

2. A Clear Word

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to read now together in the Scriptures. You'll find the reading in Psalm 119. We're reading the section beginning at verse 105. That's page 514 in our Church Visitors Bibles.

But once again this week I'm going to read from the old authorized version, or the King James Version as it's sometimes called. Well, because this little series that we're doing, when we're asking the question, what is the Bible?

I suppose it was really stimulated by the fact that this is the 400th anniversary year of the translation, this extraordinary translation of the Scriptures that had such influence all over the world.

I was just reading before I came into the pulpit something of the inscription at the beginning of the Bibles, which if some of you have one of these Bibles with you, or even at home, you might just have skipped over and never read. It's really worth reading.

To the most high and mighty Prince James, by the grace of God, King of Great Britain and France, in those days, Ireland, defender of the faith, from the translators of the Bible, with grace, mercy and peace through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[1 : 1 3] Then there's a paragraph about how glad they are that this marvelous king has come down from Scotland to rule the people of England. And then it says, they must have been quite scared, they weren't quite sure what they were getting, were they, when King James VI came down to take them over.

But we did take them over, and we've been ruling them ever since. And I sincerely hope we'll be showing them next Saturday on the rugby pitch, that we rule them in a way we did not rule Argentina. But anyway, that's another matter.

But this paragraph is worth reading. But among all our joys, there was no one that filled our hearts more than the blessed continuance of the preaching of God's sacred word among us, which is that inestimable treasure, which excelleth all the riches of the earth, because the fruit thereof extendeth itself not only to the time spent in this transitory world, but directeth and disposeth men unto that eternal happiness which is above in heaven.

Well, that's a very fine paragraph, isn't it? And reminds us that the words written in this book are not merely for this earthly realm, but are words that affect eternity.

And every time they're spoken and read, every time these words are heard, something eternal, of eternal moment, is occurring. Let's keep that in mind then as we read these verses from Psalm 119, verse 105.

[2 : 4 4] Thy word, says the psalmist, is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

I am affected very much. Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy word. Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord, and teach me thy judgments.

My soul is continually in my hand, yet I do not forget thy law. The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I err not from thy precepts.

Thy testimonies I have taken as an heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end.

And then just one more verse, verse 130. The entrance of thy words giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple.

[3 : 46] The entrance of thy words giveth light, it giveth understanding unto the simple. Well, amen, and may God bless to us this, his word.

I'd like to turn to Psalm 119 there. We're not so much going to expand this, this evening, because we're thinking, you know, thematically, really, about, about the scriptures.

But I do want to just read these two verses again, verse 105, verse 130, because in a way they, they sum up our subject this evening. Thy word, says the psalmist, is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

The entrance of thy words giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple. In this series, we're celebrating the 400th anniversary of this translation of the Bible authorized by King James, the first of England and sixth of Scotland.

But more importantly, we're not just celebrating this translation, which is certainly worthy of great celebration and marking it, but we're asking the question, regardless of the translation, what is the Bible?

[5 : 08] What kind of a book is this? Which surely has become the most ubiquitous book the world has ever known. Well, last week, we thought about this for the first time and we saw that this book is, perhaps above all else, it is a covenant word.

It's a word of personal revelation of God. It's from God, God reveals himself, his own heart in it, and he does so in order to bring human beings into a personal relationship with himself.

God reveals himself to us and through that revelation he calls us to be his friends. He calls us back into his family to be his people, to be sons and daughters of the living God.

And remember, we said that if God really is God, if he really is above and beyond everything in creation, then of course he must be the one who does the breaking in.

God must break in from outside our understanding, our knowledge, our universe, and he must make himself known to us. He must reveal himself to us, otherwise we can't know him.

[6 : 27] But in the gospel we learn that that is exactly what God has done. Right from the very beginning he has been a speaking God. From the beginning he spoke words into our world through the prophets, the poets, the bards, and in these last days as Hebrews chapter 1 says, he has spoken to us with finality, with absolute clarity in his son, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

and in the gospel of his son that is enshrined for us forever in the words of Jesus Christ himself and in the words of the apostles and the prophets of scripture.

The Bible is a covenant word, a word of personal revelation from God to us. But tonight I want to ask the question, is such a thing really possible?

Is it really possible that God can speak clearly, clearly to all human beings so that we can hear him and we can understand him? Is that possible? Now there are some people, there are many people indeed who doubt that.

Can God really speak so clearly like that? If he did, why is it that not everybody understands everything about him? Many people would say the reason is you see that God is so very complex and of course to understand anything about God and theology will be terribly, terribly complicated.

[7 : 53] So you can't possibly be simplistic in this way you talk about God revealing himself in words. Ordinary people, well, they could get terribly mixed up, terribly led astray if they thought that God could speak so clearly that all you had to do is open the Bible and read the words for yourself and you could really know true truths about God.

No, no, no, you can't possibly do that. So that's why we need theologians. That's why we need experts. That's why we need people to interpret God's very complicated and difficult words to ordinary people so that ordinary people like us, most of us, can understand that.

Now that really was the position of the church in the Middle Ages where the Bible was kept absolutely out of the hands of ordinary people. It was kept in a priestly class.

It was kept in Latin so that only those with great learning could possibly even read the words of Scripture and they could dispense the nuggets of learning that they felt the common people needed in that sort of a way.

The Bible's far too complex to be understood by ordinary people. In fact, today, there are many people who feel essentially just the same.

[9 : 13] They'll say things like this, well, you mustn't be simplistic, you mustn't be naive, you mustn't be fundamentalist in the way that you read the Bible. That's a great swear word today, isn't it?

Have you noticed it's become very ubiquitous, fundamentalist, fundamentalist believers? The way that word is used nowadays so often is almost to imply that any normal Christian who picks up the Bible and reads it and takes it seriously for themselves is very probably the kind of person who's going to be a suicide bomber or fly an airplane into a building.

The word has become so derogatory like that. But again, it's this same thought, no, no, no, no, no, to really understand God, you have to be terribly clever and have lots of PhDs and be very, very highly decorated in the church or in the scholastic realm.

The kind of people that the BBC will bring on to their discussion programs when there's any kind of question about a religious matter. Somebody who will talk in very highfalutin terms and speak lots of words that indeed, yes, most of us can't understand.

Because the Bible is such a complicated business and knowing God is far beyond the ken of just ordinary people like us and the words of simplicity in Scripture. Now, I have to say that that kind of attitude really is extraordinary elitist snobbery.

[10 : 40] It really sort of implies that ordinary people like us not only shouldn't be let loose on something like the Bible, but probably we shouldn't be allowed to read any books at all. And probably we shouldn't be allowed to vote either or do anything else like that unless we're carefully guided by some clever expert people who can tell us what we ought to be doing.

Have you noticed how we live more and more in the culture of the expert these days? We can't actually just be told the news. There's always got to be an expert to come along and interpret to us what we're actually supposed to hear. And so it often is in the way that people think about God and understanding words about God.

Now many people today doubt that God can speak clearly in that way. And there are many people in our society today, our culture of relativism, who think that well really whatever the Bible says in any place is also open to all manner of different kinds of interpretations so that really it's all in the eye of the reader.

There's no such thing as objective truth even in Scripture, even in the Bible, because whatever you understand by it, well that's just your interpretation. That's very common today, isn't it?

I'm sure you've come across that. People have said to you when you've been speaking about something in the Scripture, well that's just your interpretation. I mean, you've got your interpretation, I've got my interpretation, and that's all there is to it.

[12 : 08] But again, just think about that for a minute. There are plenty of people who claim that sort of thing and write books about that sort of thing, but again, isn't that also double standards because these people write their books in words, and presumably they expect people to understand quite clearly what their words mean about this sort of subject.

So if experts can write books telling us that nobody can understand anything and it's all relative, and yet expect us to understand enough of their words to understand what they're talking about, why can't God possibly speak in words that are clear and able to be understood by the people he's writing to?

It's rather absurd, isn't it? Next time somebody says to you about something, oh that's just your interpretation, then what I suggest you do is this, you say excuse me, and they'll say it again, you say pardon, then they'll say it again, and you say sorry, and then they'll get a bit cross with you and you'll say for goodness sake man, can't you understand plain English?

You say sorry, and when they get really cross, you just, oh sorry, that's just your interpretation, I heard you say something quite different. You see, it's absurd, isn't it, when you think about it, it's just a lot of nonsense, not very well to talk in these highfalutin fancy terms, and write books about it and all that sort of stuff, but none of us live life in that way.

This so-called post-modern relativism that everybody talks about today is just a lot of absolute rubbish in real life. In normal life, here on planet earth, we speak words and we expect people to understand them.

[13 : 50] Everything that we do in life is based upon that fact. If you don't believe me, try it next week with your bank manager when you go in and say to him, oh, I don't think I've got an overdraft at all, that's just your interpretation.

You see what he says to you. It's not working, is it, with the Greek government saying to the rest of the European Union, oh, we're not really in debt, that's just your interpretation. Well, we'll see.

Or next time you stop for speeding by the policeman. Oh, officer, I was not doing 95 down the M77, that's just your interpretation. Well, I have a fair idea whose interpretation is going to win out in the end in that particular situation and what's going to be on your driving license.

So, let's just set aside all that kind of nonsense and let's deal with reality in the real world. People claim that God can't possibly speak clearly and plainly.

But if we can, as creatures whom God made, is it not a reasonable assumption that the God who created the tongue and created words, and created language, can himself possibly speak clearly in language and in words that we can understand.

[15 : 01] Well, it would be absurd to think anything different, wouldn't it? And, of course, God has spoken clearly and set his words down clearly in the Bible. The Bible is a clear word, a clear word from God to us that we can understand.

God is a God. The Bible is God preaching God to us. The Bible is itself an interpretation.

It is God's interpretation of his words to us as human beings. It's a clear word, in other words. It's an accessible revelation. It's a ready interpreted word, which we can understand and we can take it in.

And when we do that, it will be for our great blessing and our great benefit. I want us to get that very, very clear because it is an area that many Christians are confused about and it's easy to be confused.

And even in our own reading of the Bible, when we think that we believe that God can speak clearly to us, there's a tendency to think that we go to the scripture and we take from the scriptures and put it together to make a message, to do our interpretation of what God is actually saying to us.

[16 : 24] As some of you have heard me before use the illustration that Dick Lucas has used in the past about Delia Smith. Delia Smith, the cookery guru. You'll all have watched Delia Smith's programs and you'll know that whenever Delia is cooking, we have a pristine, beautiful kitchen and we have this lovely surface where everything is set out in nice little bowls.

I don't know anybody else apart from Delia who does that when she's cooking. Do you put your butter and your sugar and your flour and everything in all sorts of little separate bowls? Perhaps somebody does here. I don't. But anyway, when Delia is making a cake, we have all these lovely little bowls with everything measured out and everything looks absolutely perfect.

And one by one, she takes all the ingredients, puts them in the big bowl and mixes it all up to make a cake. And many people think that's what we're doing when we're teaching the message of scripture.

scripture. We're going to different parts of the Bible, putting it all together, and up we come with something that we've made, our cake. But that is not at all what we're doing when we interpret scripture.

When Delia does her cookery program like that, we don't wait, do we, for the cake to cook in the oven? What does she do? She goes around and says, and here's one I made earlier. And as if by magic out of her cooker comes this beautifully well-formed and ready-made cake.

[17 : 37] cake. Now the Bible that God has given us is not the bunch of ingredients in the little bowls. The Bible is the cake that God has made earlier. And he is taking it out and handing it to us and saying, eat it.

Don't make up a whole lot of your own interpretations as though this was a random group of prepared ingredients. This is the interpretation. This is a ready interpreted word that is understandable, comprehensible, and clear, and ready for you to read, and mark, and learn, and inwardly digest, and obey.

So that means, you see, friends, that when you're coming to a passage of the Bible, whether as a Bible reader personally, or as a group leader to lead your home Bible study or your Bible study group, or as a preacher to teach it, you're not coming to the Bible with this question.

Now, here's a passage. What can I make from this? What message can I make from these ingredients here? Far less are you coming to the passage and saying, now, how can I give some meaning to the Scripture?

How can I make this relevant today? Absolutely not. The question that you're bringing when you come to the Scripture is this. What is the plain and distinct and coherent meaning in this word that God has already spoken for me to hear and to obey?

[19 : 06] That's the question that we ask when we come to the Scriptures because the Bible is a clear word. Its message is accessible to human beings.

It is a ready interpreted revelation. It is not obscure. It is not indistinct. All Scripture, as Paul said to Timothy, is able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Or as the psalmist says, the entrance of thy words giveth light. It giveth understanding to the simple. And that was one of the great watchwords of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.

It was bringing the Bible back into the realm of the ordinary people, back into words in the language of the common tongue so that people could understand it. The theological term we're talking about is the perspicuity of Scripture.

The Bible is perspicuous. It's clear like a sheet of glass. You can see through it. It's intelligible. It's plain. It's distinct. It's explicit.

[20 : 16] It's not obscure. It's not indistinct. It's not only safe to be touched by a specialist class of priests or scholars or anybody else.

Absolutely not. Now, of course, don't misunderstand. That doesn't mean that some parts of the Bible can't be hard to understand. Of course they can. In fact, the Bible itself tells us.

The Apostle Peter says that in one of his letters, doesn't he, about Paul's letters. There are some parts that are hard to understand. Indeed, there are. Don't I know it? But what it does mean is that all the parts of Scripture, everything that is essential for us, is clear to us.

And we will be able to understand it if we spend time and effort to get to know the Bible, to read it properly, to read it responsibly and sensibly.

It is light even to the simple. That doesn't mean the foolish, but it means the unlearned, ordinary, open-hearted person.

[21 : 24] Let me read to you what the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Confession of Faith of our church, says in its first chapter. Those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or another, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in due use of ordinary means, that means through ordinary reading and preaching and teaching and so on, the unlearned, in due use of ordinary means, may attain a sufficient understanding of them.

All that is necessary in God's revelation is clear to all who seek it diligently and with a pure heart. And that clarity comes from understanding the Bible better, through reading it, through becoming familiar with it, so that something that might seem unclear in one particular place, well, is made clear by something that we read elsewhere.

So the Confession goes on and says this, the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself. And therefore, when there's a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture, which is not manifold, but one, that is, it's a coherent message, not a random message, when there's a question about the true and full sense of any one Scripture, it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

You see what he's saying? The Bible is its own interpreter. It tells us in Scripture not only the events of the story of Christ and then leaving us to interpret them, no.

The Bible records the events and also the interpretation of those events. God's Holy Spirit has overseen the whole production of Scripture, weaving the ingredients together into a perfect whole so that it is clear, so that it is understandable and accessible to all, to all who will approach it with honesty and with humility and with a sense of open inquiry.

[23 : 37] glory. If we do that, the promise of Scripture is that it will be a lamp to our feet, that it will be a light to our path. It will not lead us into darkness and confusion, but into light and understanding.

Now let me just look this evening at a couple of places just to give us a couple of examples of just how clearly the Bible itself interprets some of the things that are absolutely central to the whole message of Jesus Christ.

Turn with me first to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. If you have one of our church Bibles, I think that's page 961. Here's a verse that Paul says is of the utmost importance.

I delivered to you, he says to them, as of first importance that which I also receive, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.

Now here is a verse about the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. So let me ask the question, what does the death of Jesus Christ mean?

[24 : 44] What does it mean? Go out into the street, speak to your friends, speak to others, and you will get many different answers to that question, won't you? There will be some within the orbit of the church who will say the death of Jesus Christ means a great display of what love is.

You'll get somebody else who will say, well, the death of Jesus, that was a tragic martyrdom in the first century. You'll get somebody else who will say, oh yes, the death of Jesus was a tragic and a sad end to a great teacher and somebody who did great good works.

I suppose if you ask somebody of the Islamic faith, they might say to you, I guess, that their answer is they don't think Jesus died at all. That is, as far as I understand it, what the Muslim faith teaches.

Just worth noting that, isn't it? That the central understanding, the central teaching of the Islamic faith about Jesus Christ is based on denial of one of the best attested facts in the history of the last 2,000 years.

I don't think even Richard Dawkins denies that Jesus died. Nobody in the first century denied that Jesus died. Plenty of people denied he rose again, but nobody was saying that he didn't die. But if you ask that question, what does the death of Jesus mean?

[26 : 05] You'll get a whole myriad of different answers. Well, let's look at this verse and see if we can make up our own interpretation or whether everybody can have their own interpretation.

What does it say? Christ died. Well, that speaks of an event, doesn't it? It speaks of a passion. There are many progressives within the Christian church today who will say, well, that's all that matters.

It's the Christ event that matters. It's just a fact that Christ died. I don't know why you people get tied up with all these theories of the atonement, as they call it. That's just unnecessary.

It's just full of controversy. All we need to know is that Christ died. That's what matters. And of course, the fatal objection to that kind of approach is simply this, that the fact that Christ died does not make a gospel, does not make good news.

For the first disciples, the fact that Christ died when it came to their attention was certainly not seen as good news, was it? It was seen as terribly bad news. The disciples on the road to Emmaus were full of grief and sorrow because Christ had died and they knew that fact.

[27 : 22] Richard Dawkins, I'm sure, believes Christ died, but certainly does not see that that is a gospel of good news. So the event in itself does not make a gospel.

And your interpretation or my interpretation or anybody else's is quite irrelevant. But look at the next words that Paul gives us. Christ died for our sins.

Now that is an interpretation. That is an explanation of this death. That is words that give this death content. Christ died for our sins. There's not just a passion that's being stalked about here, but there's a purpose in this passion.

It's not just a show of love. Not just a great example. Not just any of these things. It's not a tragedy. It was a death for a purpose. For our sins. But still we must ask, well, what exactly does that mean?

What does it mean that Christ died for our sins? Is it like an innocent pedestrian who's knocked down by a drunk driver? We could say tragically that person was killed, died for that man's sins as a result of his action.

[28 : 39] That's hardly good news, is it? That's tragic news. What does it mean? What does it really mean when we're told that Christ died for our sins? Well, look at the next words. Christ died for our sins, says Paul, in accordance with the scriptures.

Jesus' death, says Paul, is a death for sins in a way that death for sins is explained in the whole of the Old Testament scriptures. Scriptures that tell us that man's great problem before God is his sin.

Sin that separates him from God's prison. Sin that condemns him to death under God's curse. The scriptures that teach us of God's promise at last to reverse that curse of sin through a Savior who would come.

The scriptures that explain what atonement for sin means in terms of the whole notion of substitutionary sacrifice all through the Old Testament where one dies in the place of another's sins.

That's what's signified in all the priestly sacrifices. Above all, in Leviticus chapter 16 where you read about the day of atonement once a year where the two animals were sacrificed. One is blood sprinkled on the altar upon the mercy seat and the other the hands of the priest conferring the sins of all the people on that goat, the scapegoat that went out into the wilderness to carry those sins far away.

[30 : 07] Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures that teach about dealing with and atoning and getting rid of sins through sacrifice. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures that spoke in the prophets of the Messiah.

The great king who would at last himself come, who would be high and lifted up, who would be lifted up as a servant to die, to bear the transgressions and the iniquities of his people as an offering for sin.

Through whom many would be counted righteous, would be forgiven of their sins. You see? We have an event. Christ died. But we also have an explanation.

Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. And that is what makes it a matter of first importance for Paul. That is what makes it good news. And only that. Just as Peter says in his letter, Christ the Messiah suffered for sins.

That's the event. The righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God. That's the glorious explanation. That is the Bible's own interpretation of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 22] It's not just my interpretation. It's not any scholar's interpretation. It's the Bible's own interpretation. It's clear in front of us. It's already interpreted.

It's intelligible to anybody who's got eyes to see. And God is his own interpreter. He has spoken clearly. And every one of you can see that absolutely plainly with your own eyes tonight.

Another example. Look back to Matthew, the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, chapter 1, page 807, I think, in the church Bibles. Another example of the interpretation of the great events of the story of Scripture.

Matthew, chapter 1, and verse 18. The birth of Jesus Christ. Well, that's the event. The birth of Jesus Christ. And immediately we have an explanation.

It took place, says Matthew, in this way. Here's another question. What was the birth of Jesus Christ all about? A few years ago, one of my daughters came back from school.

[32 : 23] She was very young and announced to me, the only reason Jesus was born was to teach people about love. I said, well, who told you that?

Oh, that's what our teacher at school told us. So we opened the Bible and came to this verse and said, well, let's see what the Bible says about it. Look at what verse 18 says. Does the Bible leave us to make up our own interpretation about what the birth of Jesus was all about?

Well, look at verse 18, the second half. What does it say? It took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child.

And that's a pretty devastating event, don't you think? It was portrayed, I thought, really rather well in the BBC's drama of the nativity last Christmas.

It brought out the devastating human nature of that tragedy, the human angst, the pain, the questioning. Here's a couple betrothed, and all of a sudden the girl is found to be pregnant.

[33 : 33] What was Joseph's interpretation? If we all can have our own interpretation about this, what was Joseph's interpretation? Well, it's plain in verse 19, isn't it?

Mary had been unfaithful. That was his interpretation. And so he resolved to divorce her quietly. A betrothal was a legal thing.

It required a divorce. He was a good man. He was a decent man. He was devastated. But he knew that this marriage could not go ahead with that unfaithfulness.

That was Joseph's interpretation of the conception of Jesus. But Joseph's interpretation was wrong. It's not just fine for everybody to make up their own interpretation about this, is it?

God himself steps in to give us the true interpretation. Twice over. He gives a direct revelation, fresh, through the words of the angel.

[34 : 31] And then he gives an older, written interpretation that's already there from the prophets. Look at verse 20. As he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

It's a supernatural birth, the angel says to Joseph. It's not your interpretation at all. It's quite different. And look at verse 21. What's more?

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. It's a saving birth. That's why this baby is being born.

And then to back it all up, look at verses 22 and 23. It's a scriptural birth. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

So Joseph's interpretation of this pregnancy is this is a bastard birth, to wreck a marriage before it's even begun. The schoolteacher's interpretation, well, this is a simple birth to teach us some warm and fuzzy notion about love.

[35 : 52] But God's interpretation says, no, this is a supernatural birth of God the Son himself to save his people from their sins according to the promises of God all down the ages in the scriptures.

And if we're left in any doubt whatsoever, the whole of the next chapter of Matthew's gospel again and again tells us that each facet of the birth of Jesus was explained by the scriptures.

For so it was written by the prophet. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet and so on, all the way through the rest of that chapter. So here is something clear and plain and accessible and unequivocal that everybody who reads this can understand.

We take the Bible seriously and take time and care. It is as plain as the nose on your face what this birth is all about. There is no possible other interpretation but God's clear interpretation.

And friends, that is so all through the pages of these scriptures that we call the Bible. Of course, the Bible is made up of all different kinds of literature, different genres and so on.

[37 : 09] There's narrative like this particular part in the gospel that tells a story. There's letters like Romans that we're studying. There's poetry, there's proverbs. There's all of these things. And of course we've got to be sensitive to that and read these things appropriately.

But we've also got to realize that although the writers convey their meaning in different ways and in different circumstances, there is conveying of meaning going on all the way through.

The purpose of communication in words is to communicate, not to confuse. And that's true whether we're writing a poem or a letter or a shopping list.

The purpose of communication is to communicate. And if we learn to read our Bibles carefully and properly, we'll just find that things become clearer and clearer and clearer as the writers and their style become more and more familiar to us.

Just as you get more and more out of your favorite author, whoever it is, as you get to know them better and read them more and more. And none of this means, of course, that we don't need teachers or people to help us.

[38 : 15] Of course we do, just as we need teachers at school to help us how to learn to read and to study properly. The scriptures, as my father used to say, will not yield their treasures to chance inquiry.

And if we take time and effort to learn how to read works of literature at school, how much more is it incumbent upon us as Christian people to take time and commitment to learn to read the words of God that he gives to us?

We need to be conscientious in our Bible study, not casual, of course. But every proper teacher, every teacher worth his salt wants to set his pupils free through his teaching.

He wants to set his pupils free so that they can learn to read for themselves, so that they can be equipped to learn themselves. No good teacher wants to make his pupils dependent on him constantly, all the time, so they always have to come to him.

For the answers. And it's exactly the same in the church. That is why God has given pastors and teachers and others, says Paul, to equip the saints for works of ministry so that they can be prepared, so that all of us can learn to read and understand and benefit from God's words by ourselves.

[39 : 31] And that will happen as we are taught how to read, as we come to know the scriptures more and better for ourselves, as we come to understand how the Bible interprets itself for us.

We need to understand how the Old Testament helps us to understand the New Testament and vice versa. We won't understand the Old Testament unless we understand Christ and the Gospel.

We won't understand Christ and the Gospel properly unless we understand how all the Old Testament is pointing to him and is looking for fulfillment in him and in his work.

But friends, this book in front of us that we call the Bible, it's an open book, not a closed book. It's a clear word, not a confusing word.

And it's for all of us. Whatever was written in former days, said Paul to the Romans, was written for our instruction, that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

[40 : 40] And that's why the authorized version, the King James Version of the Bible was translated so that everybody in this nation could have access to a Bible in a language that they could understand, so they could read it.

And that's why we have modern translations, so that modern people today also can have access to the clarity that comes in God's Word. That's why we've sent David and Julie Robry to Nigeria to work with Wycliffe Bible Translators, so that the people with indigenous languages there in different parts of that nation can have the clear words of God in the clear language of their own hearts to read them and understand them and find light for their paths.

All of that is a total waste of time, isn't it? If God couldn't speak clearly or didn't speak clearly, but he has.

He has spoken a comprehensible, clear word to humankind, accessible and ready interpreted so that we can know God's mind and have certainty about his will for us.

The entrance of his word gives light. It gives understanding to the simple, says the psalmist. That means, friends, that you also and I, we can open this Bible with confidence and we can pray along with the psalmist in verse 18 of that psalm.

[42 : 11] We can pray the old scripture union prayer. Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. And it's not a great, great gift from heaven to earth that we have in this open book.

A clear word to bring light to our past. Thank God for the clarity of his word. Let's pray.

Lord, how we thank you that you give us such light to lighten up our hearts, to shed light on every aspect of our lives and of this world and that you lead us by that glorious truth with clarity and with wonder.

Help us, we pray, to follow you, to come to your word with great confidence and so to know your mind and heart for our lives.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.