

# Sermon Text for September 25, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## ***Isaiah 60:1-3, Revelation 21:1-7*** ***“The promises of Scripture”***

Today we have to celebrate. We started on January 3 and for the past 9 months we have spent 208 days reading the Bible. We have taken Sundays off and some of the days have been optional, but we have read every single word of the Bible together. I know, not all of you have done it, but many of you have, in fact, there are a number of you who have done it and it has really surprised me to hear you tell me about your experience. Let me start by saying thank you for doing it, and secondly, I am convinced that reading of Scripture will allow us to have a closer walk with Jesus. Our goal is to make everyone mature in Christ. You will not become mature in your faith or in your walk with Christ if you just come on Sunday mornings. You need to take steps that you take on purpose in order to grow in your faith. Reading Scripture is a huge step in that direction.

I remember when I went to PCB and we had to go to chapel every day, and I remember one day in chapel when we sang a hymn to the Bible and it really felt like we were in some ways worshiping the Bible. In some churches you have a big old Bible in the front of the church, at least ours is in the hallway, and that Bible in the front of the church, much like the Bible in our hallway, is never touched. You just look at it and admire it. It is then that it becomes an idol. The Bible is not God, the Bible does not have some magical spiritual karma around it. When we moved into our apartment in Russia, the same apartment that was used for 50 years with a new pastor every 2 or 3 years and there was a collection of Bibles that we would never use. I threw them away, and I know, some people don't want to throw away Bibles. The Bible is not an idol, but it does contain the Word of God.

Scripture contains inerrant truths that are inspired by the God we worship together on Sunday morning. This Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit both when it was written, the Holy Spirit filled the hearts minds and souls of the writers of this Scripture, as well as those who read it. You are filled with the Holy Spirit as you read it to understand how it is talking to you on how you ought to base your relationship with the creator of this world and those who surround you in your life here on this earth. We read in Psalm 119 King David say to God: Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet. We believe that.

There is no other authority on earth, other than Jesus and the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, that can take the place of Scripture. The Bible gives us a road map to life, it

gives us words and truth that are authoritative, after which we ought to base our life. If we choose to go against the Words of Scripture we do so at our own peril. Scripture lays out for us how we can live our lives in a way that is different from those who don't know Jesus as a personal Lord and Savior. That is important. If you read the Bible and keep doing the things that you are doing, and you are no different from when you started, or you are no different from your friends and the rest of the World, well, you need to read it again then. You missed something.

I fully understand that the Bible is not always super clear. There is a true story in the Bible of one of the apostles, Philip, who sees an Ethiopian Eunuch reading Scripture and he goes up to him and he asks him, do you understand what you are reading? The man answers how can I unless someone guides me. That is often the case. That's one of the reasons why I'm here, I actually kept up and blogged every day on the Scripture to provide another layer of understanding.

Today in our time we are going to see that Scripture contains promises that literally free us from an old way of life and take us to understand that we are called to a new way of life. For those of you who have joined First Presbyterian Church since I have been here I pray that your way of life has changed in some way shape or form so that you are living in a way that more closely reflects the fact that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ. If not, then we as a church have failed you. Our relationship with Jesus is going to be stunted, cut short, if we do not read and follow the teachings of Scripture. Today we will find promises of Scripture that never waver, that will remain for us the rest of our life, and so, as a result, ought to change our lives and the way we live our lives.

## **READ**

I was thinking this past week that just about all of us have shared a common experience together. I think that I have been with just about all of you at one time or another in your life when you have experienced the passing of a loved one. It may have been a grandfather, or a child, or a spouse, or someone else close to you, and we have prayed for you, maybe we did a service for your loved one, maybe we reached out to you in Sunday School class. We have shared a time when a loved one of yours has passed and we have spent some time going through that experience together.

You have asked me the questions, especially after last week, where is my mother? And I have responded drawing from the promises and the words of Scripture, she is right now, without any hesitation, with Jesus. There is no delay, there is no waiting in the wings till Jesus returns,

our loved ones who have died are with Jesus right now. You see in that setting where you are grieving, a lot of questions and maybe even doubts could surface. It is in those settings where you want certainty, and the promises of Scripture provide us with truths that are wavering and are not based upon my or your interpretation of events.

It is in the setting of death that we don't want to hear maybe they will be in heaven, maybe not. Even though we are unsure of our own understanding, we can stand on the promises of Scripture which provide a solid foundation. Today we just read some of the Scriptures that I have shared with you if we have walked that valley of the shadow of death together. You have heard me read certainly verses 3-4 as a way forward in a time of tragedy. Notice what John does here, he gives us the truths of Scripture in what we could call a via negative. He tells us what is not going to be in heaven. I know for sure that when we see Jesus and we are all together I know what I'm not going to see.

Look at vs.4, I will not see any more tears. I will not see death, it won't exist anymore. In heaven I can tell you what I won't see, there won't be any mourning. The crying we experience here on earth, not in heaven, nope, it simply is not going to be there. You know the pain you experience here on this earth. That pain that you wake up and doesn't go away until about noon, or the pain of separation and broken relationships, or the pain of not knowing if your kids are going to be okay, or the pain of shame and humiliation for what has happened to you in your life. All that pain, it is simply not going to be there. That's a promise, John promises us that it simply will not be present in heaven.

And the authority that we are able to claim to be able to say this is found in vs.5 where God tells John: Write these things for these words are trustworthy and true. These promises, these promises of Scripture are true. They are true for when we experience the ultimate separation in death from our loved ones, but they are also true when we go about our daily lives in all things. This is what I'm talking about when I say that if you read Scripture it is going to strengthen you and make you a more mature disciple of Jesus Christ.

Look at vs. 3 where John gives us another promise. These verses are chock full of so many promises. In vs. 3 we have the promise of Advent which is Emmanuel, that God is with us. God himself will be with us in every step of our lives. Brett Foote in one of his wedding sermons where I was present came up with this line which I love for weddings, but which I also love as a truth in our life in general, it goes like this: On this day you make promises to each other that are unlike any other you will make again, but there are no promises about how your life together will unfold – only that you will be with each other as it unfolds. It is the same

ancient promise that Jesus shares with the ones closest in his life: There is no promise of what life will be, but a promise that it will not be lived alone.

I'll take that promise every single day of my life. We will never face life alone is probably one of the greatest and most impactful promises in all of Scripture. It is this promise and others like it that ought to change our lives and have an impact on how we live our lives. Michael Wilson at our Presbytery meeting on Tuesday made a statement that convicted me pretty powerfully. He stated that as Christians we probably spend more time together in meetings than we do in worship. We probably spend more time together in meetings than we do in reading Scripture. Now, I hope that is not true of this congregation that has just finished a 9 month read through the Bible program, but maybe it is.

The church, which is called the bride of Christ, was established by Jesus not to have meetings, which are important and which we need to have, but it was created to worship him, to love him, to spend time in His Scripture and to reaching out to him. That is our purpose here. Our purpose is not to run programs, that's not our goal. So, the problem is not that we have 50 kids coming to youth group or 30 kids here during the children's message. That's not a problem. But our task is not just to bring them in but to disciple them, make them followers of Jesus, not just kids who grow up into youth who then grow up into adults who know how to run meetings.

We simply do not spend enough time together living out the promises of Scripture in worship and prayer and reading of Scripture, together, in fellowship, together. We will be changing that, at least giving you an opportunity to change that, and we will be starting with giving our leadership, our officers and opportunity to be involved in worship and in the presence of God and His word in a very direct and purposeful way. At least that way maybe we can skew back to where it needs to be the ratio of meeting to worship and prayer and reading of Scripture.

It is by being in the presence of God that we hear and understand the promises of God which are able to transform and change our lives. Let's be a part of that. Amen.