it with that word "covenant" here. In our culture, the word "covenant" doesn't really refer to too many things anymore except a marriage covenant. Are you guys with me? So, if you're under a contract with a business partner, we call it a contract. That's the word we have for it, right? A contract. But a covenant is different. A covenant is about a whole person, relational commitment to another.

When I got married to my wonderful wife Jessica – she didn't get to come down with me this time and that's sad, but it's okay. She'll come again some time. So, 15 years ago, we stood in front of all our friends and family and we uttered these covenant vows to each other; terms of the covenant. Right? So, I vowed to give my allegiance and my devotion to her. You know, sickness and in health; richer or poorer. All that kind of thing. No more video games. No more Cheetos or staying up until midnight. You know? Like, I am reshaping my behavior because I'm not giving my allegiance to this one that I love and who loves me. And I submit myself under the authority of these covenant terms and vows. Are you with me here? That's the kind of authority the Bible presents itself as.

It's telling you a story about who God is and how He wants to rescue and redeem a people. And then the Bible is inviting you to become a part of that people and to come under its authority. But, it's the authority of a covenant relationship. It's just a very different way of thinking about the Bible. It's how the Bible presents itself to us.

Okay, are you guys clear on the point? Two purposes of the Bible. Story, covenant, authority? Alright. So, here's how the story goes. Again, very crash-course, abbreviated here. So, the people of Israel, they say "yes," you know? Eager beavers. And they go in to the Promised Land. But, it doesn't work out. They're not faithful to the terms of the covenant and they give their allegiance to other gods and other nations and it results in the rotting and the corruption of their society. Idolatry and injustice.

So, God sends more Moses-like figures called the prophets. And these prophets, they speak on God's behalf. I call them "covenant watchdogs." That's what they're for. They protect God's people from themselves when they're breaking the covenant. Because, the purpose of the covenant is to make them more human again and to rescue them from themselves. But, they don't want that. So, the prophets – it's very interesting. Because, the prophets will often speak God's own words – like, first person God speech – but then also they'll speak their own words to challenge the people and so on.

Then both the first-person God speech and then the prophets own words get collected and shaped into the books of the prophets. And those books become a divine and human word to God's own people. We'll see, if you come tomorrow night, the books of the prophets give us lots of clues about the human processes by which the books came into existence. The Bible's not trying to hide its historical origins. It actually highlights it. That's really really important.

So, the people don't listen to the prophets and destruction and ruin come. Jesus of Nazareth comes onto the scene and He sees Himself as bringing this whole story to its key, climactic moment in fulfilling the story so far and taking it into new territory. Jesus comes announcing what He calls the reign or the rule of God or the Kingdom of God. He

believes that God is present in Himself, that He is the embodiment of the same God of the Exodus story, the same God as the creator God, here to rescue and redeem a people once again. And that He's here to take back His world from what we have done to the place and set things right. So, He goes about forming a new people. Right? He forms a crew of disciples. Twelve is the initial circle, right? It's this image of He's remaking Israel and restarting the covenant people.

He calls lots of people to Himself and everywhere He goes, Heaven meets Earth and people are healed and people are forgiven and people find themselves transformed and become more human again after this encounter with Jesus. And He gets so much momentum that the leaders of Israel, the covenant people, are threatened by Him, they come to hate Him, they think that He's the enemy and He's leading the people astray. And so, they set in motion a plan to kill Him; to murder Him. And on the night that Jesus was betrayed in the garden, He has a final meal with His followers. And what meal is it? The Passover meal.

Here's what He says at this Passover meal. In Matthew 26:26-28, it says, **"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then He took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"**

This is crucially important. Jesus is having a Passover meal and, when Jesus wanted to explain His death and what His life and what His death and resurrection would mean to His disciples, did Jesus write a book? Did Jesus write anything that we know of? No. What did He give to His followers to explain the meaning of His life and death and resurrection? He gave us a meal; a ritual, symbolic meal. And it's a Passover meal. This is just loaded. Everything's intentional. The most brilliant man who's ever walked the planet. Every moment of His life was intentional and full of meaning.

So, what's He saying? What He's saying is what's happening here, it's another exodus. It's another act of rescue. Except the act of rescue that is happening this time isn't just from just another tyrant like Pharaoh and it's not just from these other tyrants ruling the world. You know? The Herods and the Caesars of their day. Jesus has His eye on a different foe; a different enemy.

He talked about it. It's this reality of evil that has such a stranglehold on our hearts and our mind. It's both us choosing it, but yet, at the same time, if you're honest with yourself, how many of you have ever been in a moment where you it's really a conflict situation? Have you ever had a personal conflict before? Anybody in the room? Just maybe. I'm reaching here. I know.

It's kind of intense and there's this thing that you want to say and, you know, it's like you want to say it. But, oh man, that will not help this situation at all. You know? It's kind of building and building and you're getting angry and getting frustrated and you're like, "No, I shouldn't say it. No, I shouldn't... blah!" And you say it. Right?

Anybody? So, what's happening right there? This story with the garden and the snake and so on, I know it's odd. What's that story asking us to consider? Humans are such glorious, amazing creatures. We're capable of so much beauty and good. But yet, at the same time, we're aware that these forces, these urges come over us to do things that we know are destructive and that we know are going to break down this relationship, they're going to ruin this person, ruin God's good world, they're going to ruin me. And yet, we choose it. We choose it.

But yet, at the same, how many of you, after you blurt out that thing that you say and you're like, "Oh, dang it. Why'd I do that? Did I do that? Why did I do that? Was that me? It was me, but it wasn't me."

Do you guys know what I'm talking about? It's like you are insane. It's like evil is a form of insanity. You don't want to be that person, but yet, you were and you chose it. The Bible is asking us to consider that there's a personal, mysterious reality to evil. It gives this personal reality lots of images and names. Right? The devil and so on. There's no pitchforks or red horns and tails in the Bible. It's actually way more sinister. Right? It's this foreign personality that influences individuals, societies. And you know you experience it in those moments of insanity where you give in to the urge and you're less human, you're dehumanized for it, you've dehumanized others. Are you with me here?

And Jesus says that's the enemy. The enemy is a reality that crosses ethnic boundaries, it crosses political boundaries. There's no us and them. It's just broken, selfish human beings who are made in God's image. And we're corrupted humans. And so, Jesus

comes to zero in on that enemy, right? This is the blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus believes that He is becoming that Passover lamb. That He's going to take into Himself all of the wreckage, the train wreck of human history, you guys, all of the death and all of the evil that we have all participated in and contributed to the world, in large ways and small.

And Jesus sees Himself as taking it into Himself on the cross. And the way that He wants us to remember and participate in that is to eat this meal. Are you with me? It's very powerful. And so, what the resurrection means – it's a new exodus moment. The resurrection means that our sin and our selfishness and the havoc and the death and the destruction that we all participate in, that it doesn't get the last word. That God's covenant commitment to us and to His world, that His love and passion for human beings and our world is so strong that even death cannot overcome it. The resurrection of Jesus is this glorious, beautiful image of hope for our world. Amen? It's a new liberation. It's a liberation moment.

So, look where the story goes. This is so so important, you guys, to see how the story of Jesus fits exactly within the covenant story. The final words of Jesus in the Gospel according to Matthew, Matthew 28, here's what He says. He's the risen Jesus and He's talking to His crew of disciples, right? It used to be 12, now it's 11. Judas dropped out.

Matthew 28:18, "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,'"

So, who has authority over heaven and earth? The glorious, risen Jesus. King of creation. And then says to go out and tell everybody the good news, right? That there's a new version of your future that's possible because of what He did in His life and His death and His resurrection. And go initiate people into the family through another ritual symbol that we don't have time to talk about. Baptism.

And then He says, **"Go teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

So, Jesus, He sees this act of liberation as now being opened up to now bring people into this new covenant family that He's started. That's what He's telling people. Like, grow the covenant family. Invite as many people, as many humans, from the whole face of the earth as you can into this story and into this covenant family.

And then what does He ask those 11 disciples, who are later going to be named "apostles," what does He tell them to do? To go around doing what? To teach. To teach these new members of the covenant family to do what? To obey. Right? To obey.

Jesus brought this covenant story to a new moment. He opens up the new covenant family and then He invites these rescued people who joined the covenant family to come under whose authority? His. Okay. So, let's just stop real quick here. This is a crucially important passage for understanding what the New Testament is and what the Bible is.

Who has authority over heaven and earth? So, if you're a follower of Jesus, you believe Jesus does. If you're a follower of Jesus, listen closely. This might seem like splitting hairs, but I think it's really important. If you're a follower of Jesus, is your allegiance and your devotion to a book? I'm making some of you nervous, right? That's on purpose. Is your allegiance and your devotion to a book? It's to a person. Are you invited into a covenant relationship with a book? You're invited into a covenant relationship with a person.

What do we mean when we say, "I accept the Bible as a divine authority over my life?" What I mean when I say that is I accept Jesus as the authority over my life. That's a different kind of authority. It's the kind of authority of the one who loved me and gave Himself for me and who wants to make me into a new and different kind of human. And He invites me under His loving, gracious, Jesus-style authority to do so. And that authority is expressed to me through the writings of the prophets and the apostles.

What is the purpose of the writings of the prophets and the apostles? To tell the story of the covenant family and how I have been invited into it. And then it contains the terms of the covenant relationship that I bring myself under because I trust that Jesus knows what it means to be a human being more than I do. Are you with me? So, what's He doing right here? He sends out these disciples – they're going to be called apostles. And – think of

Dukes of Hazard or something – He's deputizing them. Right? He's making them His official representatives to represent His voice and His teachings to the nations.

So, what did the apostles, in their closest circle, go on to do? We have a covenant meal as the followers of Jesus. What do we need to tell the story of the new covenant family? What do we need to clarify the terms of the covenant and what it means to be a follower of this Jesus? We need some text, right? Just like God asked Moses. So, here we go. What are the four Gospels in the New Testament? They're the eye witness testimony of the apostles of the story of how God rescued and formed a new people. What are the writings of the apostles? They're Jesus' deputies, His authorized spokespeople, who carry on the teachings of Jesus and who guide the covenant family in what it means to be faithful to Jesus and to submit our lives and our futures and all of our decisions to Him.

Right here is the origins of the New Testament writings. Do you see this here? So, people make this split where it's like, "Man, I really like Jesus, but Paul is kind of uptight."

You know? "And Peter, I like some of what he says."

No. You can't. You can't, with intellectual integrity, do that. Jesus says, "If you're going to follow me, you're also going to follow how Peter represents my teaching, how Paul will guide his church communities and what it means to be faithful to me."

These are humans, but it's a divine word. It's not an either/or, it's a both/and.

Whew. How are you guys doing? Alright. This is such a different way of thinking about the Bible. I'm pretty sure it's how the Bible is trying to tell us what it is itself. So, it puts to us a decision. And really, you know, you guys are doing this whole Read Scripture experience, and my hope and my hope with the videos – they're so ridiculously fun to make, it's the most fun I've ever had. So, we're going to learn a lot together. I'm learning a ton all over again as I go through the Bible and make the videos and so on. But, if this remains simply a learning experience, do you see how we've so missed the whole point of this?

The point is that we rediscover our humanity. The point is that we discover Jesus' loving, gracious authority and how He wants to heal and transform us. Which means that He has to confront the Pharaoh-like elements that are deep inside of us; the stranglehold of selfishness that we're under and that we suffer from and that we often choose. He wants to confront it and He wants to kill it. He wants to kill it. But, He doesn't want to kill you. Right? Gods who drop divine rule books out of heaven and say, "Obey me or I'll squish you," those gods want to kill you. That is not the God of the Bible. And people who claim to have those books in their possession and ask for your credit card number – you know what I'm saying? – don't trust those people.

Don't trust books that fall out of heaven. The Bible didn't fall out of heaven. It has a public, accessible history that we can trace. Should I say it again? It's tell the story. So, this is my hope and my prayer is that the Read Scripture experience, what it does in your life, is that you meet, in a new way, the God of this story and that you see what He's inviting you to and the kind of human that He wants you to become and the kind of human that Jesus was for you and me that I have not, up to this point, been able to be for myself. But, He was that for me and he ate the consequences of all the stupid stuff that we do and He didn't even let that be the final word. His love and His covenant commitment are the final word.

So, my hope and prayer is not even by the end of this year, but that you find yourself compelled to give your life to Jesus. To give more and more of your life to Jesus' loving, gracious, healing authority. It's that kind of authority that is good news. So, there you go. That's what I have to say. I don't claim to know what that's supposed to mean for you right now. And that's not my job, right? That's way above my pay grade. That's Jesus' job. And we believe, as His followers, that when we gather together and He's at the center and when we're taking the meal together, that He's here.

So, here's what I would encourage you to do right now as we go into this time of prayer and reflection, worship and song and taking the bread and the cup, is just to ask yourself like, this week, what just happened in the last seven days? In what ways the moments nobody knows about, the moments where that Pharaoh came out of you – and maybe you were alone, because you would never act that way in public, right? But, some of us do act that way in public, too.

What is that thing? Where did you go insane this last week with selfishness and evil? And allow Jesus to name it and confront it this morning. And where do you see Jesus challenging you in this coming week? What are the decisions to be made? What are the relationships that are in tension or that are broken because a stupid thing someone did to you or that you did to them? Like, what conversations and phone calls do you need to make this week? And ask Jesus to guide you. Ask Him to heal you with His loving authority.

Coming under His authority means we'll have to do things that are uncomfortable and act in new ways that don't seem natural to us. And that's good news, it's just really hard. So, we need Jesus and we need each other as we read Scripture and come under Jesus' authority as a community. Amen? Let me close in a word of prayer.

