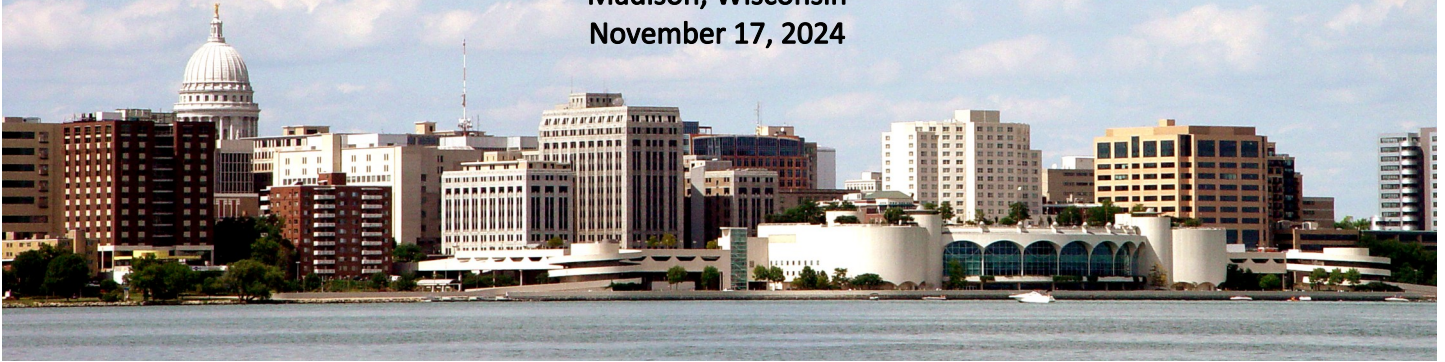


The Written Word of God

How We Got the Bible: Part 1

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Good morning and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation! If you are visiting with us today, we are happy to have you with us, and we'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card – either online or on a card from the pew in front of you. And we also invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns in that way.

Before we get to our study this morning, I wanted to share two interesting pictures I've run across over the past few months as I've been keeping an eye out for baptisms. This right here may look like a baptism, but it's not a "real" baptism. This picture comes to us from Steve Higginbotham who preaches for the Karns congregation down in Knoxville, Tennessee. Karns is home of the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies, a school for training gospel preachers, and Steve was apparently teaching a very practical class on how to actually baptize a person. The caption on this one says, "Another baptism gone wrong! Today was the day I teach the students some helpful tips on baptizing. Obviously, Rochoy was not paying attention!" And I loved seeing the comments on this one. Somebody said that it looks like a crime scene. Someone else suggested that some people just need to be held under a little longer. Anyway, I hope you guys can appreciate the fact that preachers need to learn how to do this, and whenever preachers get together for some fellowship, you will often hear some stories of baptisms gone wrong. I have a few stories of my own. But I am thankful for men like Steve who take time to teach the next generation of preachers, and I thought you might appreciate this as well.

The next few pictures are of a baptistery being installed in Arapal, which I believe is somewhere in the Philippines. Sal Cariaga says that, "It took over three long years for this baptistery to make it to Arapal. What was once dormant for over five years has come back to life. Thank you North Texas Church of Christ for saving this for us." They then quote 1 Peter 3:21, where Peter says that, "...this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." And I just love that some church in Texas had an old baptistery, they saw a need, and they found a way to get it all the way to the Philippines. One of the comments explains that, "Tim Wagner baptized his four grand kids in this baptistery. It represents a pleasant memory to him. He escorted it from the church storage area all the way to the shipping container riding next to it on top of a trailer." They say that their "shipping ministry" "...takes what was once useful and makes it useful again, half way around the world. It is a continuing story. A legacy." I love how they've installed it outdoors in the Philippines, with a shelter over it. God's people are awesome, and I thought I would share the news.

We are here this morning to preach the best of all news: God loves us and sent his Son Jesus to save us from sin: He died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up from the dead on the first day of the week. This is the good news, and we obey this good news by responding with faith, repentance, confession of Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with Jesus in baptism (an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins). And, as usual, we do have several examples to share this week, starting with an update from the Paintsville congregation, down in Kentucky. They posted a few days ago and say, "The greatest friend you will ever find is the friend who introduced you to Jesus! This evening, Cameron Law decided to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins and be added to the body of Christ after hearing the gospel (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:47). He was baptized by two members of our family at Paintsville, Daniel and Ethan, who introduced him to Jesus. Let us pray for him as he begins his new life in Christ!"

This next one comes to us from the church in Raleigh, North Carolina. They say, "About seven months ago a man was baptized in response to the Gospel of Jesus. We believe, and he believed, that getting baptized is not the end, but rather the beginning of a new life and a new mission. The man realized his first mission field was his family, and four months after his baptism, his wife and one of his daughters were baptized. Last week, his second daughter was baptized. And this past Sunday, Sabrina, his youngest daughter, decided to be baptized. We ask that you keep her in your prayers as she begins her new life with Christ. One man's faithfulness brought his whole family to Christ. Tonight we want to remind you of your mission. Jesus commands us to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations sharing the good news. The story of Jesus is the good news. As Christians, it is our job to share this news with the world. Start with your family, neighbors, and coworkers, and don't stop until the whole world knows." And then they quote from Acts 16:32-33, where Luke says (concerning Paul and Silas and the Philippian jailer), "And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family."

This next one comes to us from the Honolulu congregation. They posted a few days ago, and they say, "Rejoice church! Jessica made the decision to put on Christ this morning. Welcome our new sister in Christ. All glory to God!"

I know we've had several, but we'll end with one more, this one coming to us from the Lord's church in Batesville, Arkansas. They simply say that, "The angels in heaven rejoiced this past Wednesday when Bob and Elaine Sweet put on Christ in baptism. Please pray for Bob and Elaine as they begin their new walk with Jesus Christ." As always, we share these pictures by way of encouragement and as our invitation to you to consider obeying the good news yourself. If we can help, if you'd like to study together, please let us know. Pull me aside after worship, or give me a call or send a text to 608-224-0274.

I was planning on heading back to Proverbs this morning; however, last week one of our members handed me a question on one of the sermon request cards (from the wall back there), basically asking about the Apocrypha, and wondering how we know the books we have are inspired, and how do we know that we aren't missing any books? I started looking into the last time we studied this, and it has been a while. And I've come to the conclusion that we may need to widen the study a bit, to study the broader question of HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE. This has always been a faith-building exercise for me, and as I looked into it a little bit, I realized that we haven't studied this since February 2011 (nearly 14 years ago). So, over the next few weeks, I'd like to go back and revisit some of what we studied back then – not the exact lessons, but there may be some repetition – and that's okay. First of all, we are a different group than we were 14 years ago. I would guess that about half of you weren't here back then (including some of you who weren't even born yet), and the rest of you probably can't remember what I preached on a week ago (and I am including myself in that number)! Secondly, though, there is a value to being confident that we have the word of God as he has intended us to

have it. Many times, those who do not believe in God will start by sowing seeds of doubt concerning the Bible itself. They'll argue that the Bible was written and copied by men, men make mistakes; therefore, the Bible is full of mistakes and is not the word of God. We hear this from atheists, and we also hear this from our Islamic friends. They say the same thing about the Bible, that it's been copied so many times that it is completely unreliable. So, we need to look into this from time to time.

This morning, then, I want us to start by taking a look at the written word of God. Why did God choose to communicate to us using the written word? Then, we'll move along next week, Lord willing, by taking a look at the writing of ancient books. How were books made in ancient times? I know we plan on being out of town for a week, but when we get back, I'd like to have us ask: Are the manuscripts reliable? How do we know that the copies of copies of copies are accurate representations of the originals? Then we'll look at what is known as the "canon of scripture." How do we know what books should be regarded as Scripture? And then, finally, we'll take a look at what's involved in translating scripture from one language to another. We may pause or take a detour here and there, but this will be our general direction over the next month or so.

This morning, though, I want us to start by thinking about the written word of God, and in particular: Why did God choose to communicate to us in writing? Why not word of mouth? Why not through a series of ongoing visions and revelations? This morning, then, I'd like to deviate from my personal tradition of tackling one chunk of scripture (one paragraph), and I'd like to take a look at a series of passages (76 verses, to be exact), very roughly in the order they appear in scripture, emphasizing the importance of God's written word. And since we are looking at a long series of passages, I will put these on the wall up here (or on your screen at home), and I would encourage you to follow along. When I was growing up, there were times when my dad would roll out the blackboard at church on a Sunday night. And when we saw the blackboard up front, we knew things were about to get serious. His English teacher was coming out, and we knew we were about to have a sermon with many scriptures in it, and he would put those on the board so that we could follow along. And that's what we have here. So, in the order they appear in the Bible...

...let's start by taking a look at Exodus 24:3-4, where we find that God's word was written with the purpose of being faithfully passed along to large numbers of people. So, as to the question: Why did God WRITE? He wrote so that many, many people would have access to it. And I'll remind you here at the beginning, as I have mentioned several times through our years together: This is the main reason why we sent our kids to school, to learn how to read, so that they could ultimately read the word of God for themselves. To that end, we read to our kids even before they were born. When they were babies, I would hold them in my lap and read to them straight from the newspaper! Reading is so important!

Well, here in Exodus 24, we have what is actually one of the very first references to writing in the bible. In Exodus 24:3-4, we find that Moses writes the ordinances from God in a book,

Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!" Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.

And let's also notice verse 7, where the Bible once again speaks of Moses and says, ***"Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!'"*** The word of God, then, was written down so that the people would have access to it.

Later, we find that this written record is authoritative; that is, the book was a law that had to be followed by the next generation. And the beauty of writing is that they didn't have to rely on what somebody thought they heard many years ago; but instead, they could read it. The written word was permanent. In fact, toward the end of his life, Moses could see that the people would appoint a king. This wasn't what God preferred, but God said that when they appointed a king, the kings were to start their reign by making a handwritten copy of the law for their own personal use, and we find that that handwritten copy would serve as an authoritative standard. Speaking of these kings that would rule hundreds of years in the future, Moses says (in Deuteronomy 17:18-20),

Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.

Can we imagine this happening today? Let's imagine a new president taking the oath of office, and let's imagine the new president holing up in the Oval Office for several weeks as he copies the entire Bible by hand so that he can use that handwritten copy as his guide over the next four years. Can we picture that? It's not a perfect parallel, because we are not a theocracy as ancient Israel was, but imagine what an impact that would have, to have a copy of the entire Bible in your own handwriting! But this is one more reason why God chose to communicate through the written word. It was to be an authoritative standard.

But it wasn't just for the kings. Later in Deuteronomy, Moses continues and says that the book of the law was to be read publicly as an authoritative standard for the whole nation. Please notice Deuteronomy 31:9-13,

So Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. Then Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. "Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. "Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."

So again, Moses wrote the law, and the law was to be read publicly on a regular basis for all to hear – the men, the women, and the children, and the alien (the strangers passing through). They were to hear the written word and they would learn to fear the Lord and to obey the words of the law. And there at the end, even the children yet to be born would someday have access to the written word as well. In fact, later in the chapter, we find that the written word of God was to be put in a place of honor and was to be used to convict future generations of sin. Please notice verses 24-29,

It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete, that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, "Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you. For I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against

the Lord; how much more, then, after my death? Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call the heavens and the earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands."

So again, the written word was to be preserved in a place of honor, and the book of the law was to be read for future generations, long after Moses' death, and the written word would be an authoritative standard for the nation.

And it was. When we fast-forward roughly forty years from the giving of the Law, God tells Joshua (the new leader) to meditate day and night on those words and to observe those words without change. In other words, God was confident that those words of the Law had been accurately preserved over the past forty years. God says (in Joshua 1:7-8),

Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

We fast-forward another twenty or twenty-five years after this (which would have been roughly sixty years after Moses first wrote the Law), and as Joshua is about to die, he says to the people in Joshua 23:6, *"Be very firm, then, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left."* The written word is still being accurately preserved.

We now fast-forward through history to 1 Kings 2:3, which takes place around 930 BC, roughly 400 years after Moses writes, and David commands his son Solomon to keep God's commands as they had been recorded by Moses – those words are still accurate and authoritative. David says to Solomon, *"Keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn."*

We now fast-forward to roughly 605 BC, around 800 years after the death of Moses. The people had wandered away from God, and as a priest is cleaning out the temple, he discovers something. Notice, please, 2 Chronicles 34, starting in verse 14, *"When they were bringing out the money which had been brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the Lord given by Moses. Hilkiah responded and said to Shaphan the scribe, 'I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord.' And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan. Then Shaphan brought the book to the king..."* Notice, then, verses 18-19, *"Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, 'Hilkiah the priest gave me a book.' And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king. When the king heard the words of the law, he tore his clothes."* Eight-hundred years after it was written, the written word of God was still changing lives.

We then come to Nehemiah 8, nearly a thousand years after the Law was first written. The people are returning from the Babylonian Captivity, and the people once again restore the worship of God by looking to the words of Moses. The passage is found in Nehemiah 8:1-4,

And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose....

When Ezra steps to the podium and opens the Law, the text tells us that, *"...all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen!' while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground"* (verses 5-6).

And not only were they reading from the Law, but they translated it right there on the spot. The people were no longer speaking the same language a thousand years later, proving that a translation can still have the authority and approval of God. Notice, please, Nehemiah 8:8, where the text tells us that, *"They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading."*

All of this is with reference to the Law of Moses; however, even hundreds of years after Moses, when prophets were communicating on God's behalf, we find that those words were to be written down as well. We now skip forward in scripture to the prophet Isaiah. In the book of Isaiah, we are specifically told that God's words were to be written down so that the record would last forever. Let's notice Isaiah 30:8, where God says to the prophet, *"Now go, write it on a tablet before them and inscribe it on a scroll, that it may serve in the time to come as a witness forever."*

Similarly, in Jeremiah 36, God commands the prophet Jeremiah to write in a scroll the words that God gives him, and the purpose of writing in that scroll was to spread the word of God far and wide. Notice, please, Jeremiah 36:1-4,

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, "Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations, from the day I first spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day. Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I plan to bring on them, in order that every man will turn from his evil way; then I will forgive their iniquity and their sin." Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord which He had spoken to him.

So, not only did Jeremiah speak his message, but God also told him to write it down. And we're glad he did, because now we have a written record of what Jeremiah said back then.

We now transition to the New Testament, and we have a similar emphasis on the written word. Luke, for example, opens his account of the good news by saying,

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything

carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Luke, then, writes to a man named Theophilus, so that he (and we) *“may know the exact truth”* about the Lord. The written word is precise.

We continue in Luke 4, where Jesus comes on the scene, and we find that at that time (nearly 1500 years from Moses), the people had copies of copies of copies of the Law. They had scrolls of the Law that were widely circulated at that time, and as Jesus starts his ministry, he enters a synagogue and reads from the prophet Isaiah. It’s a copy of Isaiah, and yet Jesus refers to it as *“scripture.”* Let’s notice Luke 4:16-21,

And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,
The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set free those who are oppressed,
To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.
And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Even though Jesus was reading from a copy of a copy, he still refers to it as being *“scripture.”*

Then, after his death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus speaks to Thomas in John 20:29, and he says, *“Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”* John then continues (in verses 30-31) and says, *“Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”* In other words, John wrote the book of John so that those of us who weren’t there could have an eyewitness account of Jesus’ miracles and by reading we can believe.

And this goes not just for the eyewitness accounts, but this also goes for those who received special revelations from the Lord. In Ephesians 3:3-5, Paul explains that when he heard from the Lord directly, he wrote it down so that we could receive the message and understand it as well. In Ephesians 3, Paul writes of the grace of God, and he says, *“...that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.”* In other words, Paul wrote down what he received from the Lord, so that we could understand it. There is understanding in the written word!

In Colossians, we find that Bible writers wrote things down so that the information could be easily passed around and shared between congregations. In Colossians 4:16, Paul says, *“When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.”* Writing, then, is shareable in a way that the spoken word is not.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:14, Paul says that his letters were to be used as an authoritative standard. His written words were to be used as a basis for church discipline. He says (in 2 Thessalonians 3:14), ***“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.”*** Paul’s letters, then, had the same authority as if he were present in person.

We come to Peter, and Peter also emphasizes the written word, and he does so by quoting that passage from Isaiah we looked at earlier. In 1 Peter 1:22-25, Peter says,

***Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For,
“All flesh is like grass,
And all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
And the flower falls off,
But the word of the Lord endures forever.”
And this is the word which was preached to you.***

Peter also emphasizes writing in his next letter, making the point that he’s writing so that his readers could know God’s will even after Peter himself had died. Let’s notice 2 Peter 1:12-15, where Peter says,

Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.

Peter, then, writes the book of 2 Peter so that his readers would know what God wants them to do, even after Peter had left his ***“earthly dwelling.”***

This emphasis on writing continues in 1 John 1:1-4, where John says,

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life – and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us – what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

John writes, then, so that his readers would have an opportunity to have faith in Jesus, even though they weren’t there. This book, therefore, was written to us.

Continuing in the order we find these in scripture, we come to the very short book of Jude, where Jude says (in verse 3), ***“Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.”*** Once again, we have an emphasis on writing.

And this emphasis continues into the book of Revelation. In the opening verses of Revelation, John says,

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

We have a blessing, then, on those who read the written words of this book, and this emphasis on writing continues throughout the book. In Revelation 14:13, for example, John says, ***“And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’” ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.’”*** The emphasis on writing continues in Revelation 19:9, where the angel says to John, ***“‘Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are true words of God.’”*** He continues in Revelation 21:5, ***“And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true.’”*** Again, Revelation was written to communicate a message from the Lord.

Conclusion:

There is so much more we could consider on this subject, but the basic idea this morning is that God has communicated to us through his written word. The written word is precise, it is authoritative, it is permanent, and it can be translated and shared far and wide, spanning many generations without being changed or corrupted. And I would simply end with the passage that Jim read for us earlier from 2 Timothy 3:16-17, ***“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*** God’s word has been written down and preserved for us. What an amazing blessing!

Next week, let’s plan on taking some time to look at how ancient books were made. And we’ll pay special attention to some actual writing materials from back then. If you happen to have a papyrus at home, please let me know. It’s not really papyrus season in Wisconsin right now, but if you have a source, I would love to hear about it!

Let’s close our study today by going to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We are thankful this morning for your perfect and eternal word. Thank you, Father!

We come to you this morning in Jesus’ name. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: foullakeschurch@gmail.com