

It's God's Entirely Necessary Revelation to Us

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible readings for this morning, and you'll find those in John's Gospel, Gospel of John, in the New Testament. And we're reading in two places there, first of all in chapter 12, and then a few verses from John chapter 17.

So reading in John chapter 12 at verse 44, these are the last words of the public ministry of the Lord Jesus before he is arrested, before he goes to the upper room, shares the Last Supper with his disciples, and then is arrested.

So we're going to read these last words of his public ministry, and then some words that he prayed in the presence of his disciples in that upper room. John 12, verse 44, and Jesus cried out and said, whoever believes me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me.

And whoever sees me, sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge.

[1 : 31] The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who has sent me has himself given me a commandment, what to say and what to speak.

And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.

Now in John 17, verse 6. Jesus prays to the Father, I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world.

Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you.

For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them, and have come to know the truth, that I came from you.

[2 : 37] And they have believed that you sent me. Then down to verse 20. I do not ask, I do not pray for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.

That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you. That they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me, I have given to them.

That they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and you in me. So that they may become perfectly one. So that the world may know that you have sent me.

And love them, even as you loved me. Amen. And may God indeed bless to us these words.

Amen. Well, perhaps you'd turn with me in your Bibles to John chapter 12. And we'll come to that passage and to some others in a little while.

[3 : 49] Now this, I think, will be our penultimate study for the time being, answering this question we've been looking at as to why we treasure the Bible.

And if I were to choose a text this morning, it will be the one that's there. I think you have a handout that's on the top there under the title.

From Matthew chapter 24, verse 35. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. God's words, Jesus is saying, are abiding words.

And they are to guard and to guide all human life for all time. And that means, you see, that we treasure the Bible because it is God's entirely necessary revelation for all people.

Now we saw last time, you remember, that the scriptures are a completely sufficient revelation for us. They give us all that we need, as Peter says, for life and for godliness.

[4 : 54] We have it all. We have the final word of God's finished work of salvation. It's a complete salvation. And so what we have in the scriptures is a complete word, a word of complete sufficiency.

We have it all. And so we have all that we need. We have all things necessary, says Peter, for these things, for salvation, for faith and for life.

That's how, remember, chapter one we saw of the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it. Very succinctly, as we looked at it last time. And you see, because God has given us all the scriptures, then we must need all the scriptures.

We can't live without it. And that makes, as the very first paragraph of the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it, that's the one we have on our sheets this week, that means that the holy scripture is most necessary.

We have it all in the scriptures. And we have all we need in the scriptures. And so we need it all. We need all scripture.

[6 : 05] The Bible, in its entirety, is a necessary revelation. Now, there may be many things that God has not revealed to us. Indeed, there are.

Deuteronomy 29, verse 29, says, The secret things belong to the Lord our God. But, Moses says, the things revealed, all of them, that is the scriptures that we have, they are for us.

And, indeed, Moses says, for our children. So that we may do all these words that he has chosen to give us. The scriptures, in their entirety, are a necessary revelation for us.

God has caused his words to be written and to be preserved for us for all time. Because, since the resurrection of Jesus, without his words, we can't know God.

We can't find his salvation. We can't live rightly under his rule. And so God's word, as we now have it in the scriptures, abides because it's necessary.

[7 : 06] For the revelation of God. For a true relationship with God. And so that we may live under the rule of God.

I want to think about these three things this morning. First of all, the word of God abides always necessary. Because it's necessary for a true revelation of God.

And that's because of our sin. It's necessary because of our human sinful suppression of God's truth. And that's the point that's made here in the very first paragraph of the Confession of Faith, of our church, the Westminster Confession.

Have a look at it. Let me read it to you. Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God as to leave men inexcusable, yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will which is necessary unto salvation.

And therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in diverse manners to reveal himself and to declare that his will unto his church.

[8 : 18] And afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and of the world to commit the same wholly unto writing.

Which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary. Those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

So God does reveal himself in the light of nature and in the works of creation and providence. The Bible itself testifies to that. The heavens declare the glory of God, says Psalm 19.

But God's work in nature manifests the goodness and the wisdom and the power of God to us so that mankind is inexcusable in the face of that revelation.

Paul's very clear on that in Romans chapter 1. So why then does the confession here say, nevertheless, these things are not sufficient to give a saving knowledge of God?

[9 : 22] Well, the answer, of course, lies in the very reason that a saving knowledge is necessary in the first place. It's because of the fact of sin. The Apostle Paul says that very plainly, doesn't he, in Romans chapter 1.

That God's invisible attributes, his eternal power, his divine nature, have been clearly perceived since the world's creation. And we are without excuse because of that. But, he says, we have blinded ourselves to this reality because in our rebellion against God, we suppress the truth.

And God, in his mercy, has not left himself without a witness. Paul declares that, doesn't he, to the people in Lystra, in that pagan city in Acts chapter 14.

That God did good, he says, by giving you rain from heaven, by giving you fruitful seasons, satisfying your heart with fruit and with goodness, so that you would seek him and know him. But, we've been blinded to that reality. And at best, the knowledge of God that human beings have, through the work of God in creation, through his providential care of us in the world, at best, it's confused.

[10:39] And it's distorted. Remember, we saw in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, Paul says that the natural mind can't understand God's truth.

And he says in 2 Corinthians 4, doesn't he, that the God of this world, the evil one, has blinded the eyes of unbelievers. And so, something more is needed.

We need the trumpet call of God to pierce the fog and the darkness of our sinful hearts, to bring light to that darkness. And Hebrews chapter 1 tells us, as we know so well, that in past times, in many ways, God has spoken, therefore, to human people.

As our confession here has put it, he's done it to reveal himself, to declare his will to people. And in order to preserve and to propagate that true and fulsome revelation of himself, he has caused it to be written in words, indelibly preserving that revelation, which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary.

Because these former ways of God revealing himself in the past times of our fathers, as Hebrews 1 is talking about, has now ceased. And that's what we were thinking about last time.

[12:05] Because God's redemption in Christ is the climax of his revealing himself to human beings, well, that revelation is now complete. And because it's complete, well, that's why it's been preserved indelibly in the words of Scripture, so that that revelation can be passed on, so it can be propagated, so that sinful people in every generation, whose eyes are blinded by rebellious hearts, might still receive the light of God, and might have their eyes opened to the glory of the one true God in the face of Jesus Christ.

It's through God's word that God himself is revealed to humankind. I have manifested your name, said Jesus, for I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them.

That's what he said there that we read in John 17, verse 8. And those same words committed to writing are most necessary so that you and I, and all subsequent generations, may also know the one true God.

That's what John says at the very end of his gospel, isn't it? These things are written so that you, my readers, in the future, may have life in his name.

Let's just digest for a moment some of the implications of Jesus' words there. Only through Jesus, and only through his gospel revelation, can God, the Father Almighty, be truly known.

[13:37] Only through him. Jesus was very definite about that. Not just in John's gospel here, but everywhere. Matthew 11, you remember, no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

So he says, come to me, all who are burdened and heavy laden. I will give you that rest. The Father is made known on this earth only through the Son, and through his words alone.

It's my words, says Jesus, my words, which are spirit and life. So to know about the one true God, you need the gospel of Jesus, the Son of God.

And no one comes to the Father, says Jesus, except through me. His words, and his words alone, are spirit and life.

No one can come to the only true God except through his sovereign word. And no one can go on with God, and in the knowledge of God, without those words.

[14:49] And so you see, that brings us to the second thing, that the word of God in Scripture abides because it's necessary, yes, for a true revelation of God in the first place, but it's also necessary in order that we might have a true relationship with God.

It's necessary for salvation. Just as the universe was created by the word of God, as Peter says, so also, it's through that same word of God that human beings are brought to new creation.

Of his own will, says James, he brought us forth by the word of truth. Or Peter, we're born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable.

How? Through the living and abiding word of God. The word of God that he says remains forever.

Truly I say to you, says Jesus in John chapter 5, whoever hears my word and believes in me has eternal life.

And he says, the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

[16:10] And Peter at least understood Jesus, didn't he? Remember he responded to Jesus and said, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

And that's why at the end of his public ministry here in John chapter 12, these words that we read together, that Jesus focuses so clearly on his words. Just look at this passage that we read beginning at verse 44.

You see how he means belief in his person and belief in his words are absolutely inseparable. Because he alone is the way and his words alone are the way to eternal life.

Look at verses 44 to 46 there. It's all about how belief in Jesus is belief in God the Father. Verse 44, whoever believes in me believes in him who sent me.

Verse 45, whoever sees me sees him who sent me. 46, whoever believes in me remains not in darkness but finds light.

[17:16] But I look at verses 47 to 50 and see how clearly he is saying that to believe in Jesus is to receive his words. His words. In verse 47 and 48, you see, to reject Jesus is not to receive his words.

And it's to be judged by that word that Jesus has spoken. His word is a word of saving power if it's received. It is a word of condemning power if it's rejected.

And that's because, look at verse 49, because Jesus speaks the very commandment of God the Father himself. He gives what I say and what I speak.

And his commandment, his word, is eternal life. God the Son and God the Father are known only through Jesus' words.

or they are rejected through rejecting these very words of the gospel of Christ. And that's why the scriptures, you see, are abiding words.

[18:29] Because these words, these commandments are eternal life. They are necessary for eternal life. But Jesus, at this point, knows his ministry has come to an end on earth.

The cross is beckoning him. And he knows that his resurrection and his ascension are going to be soon. And he knows that in the future, he can be known on this earth no longer by his appearance, no longer by his earthly presence, but instead by his words.

My sheep know my voice, he said. And his sheep will be led by that voice. But just as Mary in the garden after the resurrection, she didn't recognize him, his earthly form, did she?

Didn't know him by his appearance. But what was it that opened her eyes and her heart? His words.

He spoke to her. The dead will go on hearing the voice of the Son of God and coming to life just as Lazarus was called out to life by the words of Jesus calling to him from outside that tomb of death.

Without his words, there can be no salvation. There can be no knowing the Father and the Son which is eternal life, says Jesus. But that's why Jesus is so insistent that his words will not pass away.

[19:56] They will abide forever through the words of the written testimony of the apostolic scriptures. And that's why Jesus' great concern in the upper room is to talk about passing on his words to his apostles.

Look over to John chapter 17 and verse 8. I have given them, that is the apostles, I have given them the words that you gave me and they have received them.

And he prays to his Father. They have come to know the truth. And then look down to verse 17. Sanctify them in truth. Your word is truth.

But he goes on in verse 20 as we read to pray not only for those who are there at that time, not only for those first disciples. I ask not for these only but also for those who are going to believe through their words in the future.

Jesus committed to his apostles the ongoing wonder of the ministry of the word of life. And he said they would find exactly the same responses as he found on earth.

[21:12] And remember back in John 15 verse 20 he says exactly that. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep your words.

That's what he's saying here. It's all about the words of Jesus. Whether spoken by him on this earth or delivered through his apostles and through the scriptures after his ascension to glory.

And you see the words of Jesus he's saying are inseparable from the person of Jesus. And just as Jesus' person is essential, is necessary for a real relationship with God the Father, for salvation, for

eternal life, so Jesus' words are necessary to impart that eternal life.

Jesus' life-giving voice will be heard and it will only be heard through the words of those to whom he committed that testimony. And in the upper room here he's very clear isn't he?

He's talking about those who have been with him from the beginning. Those who are eyewitnesses of his majesty as Peter puts it later. It's them who have delivered to us, the apostles who have delivered to us once for all the faith committed to the saints as Jude puts it.

[22 : 35] And they've done that by committing that testimony to writing and it is here in our hands in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament. That's why Peter when he knew that he was getting to the end of his life that's why he wrote in his second letter to stir up your minds he says so that you will remember the predictions of the holy prophets that's the Old Testament scriptures and remember the commandment of your Lord and Savior that's Jesus through your apostles the New Testament scriptures.

I'm going to heaven he says and my greatest message to give to you in the church both now and forever is remember the words of the scriptures that God has given you. Because the scriptures are most necessary.

They're essential. For a true relationship with God which is salvation which is eternal life. The scriptures says Paul to Timothy which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

And he goes on remember and to equip you to equip the man of God so that he's equipped for every good work. And that's the third thing isn't it that we come to because the necessary abiding nature of God's words of all of God's words are necessary for the true rule of God in our lives. The scriptures are necessary that's what Paul is saying to Timothy they're necessary for our service. So that we can be really equipped in every way to be the true people of God and to live under his guidance and his rule.

[24 : 19] And that's true of the whole of the Bible even even parts of the Old Testament that we might consider to be you know rather obscure rather ancient. No no no Jesus said very clearly didn't he the scripture cannot be broken.

John 10 35 I think. I've not come says Jesus to abolish the law and the prophets the Old Testament scriptures get rid of that because we've got a New Testament. No says Jesus.

I've come to fulfill them all of them. The apostle Paul was just as plain in his writing. He goes at length doesn't he to say that to the New Testament church. If you read the letter of the Corinthians 1 Corinthians 10 most of the chapter is quotations from the book of numbers from ancient and obscure stories if you like.

And he says to the church that the Corinthians all these things were written down for our instruction upon whom the ends of the ages has come. That church was very taken up with being the church that lives in the end of the ages with all the great new things that have come to us.

And Paul says yeah and these things in the ancient scriptures were written for you and you need them and you need to listen to them. We live in the great era of the spirit of the fulfillment of the climax of the power of God at work.

[25 : 39] And Paul says to the church that's why God has given you the scriptures. He says to the Romans exactly the same thing. Whatever was written in former days ages ago were written for our instruction.

So that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope and persevere to the end. The scriptures all God's words in the Bible are necessary for the true rule of God in our lives as the Christian church.

And that's because the Lord who's revealed in scripture and who brings us into relationship through the scripture is the covenant Lord who rules his people in righteousness through his word.

To be a believer, to know God, to have eternal life means to be under the rule of God, under his gracious rule, his merciful rule, but under his lordship.

To be right with God means to belong to God, doesn't it? It means to be joined in that unbreakable covenant bond with the Lord who is our Lord and Master.

[26 : 57] It's a covenant bond. It's like a marriage bond. It means that as long as we both shall live, we are to love, honor, and obey him because he is our Lord.

He's the covenant head. We are his body. Joshua was speaking about that last Sunday evening. He loved us, says Paul to the Ephesians, and he gave himself for us to sanctify us, to cleanse us by

the washing of water with the word so that he might present to himself in splendor a church that is holy and without blemish.

And it's he, our covenant Lord, who nourishes us, who cherishes us. And likewise, we are to gladly submit to him as our Lord, not to be subjected, not against our will, not under the yoke of a tyrant. That's what we once were, isn't it? As Paul says to the Romans, when we were under the power of sin, that was a tyranny. But now we're to be submitted gladly in a gracious surrender to our gracious Savior, to our tender shepherd that we were singing of.

Come to me, said Jesus, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, my lordship, because my yoke is easy, my burden is light.

[28 : 17] This is the way of freedom, of liberation. But the mark of those who really know the voice of the good shepherd is that they love to obey his words.

True love of the Lord is what makes obedience sweet, isn't it? Because it's a glad surrender because we know that his words are life and not death. They're peace and not war.

They're joy and not misery. And we want to delight our Lord, don't we? We want to please him.

That's why we delight in his commandments. They're sweet to our taste.

They're like honey on the comb. That's how the psalmist put it. God's abiding words are necessary for all of life and indeed for all time.

For the true rule of God, for his gracious shepherding of us day by day, by his grace, unto his glory. And true love and true obedience, that is the obedience of faith, faith.

[29 : 25] They always go together. Deuteronomy chapter 6, way back in the Old Testament under Moses, the Shema, the great prayer, the very heart of the Old Testament faith of Israel begins like this.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and might. And these words, these words which I command you, shall be on your heart.

To teach your children, to talk about in your house, when you're going in and out and so on. See, to love the Lord with all your heart means that his words are continually on your heart so that you can know how to love him the way he wants you to.

If that's not so, then it's not really love to God at all, is it? It's just sham, it's just religion. It's not a real living relationship with God. It's not understanding that eternal life in all its fullness.

That's why Jesus said to some people in Luke chapter 6, why do you call me Lord, but not do what I tell you? If you're resisting his word, you're resisting his love.

[30 : 39] You don't know his love. If you did, you would love his commands, which are good commands and gracious ones. God's words are necessary for us to live under his rule.

And unless we love those words and do them, then we're not really under his rule. That means we're not in a real relationship with God at all. And it means we don't really know God or anything about God at all.

Just turn over to John 14 and listen to Jesus himself just to tell us how necessary his words are for life. Look at verse 21. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, says Jesus.

And he who loves me will be loved by my father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

Judas, not Iscariot, said to him, Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world?

Jesus answered him, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

[31 : 48] whoever does not love me, does not keep my words. The word that you hear is not mine, but the father's who sent me.

If anyone loves me, he keeps my words. And that's why God's words abide. It's so that we might love God, and so that we might abide, as he says, in Christ's love.

These words are necessary so we can know how to love God, how to honor our Savior and Lord, by living under his gracious rules, so as we please him, so as we delight him, even as we are guarded and guided by these very words of life in our service to him.

Same in John 15, verse 9, abide in my love, Jesus says, if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love. And that's what delights the heart of our Lord and Savior, that's what brings him joy, when we abide in his love.

But it's also the way, Jesus says there, it's also the way to find some joy for us in our lives. These things I've spoken to you, he says, that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

[33 : 02] God's plan for us is that we'll share his everlasting joy and that that joy that we have will be absolutely complete, lacking nothing. And for that, you see, his words, his words of grace, his words of warning, his words of challenge, his words of instruction, his words of great comfort, all these words are necessary, most necessary, because these are the words of eternal life.

And that's why God has made his words abide for us in these, the scriptures, the word of God written that we have before us in our Bibles and every page, that we might have a true revelation of God, despite our sin, and know a true relationship with God through his marvelous salvation, and live gladly under the rule of God in his glad service.

The grass withers and the flower falls, but the word of God remains forever. And this word, says Peter, is the good news that was preached to you.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. And thanks be to God for that, that we might have a great revelation of our Savior, a wonderful and growing relationship with our Savior, and live gladly under the rule of our Savior and his glad service all the days of our lives.

Well, let's pray. Blessed Lord, who has caused all scripture to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, and learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and the comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

[35 : 16] Amen.