

Rev. Joe Manos's Sunday, May 19<sup>th</sup> Sermon

The B-I-B-L- E

Text=II Timothy 3:16-17 (New Revised Standard Version)

Somewhere along the way, in Sunday School, in Vacation Bible School, in a church camp, we were taught a song the words of which are: "The B-I-B-L-E is the book for me. I stand alone on the word of God, the B-I-B-L-E." I want you to think about what was once called "The Best of Books." It has been a best seller in years past. More copies of the Bible have been printed and distributed than any other book ever known. It has made an impact on millions of people and there are very few cultures which have not been touched by the Bible. While this best of all books, the Book of books, this best seller has been given such stature, it is probably the least read, the most misinterpreted the most incorrectly quoted, the most misunderstood and the most misused and abused of all writings. Furthermore, its having been so misinterpreted, misunderstood, misquoted, misused and abused has caused some terrible things to have happened during the centuries humankind has known of and about it.

When the Crusades occurred, Christians found reason in the Bible to go to Jerusalem, to fight and kill Muslims. In like manner, followers of Islam have found reasons in the Koran, their sacred book, to consider any who are not followers of Mohammed to be infidels. More scholarly

people of the Islamic faith recognize that radicals do to the Koran what radical Christians do to the Bible. We have some weird, far-out ideas about the Bible. In America today, there are those who claim Christ's name who find scriptural justification for militarism, racism and white supremacy, male domination and misogyny. The Bible has been misused and abused to justify efforts to erase the descendants of its authors from the face of the earth. Christians in Nazi Germany went along with Hitler to rid the world of Jews, bringing about the Holocaust when millions of Jews were murdered in death camps, their bodies thrown into gas ovens, burned to ashes, to conceal what had gone on. Even In colonial America, the Bible was misinterpreted to justify human slavery. There were white slave owners who impregnated black women to enlarge their slave populations. Interestingly, black people heard enough from their owners' white preachers to enable them to identify with a number of the Bible's personalities. "Go down, Moses, go down to Egypt land, tell ole Pharoah, let my people go." Thumb through the hymnal to see spiritual songs from black culture, based on stories from the same book white people used to justify slavery. Look, for example, at the hymn, "Here Am I, Lord." First we sing the words of God, calling people to be servants. Then, the refrain, based on Isaiah 6:8...."Here I am, Lord, send me." Who among us hasn't sung "Kum Ba Yah"?.....a black spiritual, raised to worldwide popularity in the 1960s; still popular among those seeking freedom and justice for all people.

The B-I-B-L-E.....the book written by Jews, but misused to justify anti-Semitism. Isn't it amazingly odd that those who wrote what became the Hebrew scriptures and those who wrote the New Testament as well have been misinterpreted to the extent that their writings have moved people against Jews. The Bible.....misunderstood so much so that women have been mistreated for centuries, victims of ill-informed and ignorant men. The Bible...misunderstood when we fail to acknowledge that it was written in the words and thought patterns of the times during which it was written, perhaps as long as 3,000 years ago. Which implies that it is not a scientific textbook. It is not a book or collection of writings to be interpreted literally. It is not a book of material which speaks to every situation in our modern world in the sense that it gives direct advice in every situation. For instance,, do you know the word, homosexuality, does not occur in the Bible? Peter Gomes pointed this out and wrote, "no extant (that is, no existing) text or manuscript, Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, or Aramaic, languages in which the biblical writings were written, contains such a word." Gomes continued and wrote..."In fact, none of these languages ever contained a word corresponding to the English homosexual nor, did any language have such a term before the late 19th century." The word, homosexuality, was first used in an English Bible in the 1946 edition of the Revised Standard Version. Which is to say, the Bible is not a technological or a medical book of advice on the subjects of homosexuality, or abortion, or vaccinations, immunization, cell research, to name a few issues.

For most of my life, I have heard and seen things for which their adherents have claimed Biblical support, to be **TOTALLY ABSURD**. Martha and I, with our first two children, moved back to East Tennessee in the fall of 1963. We had been in Birmingham, doing what the Presbyterian Church referred to as National Missions work. We were serving a congregation which included rabid segregationists. A person of color was not welcome on Sunday mornings. At the time, there were four small black congregations in southern Alabama which belonged to a presbytery in Tennessee because the presbytery which included Birmingham churches was not integrated. Four young black children were killed when a Baptist church in downtown Birmingham was bombed, an effort to slow down or halt the civil rights movement, supported by Bible-believing white people who claimed the Bible opposed whites and blacks having equality and being free to even worship together. Back in the mountains of East Tennessee, there was less prejudice...on the surface, but it was there, among the mainly Scotch and Irish descendants of immigrants who came across the southern mountains to settle in Kentucky, Tennessee and other places. Prejudice was there, as it was in Chicago, Los Angeles, Columbus, New Albany, and Gahanna.

Some other strange things happened when we were serving First Presbyterian in the then small city of Sevierville. Every summer, out on the then scarcely populated highway

between Sevierville and Pigeon Forge, a tent would be set up, filled with old folding chairs, and this was the location of a revival meeting where snake handlers conducted services. Snake handlers, poorly educated, if not illiterate men who claimed themselves to be called by God to get the local sinners saved by demonstrating the power of God to protect them as they handled poisonous rattlesnakes. These preachers found their calling in what our modern Bibles refer to as "the lost end of the gospel of Mark." It amounts to something not found in the most reliable, ancient manuscripts which eventually became the gospel of Mark. When you have time, turn to the end of that gospel and read the footnotes. If your Bible doesn't have such notes, you may find it helpful to get an annotated Bible with lots of notes and cross references. In ignorance, some have done extreme actions because they felt they were directed to do so by something in the Bible which they totally miscomprehended. Or, how many times have you heard of or read of those who continually predict the end of the world, which, by the way, is something Jesus taught us NOT TO DO? Jesus told his followers only the Father knows. That only God knows God's time schedule. We should be about what Jesus calls us to do in ministry and mission to make this world a better place. The Bible includes material which has been twisted and turned into scare tactics, warnings, and control factors.

Such material must be read and understood in the light of what is called CONTEXT. Look at Bible verses in their context. Don't pick out this verse, that verse, this phrase,

that phrase and use it to justify a position you may have taken on a given subject. The text read earlier is an example. Let me read it again...or the first verse...II Timothy 3:16. "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

**ALL SCRIPTURE!!!** What does that mean in this context?

At the time II Timothy was written, all scripture referred to the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. The four gospels and other parts of the New Testament had not yet become scripture. Biblical literalists, those who loudly proclaim that everything in the Bible is true, the word of God, inspired by God or God-breathed as has been said, don't even acknowledge that the 39 Old Testament books and the 27 New Testament books are not the totality of scripture. They overlook many other books that didn't measure up when the ancient fathers of the church decided which would constitute what you find in your Bible of 66 books. There are many other books which should be read and studied to enlighten us about our faith. There are the books of the Apocrypha, included in the Roman Catholic Bible. Perhaps you are familiar with the Dead Sea Scrolls, found in 1947 by a Bedouin shepherd in a cave, but dating many centuries earlier. Bart Ehrman, who teaches at the University of North Carolina, wrote a book entitled **THE LOST SCRIPTURES**. This is a collection of sacred writings, lost in the sense that those who decided on the 66

didn't know about them. Some of them were found in modern times in archeological discoveries. Others were found in monasteries and libraries of the Middle East and Europe. There's the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. There's the Epistle of the Apostles. There's the Gospel of Peter Another of Philip and many more.

So, we need to be more familiar with the Bible. We need to understand what we read in Scripture. We should not be like Tevye in FIDDLER ON THE ROOF who came up with some notion or another and attributed it to the book. God didn't write the scriptures. Men did God spoke through people and we grow in knowledge and faith when we learn and understand the message and meaning of scripture. You are not a heretic if you fail or refuse to believe everything in the Bible is true. The Bible contains errors, contradictions, conflicting stories and accounts, many types of literature, and it plays havoc with numbers about persons who lived hundreds of years. This is why any Bible you use will be more helpful to you if it is complemented with a good commentary to tell you what words and phrases mean. Every book of the Bible has a background which needs to be read.

I treasure the Bible and the wealth of meaning which its chapters and verses contain to help me live life IN CHRIST, as Paul says So, yes, take a few minutes on a regular basis to read some scripture, and read materials which explain what you have read. There are some books

suggested for further reading. I hope you will find some time with these and other valuable resources as you strive to be sincere followers of Christ. If you don't have a Bible with notes and other materials which explain scripture, spend a few dollars and make Bible reading a part of your life.