

Christ Comes to Us *Through the Bible*

Luke 4:14-21
John 20:30-31

*“This is written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.”*
(John 20:31)

Dr. Paul T. Eckel

This is John’s way of saying ‘My book has a purpose. My account of Jesus will make a difference in the way you think and believe and live.’

To read the Bible is to risk having your life changed!

Today is the First Sunday of Advent. Advent is a Latin word meaning *arrival* or *coming*. During this Advent Season we are going to focus on Christ’s coming.

One of the primary ways by which Christ comes to us is ***Through the Bible***.

This morning, as an aid to exploring this truth, I’m going to use the analogy of a window. The Bible is like a window through which we can see the whole

landscape of God’s love for us in Jesus.

The Bible Window

In a Thanksgiving Service years ago our congregation shared in a litany prepared by kindergarteners. The children listed the things for which they were grateful.

One little girl thanked God for “windows and curtains”!

Isn’t that wonderful! Have you ever thought of being thankful for windows? Without windows our homes would be terribly gloomy.

Some people live in gloom. They get closed in by what they have accumulated or settled for. They have few windows that let in light from beyond them.

When our kids were young our family had an aquarium. Once while looking at the fish, our son seemed sad. “What’s the matter?” I asked.

He said, “I can see the fish, but they can’t see me.” Sure enough, the light shining in the water seemed to turn the glass sides of the aquarium into mirrors. “They can’t see out,” he said, “all the fish see is themselves.”

Might that be the way God views us? ‘Poor creatures, they live in their little bowls and turn on gaudy lights to chase away the gloom. Yet all they see is distorted reflections of themselves. They have no windows to catch a glimpse of what’s beyond.’

Is there a window through which we can see something more than our own self-reflections? From the beginning, Christians have said, ‘Absolutely!’ The Bible is that window. It invites us to look through and beyond our own limited perspectives.

Measuring the Window

When you built or decorated your home you paid attention to your windows – the sizes, the number of panes, type of glass, style of frame, composition of the

sill, depth of the apron, and on and on.

You can also take measurements of this window we call the Bible.

For instance, there are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament. If you multiply the three times the nine you get twenty-seven and that’s how many books there are in the New Testament! How about that?

Or this, the thirteen letters attributed to the Apostle Paul are arranged not chronologically, or geographically, or alphabetically, but by length. They start with Romans the longest letter, and end with Philemon Paul’s shortest letter.

Speaking of ‘short’ things, the shortest verse in the Bible is “*Jesus wept*” (John 11:35). The longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119. It has 176 verses, and forms an acrostic based on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. How am I doing with this measurement business?

Some, of course, are not terribly interested in measuring the Bible. They are fascinated instead by finding errors in the Bible. Okay, here’s an error.

In I Kings 7:23 we are told the circumference of a particular circular reservoir in the Temple was three times its diameter. But any student knows it couldn't possibly be three times its diameter. It could only be 3.1416 times its diameter!

Enough! There are endless bits of this sort of random stuff about the Bible. Just as there are lots of measurements you can make of a window. You can record a window's size and shape. But only a fool imagines a window exists primarily to be measured!

Beyond the Window

A window is meant to be seen through!

Many years ago while traveling in Europe Jan and I found ourselves in the little Swiss village of Zermatt. We arrived just after dark and were shown to our room. We were assured the view from there was perfect.

This was a moment I had been looking forward to. I set the alarm for the crack of dawn. When it rang I got to my feet, drew aside the curtain, and looked out.

There it was! With the golden light of dawn shining on its head, it jutted proudly 14,701 feet

straight up into the sky – the *Matterhorn*!

My point? I don't remember anything about the window through which we saw the *Matterhorn*. I couldn't tell you whether it was big or small, high or low, had panes, was clean or dirty – nothing! I only know there was a window and through it I saw one of our planet's most spectacular mountains.

Now I know the view through the window we're calling the Bible is not always spectacular. A case in point. Do you feel especially inspired or instructed by reading in I Chronicles 26:18, that "*For the parbar on the west there were four at the road and two at the parbar*"?

Surely we are kidding ourselves if we suppose this bit of biblical information will help us live better or draw closer to God. It won't. We don't even know what a "*parbar*" was! And anyway, all the verse is telling us is that some arrangements were made for the posting of guards.

Why should we bother with irrelevant information like this? Why not focus on that handful of Bible verses that truly inspire us and deepen faith?

A Love Story

Well, we bother with *all* the Bible's bits and pieces for the same reason I always liked the old TV adventure series called *Mission Impossible*. For three/fourths of the program I didn't have a clue what was going on.

I mean they kept splicing wires, putting on disguises, drilling holes, taking pictures, crawling through attics all of it for no obvious reason. But I became confident that all these odd bits and pieces would come together in the end and enable the M. I. force to catch the bad guys.

There are things in the Bible that only make sense when you know how the story turns out. For example, some of us men still remember when that special woman we married first whispered, "I love you." I was awestruck!

But do you also remember that when you joyfully received her love, a lot of other things came along in the same package? You discovered that her father talked a lot, that she likes marmalade on her toast, she sold eggs door to door as a child, was born in Washington DC, had a yippy little dog named Nippy.

On and on flowed this endless stream of data! Ordinarily stuff

like this would bore us silly. But not in *this* case – because all this 'stuff' was *her* story. It was all about the woman who loves you and whom you love! When you are in love, everything about the other is fascinating and important!

The Bible is a love story – a story of God's love for you. More than that, it's the story of the way God has come to you and shown his love in Christ. Because the Bible is about the God who loves you, *it's all important*.

The Bible is a window through which you can see and experience God's love. This love of God is expressed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Coming to Life

In that Synagogue of Nazareth the Bible actually came to life.

Jesus read a Scripture about the coming of the Messiah. Then he said these words are more than marks on paper or sounds in the air. They are about me. The words can open your eyes to see *me*.

Even today, if you pay attention when you read your Bible you will recognize *Jesus*. Jesus insisted, the Bible will lead you to *Himself*. The Bible is a window that lets you see and experience Jesus Christ.

Let me end with a story.

Decades ago, we were doing graduate work in Scotland. Jan was out for the evening, which left me with a few unscheduled hours. I went into my study, a converted closet kept warm by a couple of hundred-watt bulbs.

Aimlessly I began rifling through my Bible and paused at the Gospel of John. The very first words leaped off the page, "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.*"

I eagerly read John's Gospel once again and found myself totally absorbed.

The verse and chapter numbers faded away. There is nothing inspired about these divisions, you know. The original manuscripts did not include such markings. They were added in the Middle Ages to help Bible students do their work.

Verse and chapter numbers meant nothing to me. The story meant everything. I read on.

Soon the glaring light bulbs fell away from my attention. I no longer felt confined by my little closet-study. I was drawn into the story, actually became part of the it.

The sandy roads of Palestine, the spicy smells of a middle-eastern marketplace, the clipped Arabic speech, robes flying, sandals kicking up the dust, rocky hillsides, the fascinating walled city of Jerusalem – all these sensations surfaced naturally as John's story unfolded.

Marching off the Page

Then to my surprise, the hero of the story – Jesus of Nazareth – seemed to march right out of the Bible and into the present. He came striding off the Scripture page and confronted me. *Me!* I actually felt Jesus was talking not just to Peter and James and John – He was talking to *me!*

I could feel Jesus' candor and strength and compassion.

It was a transforming moment. I had always honored the Bible. I grew up with it and tried to read it in the often obscure English of 400 years ago. I respected the Bible and tried to learn from it. I even memorized passages from the Bible.

But that evening something changed for me. I was introduced to the startling reality that reading the Bible can become a very personal thing! Christ came to me – *Through the Bible.*