Believe: How Do I Know God and His Will for My Life?
2 Timothy 3:14-17

As we return to our BELIEVE series, the question for the week is, “How do I know God and His will for my life?”

As a Christian, the answer to this question is clear: I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God that guides my beliefs and actions.

Our key verse for this week comes from 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

Now, I know that many people have serious questions as to why Christians believe the Bible is true, or why we place so much faith in what it says. Given that the scriptures are the means by which we come to know God and His will for our lives, I would like to unpack 1) the objective nature of the Bible; 2) the authority of the Bible; and 3) the telos of the Bible.

I. First, let us consider The objective nature of the Bible.

The Bible is objective in nature in two ways: 1) God objectively defines Himself; and 2) God objectively establishes our morality. Both of these claims are significant. The Christian does not play around with defining God’s nature or creating our own morality. For the Christian, God has already objectively revealed both his identity and our morality.

Now, you may take issue with what I just said, but before you get all fired up, let’s see if we can agree on a few principles. First, can we agree…in principle…that IF God exists and God is personal, it would be best to have an objective, unbiased self-revelation of the God who is actually there as opposed to a myriad of subjective definitions based upon each person’s preferences and expectations of what they think god should be like? I think we can agree on that point, and here’s why: because all “personal creatures” prefer to define themselves as opposed to having everyone else define them…and I suspect you are no exception.

Let’s imagine for a moment that each one of you will be given the opportunity to define me, Pastor Jim West, following this service. Some of you may have spoken to me in the lobby prior to the service, some of you may have tried to get my attention but perceived that I ignored you, some of you will love my sermon today and some of you will leave here thinking “That’s the most annoying pastor I’ve every listened to.” Nevertheless, today you will get to subjectively define me based upon your own experiences and perceptions following the service. And then later today, you all will meet up with your friends who have never met me and they will ask you...
to define me. So what will those people learn about this guy named Pastor Jim West from all of you? Based upon the subjective experience and perceptions of a few thousand people this morning, I would likely be described as nice, rude, brilliant, stupid, stimulating, boring, interesting, annoying, short...really short, and so on! Now, your description of who I am and how I am based on your perceptions or experiences of me today may have some merit, but not one of you would actually be able to define me, because simply talking to me in the lobby or listening to me preach in no way captures WHO I AM. If you all want to know me...if you want to accurately tell other people about me, I must first reveal who I am on my own terms.

As I reveal who I am to you, I will employ “I Am” statements. I might begin revealing who I am this way: “I am the son of Warren and Marie West; I am the brother of Alan, Marc, and Penny. I am an avid fisherman; I am self-conscious about my bald spot; I am a musician; I am selfish when it comes to how I spend my day off; I am the best friend of my best friend, Chris Sanders; I am far more sensitive to criticism than I allow people to know; I am the poster child for outkicking my coverage because I am married to Christy Michelle Thomas West; I am obsessive and a bit crazy whenever I lose something; and I am the proud father of four amazing kids who hopefully will favor their mother more than their father.” There...I have begun to reveal myself to you by defining who I am. Have I revealed all that there is to know about me? No. But you now know several things about me...some of those things you may have guessed correctly, but some of those things you could never know unless I told you.

Self-revelation is a privilege that every person on earth understands perfectly well. I may see you and talk to you and read your book, but I won’t really know you until you let me know you. All persons have the privilege of self-revelation, agreed?

So...IF God exists, and God is personal, we should expect that God (like all of us) would insist on revealing HIMSELF to us so that we could come to know Him as He actually is, not as we wish Him to be. That is exactly what we find in the Bible: God’s self-revelation. God states to Moses from the burning bush: “I AM WHO I AM.” He regularly defines Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God defines Himself as Love, as Holy, as Faithful, as Good, and as Immanuel—“God With Us.” In the New Testament, God defines Himself as a Father who loves His Son, Jesus—He is also the one who sends the Comforter to the disciples of Jesus.

In the same way, Jesus constantly defines Himself with “I AM” statements as well. Throughout the four gospels Jesus says, “I am the light of the world;” “I am the bread of life”; “I am the true vine”; “I am the Good Shepherd;” “I am the Resurrection and the Life;” “Before Abraham was, I AM”; “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life--no one comes to the Father except through ME.” Not only does God reveal Himself through a series of I AM statements, but God also reveals Himself in a way that is counter-intuitive and astonishing. God reveals that He is One, but that He exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God reveals that He is a “jealous God”
and at the same time a God of mercy. God reveals that He is fully powerful and just, and yet God reveals Himself as a sacrificial and forgiving God. The self-revelation of God in the Bible is so counter-intuitive that the people claiming to receive God’s self-revelation are the very same people who know themselves to be sinners. Think about that for a minute. Why would you make up a God with such incredible standards of holiness and morality that you would be damned by the god you just made up? You wouldn’t…which suggests the revelation of God in the Bible came from God, not men.

Consider some of the amazing things Jesus said about Himself. Jesus was a Jew, but when He said, “Before Abraham was I am,”…all the Jews wanted to kill him for blasphemy. Jesus said, “When you see me, you have seen the Father.” The Jews could not even comprehend of a man saying that He was God, and yet that is clearly what Jesus said of Himself. No Jewish writer would think to attribute divinity to Jesus…that revelation came from God through the One who was the Son of God.

Our critics like to claim that the Bible was created by deceitful, clever people aspiring for power. However, the God we meet in the Bible is not the God that powerful, rich, clever people would ever want to make up. In fact, the powerful, rich, clever people are often the first to be condemned by the God of the Bible; yet we know that poor, uneducated, marginalized people are not those who would somehow come up with the concept of One God in Three Persons…that concept is so difficult to comprehend and yet so beautiful that it continues to baffle the greatest minds to this day.

Listen: The God that we find in the Bible could only have been revealed by God Himself. And if God speaks in the Bible, if God reveals Himself and defines Himself in the Bible, then the Bible is authoritative. It is an authority that is beyond any other authority.

Now, I know you may have issues with what I just said, but let us agree on one more principle. If we actually long for Justice, can we agree that, in principle, we need an objective standard of law that is authoritative rather than a subjective standard of law that is subject to the whims of men? Now…I know that sounds old fashioned! Our culture scoffs at the notion of objective morality because we are convinced it would be arrogant to assume that some things are always wrong and some things are always right. But I would suggest that all people very much desire objective morality because justice is impossible without it. Think about it: if we can all make up our own laws to fit our whims and desires, there can be no justice. You may find that outcome to be perfectly acceptable when you convince yourself that you can have lots of sex with lots of people or that cheating on your exam is no big deal…but eventually…subjective laws are going to catch up with you.
Let’s say that you are newly married and you discover that you are pregnant with triplets. Eight months later, while on vacation in a foreign country, you suddenly go into labor a month early. Thankfully, you give birth to three healthy, beautiful babies; however, shortly after they are born, some men in dark suits walk into your hospital room and snatch two of the babies out of your arms. They inform you that, according to the law of that country, each family is to have only one child, and since you have three, they will now take two of your children and toss them into the river. You protest, but they mutter something like, “While in Rome, do as the Romans do” and out they go with your two babies.

Now…what does justice require? If justice is subjective and simply a man-made construct, we have no room to complain that our children are being tossed into the river--the law of man is all that there is, and there is no grounds for an appeal should we disagree with that law.

Now, this scenario is inconceivable and almost ridiculous for us because we all know that killing babies is wrong. We know objectively that any law that would lead to babies being ripped out of the arms of their mothers and thrown into a river is not only a bogus law…it is criminal. But how do we know that? Survival of the fittest? Nope. Preservation of the species? Nope…not if you think that your little country is overpopulated. Some people would say, “common sense” tells us that killing babies is wrong. But how would we account for common sense in an impersonal universe without God? It simply begs the question. The fact that we know that killing children is wrong reveals an Objective Moral Law that transcends and critiques the laws of men, even the laws of our highest courts. Now, where do we find this Objective Moral Law that is above the laws of men?

We find God’s Objective Moral Standard explicitly revealed in the Bible…specifically in the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20, God provides the Objective Standard of Morality to the Israelites, but before He gives them the law He begins His speech to the people by defining Himself. In Exodus 20:1 we read: And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Notice the “I AM” statement…God’s objective self-revelation is that He is a deliverer, that He is a liberator, and that He is specifically revealing Himself and the Objective Moral Standard to this specific group of people as opposed to the Egyptians or other groups of people. By the way, God gets to be as specific as He chooses when it comes to His self-revelation because that’s how self-revelation works. I choose to reveal who I am to my wife rather than your wife…right? The most important and intimate self-revelation is always selective and specific, not general. And note: these laws are not intended to enslave the people God just liberated. These laws are intended keep God’s liberated people…liberated! These are laws that, if followed, protect people from falling into slavery. That’s why the law is specifically given to the recently liberated Hebrew slaves…and that’s why God reminds them of who He is and who they are before providing His commandments.
Now, after revealing His identity to a specific group of people, God provides the Objective Moral Law for human living: 1) You shall have no other gods before me. 2) You shall not make for yourself a carved image, nor bow down to them, nor serve them. 3) You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain. 4) Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 5) Honor your father and mother. 6) You shall not murder. 7) You shall not commit adultery. 8) You shall not steal. 9) You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 10) You shall not covet.

These laws apply to all human beings who hope to be in a right relationship with the One True God who is there. To be in a right relationship with God requires not only our fidelity to the one true God rather than to idols, but we must also treat each other with love and honor. When we sin against others by committing adultery or lying, we are actually sinning against God. Why? Because men didn’t make these laws…God did. Such is why the Ten Commandments are not subjective…they are objective. God’s law is the immutable, unchanging, objective standard by which all human souls will be judged. It is also the immutable, unchanging standard by which all human LAWS are to be judged as well. God’s law condemns any law that would lead to children being thrown into a river…that is murder, and no society can sanction murder without coming under the condemnation of God’s immutable law that is written on the hearts of men and recorded in God’s Word…the Bible. If the Bible is the original and singular source of the Objective Moral Standard that critiques the laws of man, then it would be correct to say that the Bible is our Authority in every sense of the word.

II. Let us now look to The Authority of the Bible

Paul writes, “All scripture is God-breathed.” That is to say, the scriptures are inspired by God, directed by God’s Holy Spirit, so that God can accurately be known through what we find in the pages of the Bible. Make no mistake: the reason the Bible has been the best-selling book every year, all over the world, always…is because the Bible has an authority that is unlike any other “literature” or “sacred text.” According to Paul, the AUTHORITY of the Bible comes from its AUTHORShip. The Apostle Peter agrees, stating, “…no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Again…if God is there, and God is personal…this is what we should hope for: that God has “authored” His own self-revelation so that our knowledge of Him would be objective, not subjective…right? And that’s exactly the claim of the Bible. God is there, and God has spoken, and what God has said about Himself…what God has commanded…and what God has done to save the world…is authoritative. You can search the whole world over, read every philosophy and religious text, examine all the scientific journals and theories you can find…you will find nothing, anywhere, that compares to the authority of the Holy Bible. Such is why reading the Bible is absolutely essential to knowing God and understanding God’s will for your life.
Now…we’ve talked about the Bible’s objectivity and the Bible’s authority.

But let us now consider the telos of the Bible. If you recall, a few weeks ago I introduced you to the Greek term “telos” that refers to “the end, the main point, the final destination.” So…what is the telos of the Old and New Testament? Paul actually articulates the telos of scripture to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3: 14-15, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.”

In the end, the telos of scripture is to lead us into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in whom we find salvation for our souls. Everything in the Bible points to Jesus, and the central message of the Bible is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that states what is perfectly clear: we are all like sheep who have gone astray, each going his own way. When held up to God’s Objective Moral Standard, we are all guilty of sin and treason against God, and the penalty of that sin is eternal separation from God. Our sin has already separated us from God such that we have become spiritual orphans. But God so loved us, that He gave us His one and only Son, Jesus, who took on our sin and redeemed our souls by dying the death we deserve so that we might inherit a right standing with God that we could never deserve. Those who will repent, agree with God, and place their faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, are those who will be adopted as children of God, and they will inherit with Jesus the life that is eternal. That eternal kind of life starts immediately…it is such a dramatic new kind of life that Jesus equates it with being born again. It is a life empowered by the Holy Spirit and lived within the fellowship of the redeemed. It’s not an easy life, but it is good…not good just for you, but good for the whole world, because you will become a light that shines in the darkness…your life will matter for all eternity, and everything that happens to you from the moment of your confession will be used by God to accomplish His great purposes in the time that remains.

This Gospel of Grace is the telos of the whole Bible, and it is clear. Now, I understand that there are some parts of the Bible that are not clear for modern readers. We have a hard time believing that Jonah was swallowed by a huge fish; that Jesus walked on water; that God flooded the whole earth; that God parted the Red Sea, etc, etc, etc. Listen to me now: in every field of learning, we begin with the known and work to the unknown. Let’s take mathematics, for example. If I were to take an adult who had never had mathematics, I would not ask them consider calculus until I was sure they mastered basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division (in that order!). Imagine my frustration if my student jumped to the end of the book, looked at all of the calculus figures and symbols, and then quit because he had never seen such crazy symbols and figures, so he saw no point in reading the rest of the book. Such is the case when we read the Bible. There are some parts of the Bible that are very difficult to understand,
but there are parts of the Bible…like the Gospel of Jesus Christ…that the simplest child can understand without one single adult helping to explain it. The truth is, we’ll never understand the Scriptures without Jesus! Remember how Jesus came alongside the two disciples on the road to Emmaus when they were confused and ready to give up hope. Here’s what we find in Luke 24:27: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” Later that same day Jesus appears to all of the disciples and says to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations…”

Friends, if you want to understand the Scriptures, you will need to have a meeting with Jesus! And a meeting with Jesus is exactly the point of the Scriptures!

So…don’t get bogged down on those things that you are confused about as though that somehow justifies ignoring those things that are absolutely clear. Listen: God loves you; Jesus came so that you could have a relationship with God both now for all eternity…that is good news…and if you read the Bible, you will get that in a deeply personal way.

I invite you to read the Bible, beginning with the book of John and then the book of Acts. Move on to Romans and Ephesians, and circle back to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Spend time reading what Jesus actually said with an openness to actually meeting the God who is there, the God who loves you, and the Savior who died for you. Coming to know Jesus personally will change your life forever. If you are here today and you have a personal relationship with Jesus that completely changed your life…would you please stand?

Look around friends…these are not foolish, brain-washed people with little to no education who have been sold a bill of goods about a God who doesn’t really exist. These are witnesses…and they stand with billions of other witnesses all around the world and all throughout history that have shared the testimony that God is real, He is personal, and you can come to know Him and to know His will for your life by meeting Him in the Bible. Perhaps it’s time to give it a try.

Let’s pray.