

“The Great Epiphany Blessing of Having Primary Source Documents”

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4, ESV)

A blessing that I believe too many Christians take for granted is that they have easy and affordable access to the primary source documents of their religion. We have the Bible. Oh, Christians do not have what are sometimes referred to as the autographs - the actual original scrolls penned by the authors' own hands. Most documents from ancient history that we possess today, religious or secular, are a copy of the original. Yet we do have thousands of manuscript copies of Biblical books and passages, some very, very old, written in the original language (and this is especially the case with the New Testament). Added to that, over the past two millennia, Christians have translated the Bible into the common language of nation after nation and culture after culture. And while I'm aware that translations from the original language are never perfect at expressing what the original language says (which is why most reputable seminaries teach pastors the original Biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew), yet many of the English translations we have today quite accurately tell us what the Biblical text is saying. For God preserves Holy Scripture.

What a blessing! We have access to the primary source documents of our religion. For since the completion of the New Testament there has been an impressive unbroken chain. Both testaments of the Holy Bible have been passed down from generation to generation - preached, taught, commented upon, read, put to memory, and copied down century after century. For the Bible has spread throughout the world and has especially become widespread since the advent of the printing press. And in your lifetime and mine the printed Bible has been relatively inexpensive to purchase in America – with churches and charitable organizations even giving Bibles away to individuals who would like to have one.

See, the Bible isn't a rare document that only has a few existing copies written in a dead language and housed in a locked section of the library where only a few scholars are granted access to read it. The Bible can be on your own bookshelf. In fact, you could afford to have multiple copies of the Bible spread throughout your home. And the Internet has made access to the Bible even less expensive and more convenient. For you can read or listen to the Bible on your cell phone from websites that charge nothing to access God's Word.

My friends, the Holy Bible is the compilation of primary source documents that we often call “books.” And in the Bible, you can read what Moses wrote about the creation of the world, and about the history of the patriarchs, and about the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, their wandering in the wilderness, and their entry into the land God promised to them. You can read the prayers that King David wrote into psalms. You can read the words that prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, or Micah wrote down. In the Bible you can read what eyewitnesses recorded about Jesus – His teachings, miracles, prayers, sacrificial death upon a cross, and His glorious resurrection appearances. In the Bible you hear what great apostles like Peter, Paul, and John tell us about Christianity. And what all these men wrote down is by their own admission (2 Peter 1:20-21) what God Himself told them to say – hence, they penned God's Word. Wow!

Dear Christian, what an incredible privilege and blessing to not only have free access to the primary source documents of your religion, but to have free access to the very Word of God Himself. Down through the ages heathens have earnestly sought to find the Creator and learn what He would have them know and do. And many agnostics tell us that if God exists that He is supposed to come directly to them and make Himself known to them. What these folks who ***“grope like those who have no eyes” (Isaiah 59:10, ESV)*** fail to understand is that the Creator has revealed Himself throughout the pages of the Holy Bible. And He did so to tell us who He is and what He has done in His Son Jesus Christ to deliver us from the darkness of sin that separates us from Him. And this truth is very accessible. As the Apostle Paul wrote: ***“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”***

And in this passage that I just quoted, St. Paul of course was referring to the Old Testament. But the same applies to the New Testament – part of which Paul was penning in these words he wrote down to the Christians at Rome. Do we Christians, though, fully appreciate what God has given us in these primary source documents which are His Word?

Obviously, God enemies, the devil, the fallen world, and our own sinful nature, are going to do what they can to destroy such a great blessing as God’s Word. They have done so down through history and still do so every day. We’ve seen skeptics attack the authenticity and authority of God’s Word. Some of these shysters have even infiltrated Christianity to attack from within - hiding their intentions behind things like church affiliation or titles like “pastor,” “professor of religion,” or “doctor of theology.” And this attack upon the Bible has been going on since the beginning of Christianity. And these folks will tell us that the Scriptures are not primary source documents. They will insist that the Bible is inauthentic, inaccurate, full of contradictions, and is not the revelation of the living God. And even though these false scholars and teachers have been up to no good since the days of the prophets, apostles, and the early church, their attacks have not prevailed. God’s Word stands and its credibility, influence, and power remain intact.

And you know, these great enemies of God’s Word will also tempt us (yes, even us believers) to ignore and neglect Holy Scripture in order to separate us from its great blessings. They’ll tempt us to read *about* the Bible (that is to say, what other people comment about the Bible) instead of challenging us to actually read the Biblical text itself. For God’s Word is not any more complicated to understand than many of the things you and I must learn in life. And there is a plethora of resources available through God’s church (including me, your pastor) to help any reader of the Bible looking for assistance in his or her study of God’s Word.

God’s enemies also will try to distract us from hearing and reading the Bible. For as technology has broadened the ease at which individuals are able to obtain God’s Word, technology has also increased access to other things that compete for our time. And while the printed Bible in English is quite affordable to us Americans, so too are any number of books and printed publications on a wide range of subjects that we could read instead of the Bible. And as we can easily access the Holy Scriptures on our screens, so we are able to also effortlessly be entertained by our screens – chewing up precious time that could otherwise be spent taking in what the living God of the universe has to tell us. For while prosperity has provided us more resources and free time to enable us to focus upon God’s Word, yet our increased resources and greater free time can also

distract us by tempting us to dedicate our hours and days to other things ranging from hobbies to vacations to entertainment to surfing social media.

See, it comes down to choices. What takes precedence? What do we value? If a real “fountain of youth” were ever discovered, my guess is that people would push most other things to the background and do everything in their power to lay hold of its contents. Well, God has given us His own revelation in primary source documents and these Holy Scriptures are readily available. And God’s Word is not just information. It delivers what it promises – giving forgiveness, salvation, and, yes, even unending life to the one who believes the promises the Lord offers through His Word. So, let us be like the Bereans in the Book of Acts who **“received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11, ESV)**. For the crucified and risen Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, makes Himself known through His Word. We are blessed indeed!

See you at worship,
Pastor

PS – The Season of Lent, the most penitential season of the church year, is fast upon us. The church councils at both congregations have approved *a change in our mid-week Lenten Services this year*. Beginning with Ash Wednesday (February 18th), which is the first day in Lent, there will be two midweek Lenten Services on each Wednesday throughout Lent. There will be *an afternoon worship service* at St. John’s every Wednesday beginning at 1:30PM. And there will be *an evening worship service* at St. Paul’s every Wednesday beginning at 7PM. The reason for adding an afternoon worship service during Lent this year is to offer those no longer driving at night the opportunity to attend the mid-week worship services during Lent. Offering a worship service at each congregation during Holy Week is being considered as well. There will be an evaluation following this Lenten Season to see if having two worship services during Lent is something that ought to be pursued again in the future. The sermon series for this year’s mid-week Lenten worship services is entitled *Set Free: The Gospel in Exodus*. Hope you are able to join us ~ Pastor.