

"How do you know that Jesus lived perfectly for you, died to take away all your sins, and rose to assure you of heaven?" "The Bible says so." "How do you know Christianity is right and everything else is wrong?" "The Bible says so." The thoughtful skeptic then turns around and asks a Muslim, "How do you know that the prophet Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection didn't happen?" "The Qur'an says so." "How do you know Islam is right and everything else is wrong?" "The Qur'an says so." The thoughtful skeptic, confused and irritated as ever before, growing more and more critical by the second, then turns and asks a Jew, "How do you know that Jesus can't be the Messiah?" "The Hebrew Scriptures say so." "How do you know Judaism is correct and everything else is wrong?" "The Hebrew Scriptures say so."

No proof. No evidence. Just a pious claim to some holy book that somehow exists. Why? How? I have faith. Just don't ask me why I believe it's true. It just *is* true! Ask someone else and they will come up with a competing holy book that tells them the opposite. No wonder the frustration. No wonder the confusion. No wonder Richard Dawkins, the greatest defender of atheism in our time, has lamented that some have grown up in a brain-washing home in America and been indoctrinated that Christianity is true, while another has grown up in Saudi Arabia and been indoctrinated that Islam is true. Each religion has its holy book. It tells them they are exclusively right when it comes to spiritual matters. Each one is growing increasingly irrelevant to our society and my relationships every day. What kind of a positive impact can it possibly have? Why should I believe it? Today Paul helps us lovingly answer a skeptical question that rightfully deserves a thoughtful response, **"What's so special about the Bible?"**

The attacks on the Bible are endless, all wondering that same question. Why is the Bible so great and glorious and better than the Qur'an or the Book of Mormon or anything else out there? Just do a Google search. Read the latest best-selling books, like "Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind who changed the Bible and why." The biblical stories are myths, not history, no different from the myths of Zeus, the legends of Rome, or the stories of Egypt. The Bible has countless discrepancies and contradictions. Archaeology and science have disproven much of what the Bible says. The stories have evolved from mythical beginnings, and it's our job to figure out who Jesus really was. We don't even have the original manuscripts! Plus there are literally hundreds of thousands of variants in what we do have! It's impossible to know what the Bible originally said. You can't possibly believe everything in the Bible. It's just not trustworthy. Have you ever played the telephone game? You know you can't trust someone's memory as they embellish what actually happened over hundreds and thousands of years! We need to put the Bible on trial. When we do, everyone will clearly see it's not special at all.

Every few years society has its own high profile court case. The case that has consumed the world's attention this year is Oscar Pistorius, the Paralympic and Olympic star from South Africa accused of murdering his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp. Do you remember back to Day 1 of the trial? What was displayed as evidence? Eyewitness testimony. The very first witness to take the stand was a neighbor named Michelle Burger. Even in a world of DNA testing, constant electronic tracking, and computer re-creations, very few are willing to completely dismiss what eyewitnesses have to say. Why is it that we still value eyewitness testimony in our most high-profile cases but fail to take into account eyewitness testimony when we put the Bible on trial? Why do we trust eyewitness testimony today but automatically distrust the eyewitness testimony of the first century? In one of his books, Lee Strobel put to the test the Gospels' eyewitness

accounts according to eight standards of determining credibility used in today's courtrooms. They all passed easily. Why, then, do we question if we can ever really know what the Bible says when we have almost 300 times the amount of copies than any other average author at that time? Why does no one bother to question what Aristotle said when we have 5 copies for him compared to over 5500 for the New Testament?

Do you believe places or people exist even though you haven't seen them? Of course. We all do. No one disbelieves Abu Dhabi exists now as one of the most famous, extravagant, and modern Middle Eastern cities. No one disbelieves Julius Caesar existed as a Roman general. But why? You haven't seen Abu Dhabi or Julius Caesar. But you trust they exist. We have records. We have testimony of others who have been there and seen them. We could constantly question whether the evening news or modern history books are making everything up and deceiving the masses, only to live in fear. We could be skeptical to no end whether this is reliable, but that's no way to live. Constant paranoia that we can trust something only if we have it right before our eyes doesn't help; it only hurts.

In the face of such testimony about the Bible, why do we think we can write a better Bible than God can? Why do we think we can write a Bible that more fully fulfills our needs? Why do we think the Bible is not relevant or true to life when it has no qualms about laying the faults of its own people out for the world to see? No other book roots us to the writers who acted just like us. It chooses the founder of God's Old Testament people to be Abraham – a liar, a deceiver, an adulterer – just like us. It chooses the king of his people to be David, whose disgraceful fall is started by one wandering, lustful look – just like us. It chooses a tax collector to write the first Gospel *to fellow Jews*, who everyone knew would selfishly and greedily rip off society – just like us. It chooses Peter to lead the church, who changes every day between boldly following Jesus and denying him – just like us. You'd never invent a book quite like this just to advance the church's made-up agenda in Roman society. It strikes far too close to home with the sin in my life.

What so special about the Bible? This is what's so special about it. No other holy book has a God who is willing to come down into history for one purpose: to forgive our idolatry of thinking we're a better book writer than he is. No other holy book has a disgraced, humiliated, and crucified Savior – a complete joke to the ancient world. No other holy book has a Savior who conquered and triumphed over sin not merely in spite of his disgrace on the cross, but because of it. No other holy book has a God who sees in you a status of forgiven and perfect without demanding anything in return. No other kind of philosophy gives you an identity of complete self-worth based not on your own performance or evolution but on Jesus' sheer love for you. No other book tells of a Savior quite like Jesus.

Paul would never have given up so much from his successful previous life to die for a fairy tale or myth he made up. He had nothing to gain from that and everything to lose. No one today gives up their life to follow Aesop's Fables. The Bible is much more special than that. It's a Bible that strengthens you to give up impure motives, trickery, flattery, or greed. It's a Bible that strengthens you to take up gentleness and care as you share it with the most skeptical inquirers and their tough questions. It's a Bible that will illicit strong opposition from the world in the twenty-first century just like the first. It's a Bible that will bring you suffering and persecution in Verona or Madison just like in Thessalonica or Philippi, as HR guidelines restrict the free expression of your Christian identity on the job. But above all it's a Bible that deserves our sacrifice which is empowered by Christ's sacrifice.

Throughout this whole year I, like Paul, thank God that you here at Resurrection have seen what's so special about the Bible. I ***“also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.”*** Just like Paul passed through from city to city founding and strengthening churches, as we look back on this year it might seem like it was just a visit. But it was a visit that was not in vain, just like it was with Paul. It wasn't in vain not because of me or my service but because of that special message about the Bible.

No matter how many pastors, vicars, or people pass through this place, treasure the Bible not as the word of your pastor, or vicar, or any other human, but as the very Word of God itself. That's what makes the Bible so special. It's a Word that is rooted in historicity and authenticity. It's a Word that is rooted in relevance and powerfully impacts our lives. It's a Word that empowers us to love others so much that we share not only the gospel with them but our lives as well. Amen.