

The Importance of Reading the Bible

Welcome to all of you this morning.

If you have the chance to hear the news, you will know that President Clinton was at a funeral in the state of Texas for one of the prominent figures in the United States, Ms.

Jordan.

I was pleased to know that on this particular day, the primary news station in Southern California appropriately carried it.

This is the time of trial for many people in different parts of the world.

There were some interviews recently with respect to the American perspectives in the Balkan Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The peculiar thing one notices in these interviews is that the local people speak of nationalism and ethnicity, but they do not speak of any fundamental characteristics of their religious convictions.

One finds it peculiar to think of Western Christianity in the form of the holicism, the primary perspective of Croatian, the Eastern form or Serbian orthodoxy of the Republic of Serbia, or Islam with respect to others who live in Bosnia.

It's as if the religion of the Western world, in this case Christianity, has had little impact on the actual thinking in lives of people.

Hence it seems appropriate today in the world of this nature that we spend a little time considering what we have in Scripture in terms of the importance of the book that we call the Bible.

It's used commonly referred to the scriptures in Hebrew and Aramaic as the holy scriptures.

They would not use these terms of Bible in the same way that the Christian world does to include both that which was translated from Semitic language and that which was translated from Greek.

Obviously the word Bible comes from a non-Semitic language, that is, meaning simply the books.

The Greek word Tabebles, the books which give us the sense that the Christians for centuries have included not only the books that were translated into Greek from Hebrew and Aramaic, but also those which the church.

And that first century came to understand as the written revelation to be passed on from generation to generation, in addition to what had been holy scripture before.

In this world in which religion seems to play so little a part in critical areas where one would think people would learn instead of leaving their houses and setting them afire so nobody else can use them, that they would set an example of having the house in order if they think they have to leave and let it be to the benefit of someone else.

But that's the problem in and around Sarajevo.

I chose a verse in the book of Acts as a guide to understand the thinking of the Apostles through the Gentiles, that is to those who were in the Greek world in the middle of the first century of the present era.

And in this we have a very important introduction to the parable in terms of how we ought to be thinking today.

If I say that the title is the importance of reading the Bible, I am of course addressing the fact that we are a literate society.

If I were addressing an illiterate society, it would be the importance of having the Bible read to you or of feeling the Bible.

We have a chance to read it ourselves.

Now Paul was a learned person and he read the Scriptures in his feats of this relationship to the Creator God in these terms before the officials representing the Roman government.

Verse 14 of chapter 24 of the book of Acts, but this I confess to you that according to the way which they call a sect, the way is a reference to the conduct of Christians and he was addressing Felix the governor.

So the Jews considered the way of life that Jesus brought as a sectarian duty of what we might call Judaism.

So was to find the God of my fathers believing all things that are written in the law and in the prophet.

I have hoped in God which they themselves also accept that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

This being so, I always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and man.

Then he explains what he was called to do and what his responsibility is as a representative of Jesus of Nazareth who brought that way of life to some it was a sect.

So let me start out and say that even the leader of Christianity was not embarrassed in the Greek world to view himself as a member of what his nation called a sect.

If you're not offended by that, you simply was stating a fact.

Some people had that view.

In our Christian world, we have various views.

Any responsible Catholic in describing the Western world would speak of the church and the sect.

Father sense would not use that term.

This is just a different viewpoint that runs very deep in the phases within the Christian world today in the West.

And at the juncture between East and West, between Christian orthodoxy in Eastern Europe, Roman Catholicism and or Protestantism, but in this case Roman Catholicism on the West, we have this tragic division as represented by the different republics that have grown out of a West United Yugoslavia.

But there has never been a historic period lasting for centuries of that area being united.

So we're going to take a look at the importance of reading scripture.

Paul himself at this time referring to scripture as the law on the prophet.

That is the material that we have in the three fold division that represents the first five books of Moses, the writings that we call the former and latter prophets, the second division, and of course the third written by prophets, scribes, priests, simply called the writings or often the word prophets was used to cover everything outside of the first five books.

So Paul speaks of believing all things which are written in the law and the prophet.

Now we want to understand how we should consider this book of which the law on the prophet or the Hebrew scripture was standard instruction.

They came in addition to foretold in the law on the prophet the Messiah.

The Jewish world came to be divided over this question.

Some became the followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

The majority did not.

And in the material we have that is now called the New Testament, we have a number of remarkable parables which were addressed to you already this morning, the one especially in Luke 8.4-15.

I told that one first for a reason that we normally think of Matthew and Mark and Luke in that order but I wanted to start with Luke's account which was of course the way, the message or the way of life of Christ was presented to the Greek world by a person who was knowledgeable of the Greek world.

Matthew does not write directly, first to the Greek, he writes with a genealogy of Christ which would have made no sense to Corinthians directly, but Luke is addressing the state of affairs of the Roman world, he addresses Caesar, Herod, Pilate and finally the message of Christ.

And you have had this 8th chapter in part read to you, so I want to go over it in sufficient detail that you have an understanding in these verses, 4-15, I am using the New King James version which also is now published as an interlinear, we are introduced here to Jesus going about every city and village verse 1, speaking the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. Any definition of the gospel or good news or glad tidings, any such definition is never fully summarized until we use the term Jesus himself chose to, that is that explains the whole of it, the kingdom of God, the entire realm, everything God has made and governed. The twelve were with Jesus and a number of women, the one of great multitude had gathered and they came to him from every city, he spoke a parable. Now you will notice when I turn to Matthew and Mark, the setting will be different, it will be the same theme, but there is no reference to a boat, no reference to a sea, that is the sea of Galilee. There is simply a reference to the people who were there and this will lead to an interesting observation, that is that Luke's description is not exactly that of Matthew or Mark. There has been a tendency of people to take for granted that Jesus gave this one parable called the parable of the sower, a parable about soul ingrain recorded in each, Matthew, Mark and Luke, and his assumption is that Jesus gave this parable once and then we wonder why the differences in the way each one remembered it. First place you need to realize Jesus spoke to different groups in different cities, in different settings and he didn't always explain it in exactly the same words in Aramaic each time. We're taking now an illustration, one way of presenting this parable. So let us quickly note the background, the first part is what was to make something clear in the mind of the reader. Being an agricultural country, Jesus chose to describe with clarity what it is like to sow grain, barley or wheat. The sower went out to sow the seed, that's clear, and as he sowed some fell by the wayside. It was trampled down and the birds of the air devoured it, that is you would often have paths going to the countryside, next to the paths

would be uncultivated areas and then the ground that was cultivated for sowing. So sometimes when you scatter the seed, some of it hits the roadway or the pathway and there you would discover that the people who walk by trample it down or as you walk along you'll find often that the birds pick it up because it was on the surface and didn't fall into recultivated ground. Now some fell on rock and as soon as it sprang up it withered away because it lacked moisture. And now you can well understand that along a path there will be a rocky border and adjoining that some fell among thorns and the thorns sprang up with what was sown, the barley or the wheat, and ultimately choked it. Now thus far anybody who had any agricultural experience would understand sowing by the wayside, some falling on the rocky border of the man's property that bordered the paths that separated one cultivated area from another, the so-called rocky or gravelly area, and then you had thorns. Now this word thorns has nothing to do with cacti. Cacti are a new world that is north and south American plant and for the time after Christopher Columbus, the peoples of Europe, as far as we know, had no knowledge of cacti. In fact, no cacti grew in Africa, Asia, or Europe, or Australia, or New Zealand. They are natives to north and south America. Thorns are quite different from the needles of cacti. I want to take a moment of time since I mentioned that we ought to read the Bible and we should read and think about it and when you aren't sure what is meant there are always ways to comment. I had the chance in the period of 1983 to go along the paths and into the cultivated area along the Euphrates River. Perhaps one would say about three-quarters of the way toward Iraq on the Euphrates River at the ancient site of Tertus, the modern village of Akhara, which is southeast of the town on the map that you would find is Derazor, where oil has been found in Philly. And it was an opportunity to really understand what thorns are. They are essentially green vegetation and they may have an actual thick and heavy and bold thorns at each leaf area and that thorn can be upwards of half to three-quarters of an inch long or if it's especially vigorous upwards of an inch. And we were searching through the area and thorns were all over even in the cultivated area after the harvest because these plants and the seeds flowed down the river and we were in what we call the area of the flood plain that is when the Euphrates rises then the water spread to the edge of cultivated area and then it recedes.

And in this area where it has spread over the farmland it drops thorn seeds from further north out of Turkey or northwestern Syria. I was wearing the typical shoe that most men wear today which don't come high up and I was wearing thick socks and pants and when I was through by the end of the day I had an interesting experience. I took my shoes off, took my socks off and my feet looked good and above them for about six inches it was all red and swollen.

It was because the thorns were high enough up maybe approximately 10 inches above the soil and when you walk through you constantly had the thorns sticking into you without a real awareness of it. So I learned what thorns were in this plant.

They are corny vegetation that cattle eat, seep or goat not cows in this area they wouldn't survive but they can eat it when it's fed to them. Plants they don't grow in this part of the world.

These are different then from the cacti which if you touch them you're likely to have needles and you know your work to try to get them out. Nothing like that the thorns stayed on the plant but they provided enough alkaline material that whatever was available through them as a surface to penetrate to the skin caused damage that would last some two or three days and you'd notice it. That's the thorn and it covers the area. So Jesus listeners were well aware of this kind of experience. So some of the grains fell on thorns, thorn is soil where plants had the seeds at the time it would have been cultivated and you wouldn't have necessarily noted that many thorns and of course where Jesus was describing it this is not a river plain therefore most of the land would not have thorns only

that which was bordering on the edge of this property near the roadway because water wouldn't have spread the seed all over as in the Euphrates Valley.

When this was cultivated you probably would have found that the plants of the previous year had essentially died or dried away in the ghouse that takes place there in the summer and having been cultivated the seeds were in the ground along the edge of the roadway and so when the seeds were scattered in this area and the rains came in the late October, November then the thorns sprang up as well as the wheat and the thorns grew much faster and poked it out. Now other seeds fell on the ground sprang up and yielded a crop a hundred fold.

When Jesus has said these things he defined what he had read he who has given me ears to hear let him hear. Now everyone who was not deaf could hear and the reason Jesus had so many follow him is that he described something that was so clear in the mind of people they thought they clearly understood what he said.

No problem about rock, thorns, barley or wheat producing, birds coming down and picking up the grain or it simply being clodden on and trampled so it couldn't survive. All that was a clear description. Jesus did not use obscure words so you didn't understand what he was saying in Aramaic and that entertained the people.

It was like listening to the if I may use the term the emerson of that day. People came to listen to him because he had interesting stories to tell and he talked about the kingdom of God and how many people wanted to understand how this parable fit into the story of the kingdom where they had their own views of the kingdom of God and this was a nice story about it.

They might have done some thinking on the subject but Jesus never explained what he meant symbolically by these things. The disciples afterwards asked him what does this parable mean and Jesus says of course to you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God to the rest it is simply given to them in parables seeing oh yes they saw a picture.

That's exactly as Jesus had described it yet they did not see what it meant.

They heard it clearly. Jesus wasn't a speaker who couldn't be heard if they didn't understand why he ain't those symbols so he satisfied with a simple surface description. The parable is this of Jesus the seed is the word of God word here from the Greek we're now moving from however Jesus worded it in Aramaic we're looking at the Greek text the language that God chose for preserving the message of Jesus of Nazareth he said the seed is the word of God logos we say logos are words Jesus is described as the personification and what he thought and what he said is equally logos in the sense the words of God so we have seeds here being symbolic of the thoughts of God the thinking of God as manifested in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and in his message about the kingdom of God the government of God the realm of God and those who make it up and how it is governed what way of life is in it so the sower is not defined the seed is defined the sower inevitably must be understood as God so this is the story of his kingdom and his kingdom is pictured as the field those by the wayside are the ones who fear now here he moves interestingly in a direction he isn't just talking about the word of God as seed he's talking about the word of God as the life in the seed and he describes the seed as in fact the people whose lives reflect the state of the land those by the wayside or the pathway are the ones who fear then the devil comes so now we have a connection with the bird and takes away the word out of their heart now you have here the seed or the word of God is pictured as lying on the roadway and it's trampled on or it is picked away the devil for all sorts of problems immediately make it impossible to grow it's like many inner cities today and the people are like the wayside there is absolutely no possibility of anything growing their minds are as barren as a roadway

so Jesus is interestingly looking at the word of God as grain seed and when it falls in a certain area it's like saying the message of God penetrates or takes root in those in accordance with his description or in accordance with what happens in this kind of experience in our cities today in the great metropolitan areas where the bulk of population lives now in the developed world the wayside provides no possibility of survival of any message that we give when such people are simply barren pardoned by their experience like the roadway is who think religion has no meaning some are on drugs some are criminals their minds are closed some are in business another form of crime in many places and what is left is nothing that they should believe and be saved but God is not unfair this is simply not the time for those whose lives are like the roadway now the ones on the rocky border are those who when they fear receive the word restored now they may be in the city they may be in the suburbs but their life is also very very hollow like rocky soil they hear and they receive this sounds very good and they believe for a while they like what they read in the booklet like what they read in the magazine like what they may hear on radio or television and then there comes a time of temptation now let me read you the translation and then we're going to take a look who for a while or we believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away so let me now look at verse 13 with you more carefully here we have in verse 13 a time of temptation as this verse as it translated now there'll be different translations in modern or the king James depending on what the traditional thinking of people who translate at this point in time so let me give you the sense of this wording in the interlinear here and you could find it elsewhere a time of testing is what is meant now peras move or the luke word peras most means to put to the test or to put to prove we go through times of testing students go through times of testing we test metal we we test many things now in a time of testing something happened now fall away in a time of temptation they fall away now the word temptation is not an adequate meaning to the word not every test you take is a temptation you have to learn that's why I say it is time that we do read and read with care not every test is a temptation therefore to speak of it is a time of temptation is to give an inadequate expression of the greek word which simply means to test or prove there's always a time when children are put to the test by parents I want you to take out the garbage today let's see if you do it I want you to take care of milking as in my case the goats see if you can do it and happily I haven't forgotten but it was difficult because some of them have very little teeth you know you use two things not something large where you can work with time of testing now during such a time of testing something happens it says a piece on tie or the root word a piece to me and this word is simply a different meaning than a sense of falling away now we use the sense of falling away in religious terminology as some kind of apostasy I mean that's in the mind of the leader so the sense of temptation and falling away is to say that the translator here had an idea of focusing on temptation and necessarily falling away or abandoning or apostatizing but that's not actually the sense of this entirely so let's look at the actual emphasis that could have been given there always comes a time of testing now you would heard it you like what you heard and then a test comes a test may include temptation to cheat but it doesn't have to that's the point not every test provides temptation but the result is as a result of being tested something happens and the root meaning of this word a piece to me is to remove that might sound strange to remove but let's look at the sense of it sometimes it is used in a reflective sense meaning to desert or to depart to desist from doing something even to instigate revolt it's the word that has to do with a reaction to taking the test hence the new king james uses the words here in the margin uh fall away it could just as well be rendered to withdraw now what we have had in the church for more than a year is the time of testing and as a result of the test no small number of people have simply withdrawn they have removed themselves from taking the test they are gone the test is to see what you would do how you would read how you would study how would you listen and what you would do with what you learn from what the church is presenting in a time of test taking if you please many simply withdraw that's the note in the interlinear a much better rendering in this case

the interlinear is far more correct in being general nothing specific it is simply a time of testing the people withdraw they don't stay as students in the classroom they don't want to take the test they walk away from it and guess what where they go will be a new test very simple you can't run away from test finally the one administering it ultimately is you yourself you present so many problems running away from taking it if you have immense problems in facing light and making decisions how do we all get the test 100 percent or 90 or 80 or 70 those who withdraw those who don't take the test those who see zero they left the test there there were no answers just zero they're gone they will be tested in their own experience with one another wherever they are or alone now this is a very interesting thing because what we are finding here is a simpler word than the thought of temptation and falling away as those words typically express themselves it is a time of testing when people withdraw now there is another problem the seed that falls among the thorns now this one has been far more common and the curse over decades so there were some who fell among thorns and when they heard they were choked by cares or money not the cares of poverty some were choked by the riches they had so you have an interesting parable here in Wix you have people who were poor who were choked by cares and responsibilities and people who were rich and found the cares and responsibility of riches were equally a problem the pleasures of life opportunities that come along get in the way and bring no fruit to maturity i'm not focusing on verse 14 because that's a separate kind of theme that would deserve a sermon all by itself in contrast to the good ground which you should be familiar with here so what we have looked at in particular is verse 13 in this parable not spoken by the seed not from a boat uses users an interesting set of words he's using the word to test and using the word to withdraw or to remove you know remove yourself from taking the test and sadly there are many who knew they could not answer the questions they had not a willingness to look into and examine they simply walked away now let's go to Matthew's account of this and then we'll quickly look at Mark and Matthew's account chapter 13 Jesus went out of a house and sat by the sea verse one chapter 13 great multitudes were gathered together so he got into a boat and sat and he had moved away from the shore just enough that something happened if you are a figure meant you will recognize how easily your voice will carry from a boat just offshore over the water and so by withdrawing from the crowd he was able to reach a larger cloud by being on a boat in the water this is a different setting and he spoke to them in parable there's the sower he sows by the wayside then there are the stony places which didn't have much earth they immediately spang up now when the sun comes they're scorched and they have no root and wither away then some fall on thorns so we're not going to focus on the thorns we're not going to focus today on the question of 100 fold or 60 or 30 each one of those would be in verse eight a separate kermit the disciple said please explain when Jesus here in Matthew goes into great detail for a number of verses to indicate how significant it is and why it is that he spoke with such clarity that the people thought they understood every word he said but didn't get the meaning because it never occurred to them what those symbols of the soil the land the sower the seeds represent now here's a parable he says in verse 18 when anyone hears the word of the kingdom that is information about the kingdom the realm of God and doesn't understand it that is he just didn't get the picture now sometimes there are people who do get the picture this is people who have heard it who are interested in all sorts of other things they don't understand and whatever they heard takes no root the world and immediately receives it with joy yet he has no root in himself that is the soil is dry and he endures only for a while and then tribulation or persecution arises because of the word and immediately he stumbles now let's look at verse 21 this is now a different set of words this is the same basic parable given with a different set of words in greek i have no way at this point to tell you what there might have been an aramaic given in a different setting to a crowd that may well have included people before or somewhat different so let's look now as we looked at verse 13 and luke 8 we now look at chapter 13 of matthew and we look at specifically verse 21 so here we read that there but when

tribulation or persecution and now we look at these root words and we have something very interesting it says but trial or persecution we'll look at the word trial sleep sales luke does not use this word matthew does and you will see also mark now this is not the word for test this is not the word for putting someone to prove you this is a simple greek word that could best be explained by the definition pressure p-r-e-s-s-u-r-e pressure there are many people in this past year said well we felt under pressure we felt pressured that's all the word means in its fundamental sense so let's look at it step by step there comes pressure because of the word i'm skipping the other word persecution for the moment and immediately a person is skandali the tie that is offended or scandalized we get the word scandal from the greek interesting there comes pressure maybe it's pressure from headquarters maybe it's pressure from the local minister maybe it's pressure from other people and you become scandalized that is it offends you begin to have an attitude toward other people that is not appropriate so the word offend is not a problem it could be scandalized or you become offended and this is because you feel pressure now not everybody is able to withstand social pressure religious pressure the pressure of father and mother the pressure of teachers the pressure of your peers in school some people can't take pressure some people don't want to take a test they aren't willing to be put to the proof they leave they remove themselves in this case under pressure people become offended or scandalized now in addition we have the word the Diogmu which also is important here which means persecution now that is not something i wish to dwell on here for the simple reason we don't have every one of these experiences in the church's modern history in general and certainly not within the United States persecution might have described the state of affairs of the slovic speaking brethren in the ukraine after world war two whom we have come to know more recently anyway our purpose is to focus on some of the differences and similarities we can say that our human experience defines a significant number of people who recently no longer are in our fellowship they went through a time of pressure simply couldn't take the pressure and often became offended at the institution or the persons locally in that institution and away they went as a result of being offended or scandalized so we're not going to dwell on the root of the word persecution here because that's not fundamental to the purpose today then we've had the story of the thorns and we've had the story of the productive soil so now we turn to mark just to complete the picture and we have in mark chapter four we have the setting he began to teach by the sea and now we will look at a particular verse of consequence in mark some fell by the wayside verse four the birds of the air came and devoured that's clear enough some fell on stony ground didn't have much earth sprang up had no depth of earth dried out when the sun came and scorched it withered away that is nothing really was left of god's knowledge in their minds others fell among thorns and then the good crop 3600 fold so mark and mathu tell the same story now jesus will define this parable we will now go to some later verses verse 14 on we have the story of course of the wayside in verse 15 and some is so in verse 16 on stony ground and when they hear they received it was interesting glad they had heard the message or read it and they had no root in themselves because it was no depth of soil it was rocky and when it got hot it was an inadequate moisture to sustain it endured for a time afterward and the translation says here when tribulation or persecution arises trial remember and persecution and mathu but that's not the real sense of it it is the sense of pressure when pressure or persecution that would be a correct rendering because in verse 17 mark uses the same expressions flip seos or a state in which you feel under pressure and then persecution and they are scandalized so what we have here is a very important setting in two of the three accounts of the parable we are dealing with pressure that some people can't take they become offended at either church or other brothers sisters at local leadership shall we say they all have their Mr. Guy Aims some like him and some are scandalized I hope it's only the first here now he's not the only reason my wife and I are here one we weren't scandalized by him and two we also know some of you and three we've been in this zone all along so some have pressure become offended and leave others don't want to take a test they don't

want to be put to the proof and they remove themselves I don't know a better description of the state of mind of what has happened by so many who are not among us they will now have to sort out their lives with each other somewhere else apart from us you'll have a closing prayer on their behalf and ours our father in heaven as we're seated here we ask your guidance to understand with care how we should read scripture and carefully analyze and examine the implication because not every translation gets right to the fundamental point translators have certain things in mind there are indeed temptations there are tribulations but on the other hand sometimes they're simpler things simply being tested to what you will do or feeling put under pressure you know our problems within each one of us and through Jesus Christ we can come to you and present those problems to you and learn what the psalmist said the righteous are never offended there's some problem with people who are we're told to resist the devil and in resisting the devil we don't just have to run away from him and find that he keeps following us we have to resist him and he flees from us so there's no reason to divide Christ or as one man said whose letter I read last night and we could follow this person or that person or some other person or another group there are people who are looking to men and not to Christ and not to that body that is willing to take a test and even if we may have different perspectives with respect to the answers to these issues that have been addressed by the church we should learn how to work with each other in harmony not to be scandalized not to be offended to face up to things that we think need correction whether within ourselves or the institution that is the church to know how to behave uprightly in your presence and with one another you know how to care for those sheep and goats who have been scattered to other pastures that is your responsibility we have ours here and ask your direction on the ministry the elders the deacons and deaconesses and each other in this fellowship your blessing in Christ Jesus name your son amen