

THE WORD OF GOD WHICH LIVETH AND ABIDETH FOREVER

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on August 6, 1967 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P. M.

After nearly 2000 years, the Bible is still the world's best-selling book. Robert Ingersol, the famous infidel of the last century, predicted in 1891 that within fifty years not a dozen people in the city of Denver would believe the Bible. Today, more than 20,000 copies are sold annually in the city of Denver alone. The French atheist, Voltaire, predicted that the Bible would fall into oblivion, but his own house was later used as a printing place for the Bible.

I. The Bible is the word of God that lives forever, because it is from God. God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. 1:1.) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made." (John 1:1-3.)

God is not limited by time. He has a perspective of past, present, and future--an eternal present. It was in II Peter 3:8 that the apostle wrote, "But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." In contrast to God's eternity, we recognize our own transience of life. James wrote, "Come now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. What is your life? For ye are a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this or that." (James 4:13-15.)

If the entire expanse of time were symbolized by the five hundred-foot Washington Monument, a man's life could be illustrated by the thickness of a postage stamp on top of the monument. In contrast to the passing brevity of man's life, we remember again in Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and forever." This eternity of existence applies also to God the Father. It also applies to God's inspired word. In I Peter 1:22-25 we read, "Seeing you have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently: having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower falleth: but the word of the Lord abideth forever."

II. The Bible is the word that lives forever, because it deals with the eternal verities. The Bible is never out of date, or old-fashioned, for it tells where man is from, where he is going, why he is here, and how he should live while here on the earth. It deals with the greatest principles of ethics: love, justice, righteousness, truth, beauty and self-disciplined obedience to God.

The ten commandments, for example, are central in every civilized society. No code of laws that has organized society and furnished a stable foundation upon which to build a nation is without those commandments among the ten which deal with respect for home, property, life, and the like. The moral law of Christ, which we find so beautifully set forth in the sermon on the mount in Matt. 5 through 7, is central to the well-being of every man.

For example, the following teachings are basic to the ongoing of society: "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment. . . . We have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye; and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you." (Matt. 5:21-22, 38-39, 43-44.)

Jesus said it still later, as we read it in Matt. 26:52, "Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Man must heed these and other teachings of Christ if civilization is to survive and if the evils of the world are to be overcome. Notice especially Christ's all-encompassing statement for man's relationships with his fellow-man. "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets." (Matt. 7:12.)

III. The Bible is the word that lives forever, because it meets man's needs. Human nature has not changed. Man still has the same longings, the same need for guidance, and the same needs for redemption and salvation that he has always had. God's great truths do not change with the passing years. Honesty, integrity, truth, virtue, self-control, brotherly love, goodness, godliness, purity, and the like are as important in the twentieth century as they were in the first. Man has no new problems, or needs, or temptations, or sins. There are new settings and a new pace, but the fundamentals of life are just the same. Our great bewildering task in this rapidly changing world is to distinguish between those things which are lasting and eternal and those things which are temporary and fleeting. The word of God is our eternal guide by which to measure and evaluate all things.

The Bible is universal in its appeal. It applies to all centuries of time, to all races and nations of men. It is equally applicable to all walks of life and to all occupations. Other books become obsolete within a few years because of their commonplace subject matter. Better books are written and the old ones are relegated to oblivion. Many books have included what appeared to be facts but were later proven to be false facts. Yet the Bible, even though it is not a book of science, contained scientific foreknowledge concerning the rotundity of the earth and even showed a recognition of the existence of germs thousands of years before man discovered them. The accuracy of the Bible in all geographic matters is impressive. The hundreds of Old Testament prophecies which have been fulfilled also constitute a solid evidence upon which we can believe the Bible to be the eternal word of God. Modern archaeology also furnishes support for our faith that the Bible is the inspired word of God.

In A. Z. Conrad's delightful poem, "There It Stands," there are these impressive words:

Century follows century. . . . There it stands.
Empires rise and fall and are forgotten. . . . There it stands.
Atheists rail against it. . . . There it stands.
Agnostics smile cynically. . . . There it stands.
Profane prayerless punsters caricature it. . . . There it stands.
Unbelief abandons it. . . . There it stands.
Higher critics deny its claim to inspiration. . . . There it stands.
The flames are kindled against it. . . . There it stands.
The tooth of time gnaws but makes no dent in it. . . . There it stands.
Infidels predict its abandonment. . . . There it stands.
Modernists try to explain it away. . . . There it stands.

Not because it is new, but because it is true does the Bible continue to exist down through the ages. All of us have been impressed with the often-quoted poem:

Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith's door,
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
When looking in, I saw upon the floor,
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.

'How many anvils have you had?' said I
"To wear and batter all these hammers so?"
'Just one,' said he; then said with twinkling eye;
'The anvil wears the hammers out, you know.'

And so, I thought, the anvil of God's word,
For ages skeptic blows have beat upon;
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil's still unharmed—the hammer's gone.

Man is time ridden. There is an expiration date stamped upon him. It is a little like the expiration date stamped on a package of film which one buys for his camera. Yet, he has a longing to tie his life to the eternal, to make his life count for something. The Bible with its truths and the God who gave them is the only thing eternal in man's existence. When he builds his life upon God's inspired word, he builds not for the moment, but for all eternity.

Unnecessary Anxiety

Bible believing men and women are sometimes uneasy about the continuous bombardment directed against the Bible. As Bible believers they need to re-examine the statement of Jesus. He said, ". . . My words shall not pass away!" (Luke 21:35.) There is no need to make concessions. Man is fallible. This we freely admit. But the Bible is the word of God; God is the source of its power.

Walter Chandler, the American lawyer who wrote the bulky two-volume treatise, The Trial of Jesus, had this to say; "The Christian need have no fear of the results of scientific investigation or historic revelation. Assyriology, archaeology and paleontology, interpreted and applied by the finest scholarship and the most superb intellects of earth, have spent all their stupendous and concentrated forces in the direction of the discovery of natural and historical facts that would confirm or destroy the Christian theory of things. And yet not one natural or historical fact has been discovered that seriously disturbs the testimony of the evangelist or impairs the evidence of Christianity."

When the world-renowned chemist-physicist, Michael Faraday, lay dying he was asked, "Faraday, what are your speculations now?" "Speculations," he replied, "I have none! Thank God, I am not resting my dying head upon speculations." Then he quoted the words of the apostle Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." (II Tim. 1:12.) Such names as Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Priestly, and Kelvin grace the list of men of science who were noted for their implicit faith in the Bible as the inspired word of God.

The sixty-six books of the Bible have a unity of theme and purpose unmatched in any other word. On occasion we hear the disparaging statement that the Bible is merely one of many allegedly inspired books. Yet man's investigation and time's ravages have proved the Bible to stand alone as the one, truly inspired book of the ages. Only the Bible pleads for the universal brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God. Admittedly, other books have been influential, other books have made certain

contributions toward the betterment of mankind. But only the Bible points the way from earth to heaven.

As one anonymous writer had said, "This book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. . . It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents." Most books are for the old or the young, the rich or the poor, the educated or the unschooled, but the Bible is for all. While meaningful to a child, it is even more challenging to the mature man. It can be compared to the ocean. At its edge it is shallow enough for a child to wade in perfect safety. Yet farther out man cannot cope with its great depth which defies man's finest equipment. Children love the stories of the Bible. They get just the direction, the inspiration and the challenge that their young lives need. Its scholars pore over its pages for a lifetime never fully mastering God's book. When the sun has burned itself out and the brilliant stars of the milky way are no more, the words of our Lord will remain. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." (Mark. 13:31.)

Conclusion

Through God's word Christ lives in the hearts of noble men. As the apostle Paul expressed it, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Col. 1:27.) The inanities peculiar to our time will have their little day but Christ will shine forth when our sayings, our books, and our accomplishments are reduced to a few lines on the broad page of history. Whereas a mop-topped entertainer can boast of his group's popularity as exceeding that of Christ--the eclipse of his group has already begun. And as their inconsequential deeds recede toward oblivion, the influence and power of the words of Jesus will continue. He alone, of all men of all time, could say, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28:20.)

As we read the New Testament we see mirrored therein the likeness of those about us. If we are completely honest we also see ourselves. The word of God is the mirror of the soul. If we would see ourselves not as we see or even as others see us, but as God sees us, we have but to look into this mirror fashioned by God. If we do not like what we see either in ourselves or in the world about us, and the chances are that we will not, we can remedy this situation. It is God's inspired word that provides the hope of the future of mankind. The salvation of the individual soul and the salvation of society in general rests upon an acceptance of the truths in this eternal book. It was James who said, "He that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing." (James 1:25.) As mentioned by the apostle Peter, "The word of God, . . liveth and abideth. . . The word of the Lord abideth forever."

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