



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

June 22, 2014

"It All Comes Together" (Book of Acts Series)

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Acts 28:23 *After they had set a day to meet with him, they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets.*

Acts 28:24 Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe.

Acts 28:25 So they disagreed with each other; and as they were leaving, Paul made one further statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah,

Acts 28:26 'Go to this people and say, You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

Acts 28:27 For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.'

Acts 28:28 Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

Acts 28:30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense

and welcomed all who came to him,

Acts 28:31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

And so it all comes together. It's the end of the Book of Acts. We have been studying it for six months! The book began with Jesus going up to heaven. Then the Holy Spirit came down in tremendous power over the followers of Christ, and they were never the same again.

The early church was formed, and people like Paul, Silas, Peter, and Luke took center stage and traveled around the Mediterranean world spreading the good news about Jesus Christ.

Toward the end of the Book of Acts, we read that the Apostle Paul has been arrested and he is being taken to the city of Rome with armed guards. He gets to Rome and immediately is put in house arrest with a soldier chained to him at all times, probably having a new guard every six hours. Not only does Paul have the chance to evangelize every single prison guard assigned to him, but he was also allowed to receive guests. Paul continued sharing the gospel with Jewish leaders and anyone who wanted to talk to him.

Last Thursday night, I flew back all the way from Little Rock, Arkansas. (Anyone been there?) I was there to do a radio interview to promote my book *How to Pick A Spouse*. I was interviewed by Dennis Rainey, one of the founders of Family Life Ministries, for his *Family Life Radio Show*, which has more than one million listeners. And once again, while on a trip, I encountered people who made assumptions and wrong conclusions because of my name. I'm not talking about Family Life; I'm talking about the airline I bought my ticket from.

I was on my way home to Hawaii. I arrived at the gate ready to leave the Bill and Hillary Clinton National Little Rock Airport, hoping I could make the next three connecting flights. I was first in line at the gate, and I gave my ticket to the agent.

Lo and behold, she said that I could not board the plane because I did not have a reservation and to please step aside and let the others board. I pleaded with her that I had a reservation and in fact, she was the one who checked me in just 30 minutes prior. But no. She said I was on standby and so I should let the other passengers through. Meanwhile, I am sure the other passengers who wanted to board were getting frustrated. Get the Chinese guy out of the way.

As you may have heard in my other sermon stories, people tend to get my name wrong when it comes to hotel and car rental reservations. So I finally said, “My name is Chun, Dan Chun (trying my best to do a Bond, James Bond imitation).”

She looked at me, looked at my ticket and said, “Chun. Ooops. Sorry, I was getting you mixed up with another passenger who has a similar name.”

You’ve got to be kidding. She had just checked me in 30 minutes before that!

Now I know we Asians all look alike. We all look same. Our names may even sound all the same, but I wasn’t happy. The point is, she didn’t get the information correctly that was right in front of her eyes. And it was an overbooked flight and I would have missed my flight.

For all of us we can get confused, miss out on opportunities, and even cause anguish on other people when we don’t the information right just in front of our eyes. To make a parallel observation, when we think that all beliefs are “all look same,” and that Christianity is no different from other religions, then we can miss out on a ticket to heaven.

We have just read and studied an entire book of the Bible – the Book of Acts. But it won’t mean anything (actually the preaching of any book of the Bible won’t mean anything) unless we trust the Bible that’s right in front of us. The Bible is true and that we ought to live by it.

And yet maybe for many here, you are not fully sure about

whether the Bible is for real, or whether it is only a book of legends. We can be skeptical with deep untold doubts, and if we don’t take care of that, all the preaching in the world won’t matter.

So I want to talk about the reality of the Bible that could change our whole live because more importantly it points to Jesus who can change our lives.

“From morning until evening he [Paul] explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets.” Acts 28:23

It is important for all of us to believe the Scriptures, and that all the Old Testament and all of the New Testament are true, reliable, and authentic. We live in a world that doubts Scripture. When it conflicts with how our society is going, the tendency is to say that the Bible is wrong and American society is right. We can say that where the Bible is not politically correct (PC), it is wrong because it is more important to be PC.

We can get into a Bible buffet where we pick and choose what we want to believe as true and what is not. But in the end, our choices for what is true will be wrong and we get what I call Agnostic anemia, where we are not sure about God.

I want to talk about why Scripture can be trusted. This might help you or your friends or relatives who have troubling questions about the Bible – good questions, but questions that need answers.

Let’s hit some of the issues on the Bible head on. And I

thank Tim Keller who helped me put this into focus in one of his talks on *Literalism: Isn’t the Bible historically unreliable and regressive?* (Nov. 6, 2006), as well as his book we were selling a few weeks ago, *The Reason for God, - Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. The works of C. S. Lewis was helpful for this too.

There are those who say that the Bible is not to be believed because it is not historically accurate, culturally relevant or personally relevant.

1) Criticism: The Bible is historically inaccurate.

There are those who have kind of a *Da Vinci Code* theology and a limited Hollywood movie education that says the Bible can’t be trusted because the writers were either ignorant or were trying to make up a story about Jesus to start a new crazy religion; that maybe the Bible is just a bunch of legends.

First of all, If you were going to make up a legend about a man who was crucified and rose from the dead, why make it up so close to a time when there would be so many people who could say, “Hey, we all know that didn’t happen.”

But instead, if it were true, then why NOT do it when so many could verify facts and be witnesses who could say, “Yes, that happened and in fact I saw Jesus after he was crucified.”

In 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul says that more than 500 people saw Jesus after the crucifixion: “...and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.” (1 Cor. 15:14)

In Philippians chapter 2, Paul wrote of the divinity of Christ, and some think that might have been written just 15 years after Jesus died. It's much safer to create legends hundreds of years later, not when the witnesses are still around, unless the so-called legend was true.

And if you were going to write a fictional novel, why make the key characters look so bad? Look at the Apostles. Are they the heroes you would put in a legend? The Apostles John and James were known as the sons of Thunder. Why would you call those kids the sons of thunder? They were probably loud and rambunctious or maybe had anger issues. Hi everyone! Oh no, it's James and John again!

Matthew was a tax collector. The people hated tax collectors because they were embezzlers. Simon was known as Simon the Zealot. He fought against the Roman government. Today we would call him Simon the Terrorist. He was a Jewish Taliban against the Romans.

And Thomas? What a loser! Always doubting. Such an Eeyore! Seemed like he was always lacking faith. He even told the other disciples that they should go with Jesus to Jerusalem so they could die with him.

And Peter? He always puts his foot in his mouth. He also kept denying Christ, again and again and again. And if you count it all up, it's not just three times but at least 6 times that it was recorded in the Bible, and maybe there were more times that weren't recorded.

The disciples were all losers. The only one who had a good resumé was a guy who was

good with money, had connections with the political and religious leaders, and was known as an Essene—so he was highly religious. He had the best resume and portfolio but his name was Judas Iscariot and you know what he did in the end. He betrays Christ.

So if you are going to write a novel or a legend, why make the leaders in the legend look so bad? And not only do they look bad, but Jesus looks bad too. He was not legend stuff. While in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, "I don't want to do this, God. I don't want to go on the cross. If you really want me to I'll do it, but I don't want to." And then when He is on the cross He says, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

If this were a concocted story, you would take the Hollywood route and have him like a hero in the mold of Harrison Ford, or Tom Cruise or a tough character like Jack Bauer of 24.

But did Luke really write a novel or a fictional story? Realistic fiction written like history as we know it today was not developed until the 18th century. There was no ancient writing back then, like an *Iliad* or a Homer story that would start with how Luke began the Gospel of Luke. It's a different style aimed at facts, not fiction. Here is what he wrote in Luke chapter one:

"I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed." (Luke 1:3-4)

This was a new genre of journalistic eyewitness account that said, this is what happened,

and I am a witness and there are 500 other witnesses. This isn't written like a legend or a novel.

C. S. Lewis, the late Oxford don, was an expert in ancient literature. He had this to say when looking at the gospels:

"I have been reading poems, romances, vision literature, legends, and myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know none of them are like this. Of this [gospel] text, there are only two possible views. Either this is reportage, or else some unknown [ancient] writer without known predecessors or successors suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern novelistic, realistic narrative. The reader who doesn't see this has simply not learned how to read." [C.S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, Walter Hooper, ed. (Eerdmans, 1967), p. 155.]

The Gospel accounts and the Book of Acts are not written like fiction. But then there are those who say that the Bible is not just historically inaccurate but culturally irrelevant too.

2) Criticism: The Bible is culturally irrelevant.

Sometimes people make cultural objections to the Bible, but they need to be advised to take their time and study the issue first and see if the Bible is really teaching what they think it is teaching.

Often we hear the argument, "Look at slavery. Didn't the Bible endorse slavery by saying, 'Slaves, obey your masters'?" And if it did, then the Bible is culturally irrelevant for today and that kind of thinking will hurt other people groups."

But let's take a look at that. When people in America think of slavery, they think of the 18th and 19th centuries and what happened to the African Americans. Slavery in America back then was targeted for a certain ethnicity. It was also based on socio-economic classes.

But slavery during the New Testament was entirely different. We would call it more like contracted service, like having a butler. Masters owned the slaves' time and skills, but they didn't own the slaves for life. Slaves could be released within 10 to 15 years.

The slaves looked and lived like everyone else. There wasn't much difference between slaves and the average free person. They made the same wages as free laborers and, therefore, were not usually poor. From their savings they could get out of their slavery contract, if they could afford to. (*Tim Keller, Reason for God, 2008, Penguin Publishers p. 110*)

We get a clear view of slavery in the times of the New Testament in a book called Philemon, as Paul wrote to him in how to treat Onesimus, his runaway slave. We see kindness and tenderness and brotherly love. A New Testament slave back then was often more educated than his master. (*Ibid.*, Keller *Literalism: Isn't the Bible historically unreliable and regressive*).

The African slave, on the other hand, was kidnapped. The Bible unconditionally condemns kidnapping and trafficking of slaves as seen in 1 Timothy 1:9-11, and Deuteronomy 24:7.

Another slam against the Bible is polygamy. They say, "Look at how the Bible supported

multiple wives and endorsed that living."

Yes, that was the ancient culture back then. But actually if you look at the entirety of the Old Testament, you would see that it is one big lesson on how polygamy really screws up your family.

Whether it is Abraham or Isaac or Jacob or King David, having many wives just brought them heartache and really messed up their families. And the Bible was showing them a new way—that polygamy was not the way. Monogamous relationships between a man and a woman was.

In fact, in the Old Testament there are two strong Jewish family themes – polygamy and primogeniture, which means that all rights and most of the blessings go to the first-born. The Old Testament is so amazing in that it challenged the ancient cultural ways.

Dr. Robert Alter, a Jewish professor at UC Berkeley, wrote a book called *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. He says that the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures actually revolutionized the ancient Middle East culture of primogeniture because in every generation when God wanted to bless the family, He chose not the older but the younger son. Incredible!

God chose Abel the younger over Cain. He chose Jacob the younger over Esau. He chose Moses the younger over Aaron. He chose Joseph, who was second to the youngest. God chose David to be King over his older brothers. God challenges and radically changes society.

So don't be quick to judge the Bible as being too easy on slavery, polygamy, or why the first-born should get all the money and power. God was always changing things. Through Jesus, God gave women more power and authority than what they would normally get in their ancient cultures. And let me add, if you wanted to write a legend, then you wouldn't have women be the first witnesses of the resurrection in a society where women had no say in the courts of law.

3) Criticism: The Bible is personally irrelevant.

On the contrary, the entire Bible is about you. It's personal, but it's also about Jesus. Don't leave the Jesus part out or else all of this is for nothing. What do I mean?

Every thing in the Bible in the entire Old Testament and in the book of Acts and beyond to the Book of Revelation is all about Jesus. How is the Old Testament all about Jesus? Tim Keller notes that.

The temptation is that we think life is all about us and not about God. The story of Moses. Is it about you? Is it about how we can be faithful like Moses or courageous so that we can fight the Pharaohs in our lives or how we can be the good manager or leader in life to lead the children of Israel out? Is it all about us? No! We can draw out life lessons on things like that but if we only go down that road and skip out on how Jesus is in the story, we miss the whole point.

God didn't appear to Moses to say, "You are such a cool dude. You da man. You da bomb! You know what? You are qualified to be the leader.

And how do I know that. Because you are really faithful, loyal, committed to me, because you obey the laws like the Ten Commandments, I'm going to let you lead the Israelites out of Egypt." It's not about those who are like Pharisees and keep all the rules win. It's about a relationship not about regulations and rituals.

Instead, the story of Moses and the Passover is this. Humankind, you all deserve to die because of your sins. But here's the key. Kill a lamb, put the blood on the doorpost. It is because of the blood of that lamb you will be saved, and when the angel of death comes by you won't be paying for your sins."

And who is the lamb throughout the entire Old Testament. Don't miss it. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He says, I am God to take on all of the debt of sin so that you can be together with God for eternity. (Ibid., Keller, *Literalism of the Bible*).

Every thing, EVERYTHING in the Old and New Testament is about Jesus. The rock of Moses, struck in the wilderness in search of water in the desert—that's Jesus, the real Living Water. Jesus was struck and crucified with the rod of God's justice so we could have water in this desert.

Look with different eyes! Jesus is also the fulfillment and embodiment of the Old Testament tabernacle, the temple, and all aspects of it - the sacrifice, the Temple altar, the light, the bread, the prophet, the priest, the king. The Bible is about Jesus.

When we pick and choose only what we like in the Bible, then it becomes like —what Tim Keller's

wife Kathy says—the *Stepford Wives*. Remember that movie where women are given a device in their heads so that they become the perfect wives who never bother their husbands and do whatever their husbands want.

Kathy Keller says there should be a new movie version of *Stepford Husbands* where they get a chip in their heads and do whatever their wives want. Complete robots. Totally subservient.

But get this: What we want at times is a Stepford Bible that can be interpreted in all the ways we want. Anything that we find offensive, we don't believe. Are you doing that?

Maybe we want Stepford churches where the hymns, songs, and preaching has to be exactly the way we want them. Or maybe we want a Stepford God who doesn't offend us, challenge us, or is wiser than us who might call for a sacrificial life. So we want to put a chip in Him so that He is subservient to us and give us what we want and to conform to our lifestyle.

Friends – trust the Bible, be patient with it and let God speak to you through it, and then follow Him. Jesus is saying, "Come to Me, All you who are weary and are heavy burdened and I will give you rest."

For you who are skeptical, today I say come and see...come and see what what Jesus is really about...His forgiveness, His dying on a cross at Cavalry...what He really says about life and what the Bible say. Jesus Christ is the true fulfillment you are looking for. Amen. Let's pray.