

## 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020 10 am The Authority of the Bible and why it matters (The Power of God's word – part 1)

Service led by Andrew Attwood, Talk by Graham Archer, Interview by Andrew Attwood with Steve Hawke, "What the Cross Means to Me" by Gill Palmer, readings by Di Archer.  
*This transcript is of excerpts from the service as listed below:*

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### **Notices**

So, just to welcome people to the service, it's an unusual Sunday. It's Remembrance Sunday, but as many of you will know, there's not even going to be a remembrance service at the memorial in town today. Everybody is encouraged today to be on their doorsteps at 11am for two minutes' silence and we'll try and time the service so that we can join in with that without any kind of clash. We will have two minutes probably embedded in the service as well. But yeah, it's an unusual Remembrance Sunday, it's back to a second lockdown. So, you know it's a tricky one. I'm hoping that you're all feeling like it's something you can cope with?

The purpose of today's service will be to lead us into a new mini-series in terms of the things that we're talking about. We're going to be talking about a focus on scripture itself, and the authority of the Bible, and how we can learn to engage with that in deeper ways. Just in terms of the practical notices, just before we get into any of that, though, of course, lockdown means there's no other services happening in our church building. Everything is going back to only online, we'll be exploring the possibility of Quiet Space if we can work out a way of manning that in the building, but we need to just say that there's no services available until at least December 2<sup>nd</sup>, so that's just for your information. Youth will be meeting online at 11:15 as usual, there'll be a 6pm YouTube service. And I think that's pretty much everything I need to say in terms of notices.

### **Andrew Attwood interviews Steve Hawke**

[Andrew:] I'm going to introduce Steve Hawke now, [...] We're going to have an opportunity to just tease out a little bit more about about these different members of our congregation. Steve, I just wonder even before I ask you any questions, can you just introduce yourself? Tell us a little bit about yourself.

[Steve:] Yeah, good morning. So, I'm Steve. I'd normally be at the front of the church and playing my guitar which I've been missing certainly quite a lot, and a chance to kind-of lead that congregation worship so it's been missing. But I'm acting head of a primary school nearby in kind-of the chaos and the wonderfulness of COVID and everything that that provides. So there's a lot of work pressure but also a lot of sort-of interesting challenges. And certainly lots of learning going on.

[Andrew:] It sounds like quite a lot, so, just in practical terms, then, first question, Steve: tomorrow, what would you be doing, say, 10am-ish through tomorrow? What would you be doing?

[Steve:] "Who knows?" is part of it. Certainly I'll be at school, but it depends what challenges the day brings. Hopefully everyone will be in and settled, and all the classes and children will be in and staff are where they should be. So

probably getting into the kind of routines of the day, starting to settle in, to be at meetings, or going around and seeing the children in the classes or something like that, hopefully.

[Andrew:] Okay. So, given that you've obviously got particular responsibilities at the minute, as a Christian, where do you see God involved, in terms of life at work or supporting you in your life at work?

[Steve:] So I'm incredibly lucky really in that I work at a Christian primary school. So it's a Church of England primary school. And there is a really strong Christian ethos that runs through the school, and it's central to what we do. And I feel very lucky in that I now am in a position where, in leading assemblies and in looking after that school community, that I can share my faith with those people. So, be it in the way that I'd meet with teachers and talk to them and kind-of lead them through these anxious times, be it in the way of obviously delivering to the children in assemblies and encouraging them and looking after them, or even in talking to parents and discussing practical matters with them, having that sort of Christian faith is a bedrock to reassure myself. I feel it puts me in a very lucky position to then share that reassurance in some ways with the rest of the community that I'm serving at the moment.

[Andrew:] And, I mean, that's that's wonderful to hear. Do you have a sense of God's presence or His sustaining help, just in getting you through what is obviously quite a challenging role?

[Steve:] Yeah, I mean it's certainly that feeling of, I can't do any of this in my own strength, and without God's, I think a lot of it would have gone incredibly wrong. There's a lot of potential, as the government way back in March when schools first closed, all the unknown and the uncertainty and all the potential for things to go quite wrong, actually we've seen the community come together and be strengthened during that time. And it's been really good to see God's at the centre of all of that, and you know it's been quite a prayerful time, quite a strong time of reflection for the school community. So yeah, it's been really lovely to see God at work through this time, even given all the uncertainty and the chaos of it all at the same time.

[Andrew:] I mean just on a final note, related to that, you would probably describe your job as something that God has called you to?

[Steve:] Yeah, absolutely. I think most teachers would say it's a vocation. And it's something you feel kind-of called to, whether you're someone of faith or not. And yes, the sort of reason you go into teaching is for the children and for looking after them and caring for them and I think you've got to be that sort of personality anyway, and I think that as a Christian, certainly, I mean I knew from the age of 13 that I felt a kind-of strong calling that God wanted me to be a teacher, and be in schools. So yeah, as I say, I feel very lucky that I'm in this position now to have such a wide influence.

[Andrew:] Fantastic. So Steve, just to finish with then, what could I pray for at this time for you as a worker?

[Steve:] Um, certainly wisdom, to kind-of make those right choices, and to try and sift through what's the right way to take things, but also patience: I think kind-of looking after the community, and being able to listen to people and deal with different concerns they have. And hopefully, keeping God at the centre and continuing to keep Him as that kind-of the root of what we're all doing, so we can remain rooted in that and that strength that comes from God.

[Andrew:] Okay. Thank you very much, Steve, I'm going to pray now then. And for those who are watching online, I just want to encourage them to join with me as I pray for Steve. Let's pray.

Father God, we want to thank You for Steve and his sense of being called into this very special context, leading a primary school. We pray by Your Holy Spirit, You'd really touch him and fill him with wisdom for all of the unexpected things, for the things that he has to plan and organise. We pray for an outpouring of wisdom, particularly this coming week and the next week and in this lockdown phase. I pray too, Lord Jesus, that You would grace him with patience as he deals with children, staff, parents. I pray, Lord, that You would oil the wheels of that machine, that everything moves smoothly. Where things don't move smoothly I pray You would give Steve patience, and again just to finish with this, Lord, we pray that You would be very much at the centre of his experience at work, and that You would indeed be a strong influence and a presence in the whole school in general. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

[Steve:] Amen.

Thank you very much, Steve. Great to see you.

[Steve:] Thank you, Andrew. Bye-bye everyone.

[Andrew:] Bye now.

### ***What Jesus Means to Me by Gill Palmer***

So we're now going to have a short video from Gill Palmer to help us focus again on Jesus on the cross, and then we're going to have some songs to help us worship God. So over to Gill.

[Gill Palmer:]

What does the cross mean to me? Well, the death of Jesus on the cross, demonstrates to me the overpowering and overwhelming love that God has for all of His creation, the lengths He would go to, to bridge that gap between Him and us. However, Jesus's death is not the end of the story. It's only part of it. Everybody dies. Only one person arose again. So the resurrection completed His act of sacrifice, leaving us today with the living Christ in our lives. Now that is love.

### ***Reading: Luke 4:1-12***

[Di Archer:]

Morning everyone. So now we're going to have our reading and it's taken from Luke, in the New Testament, chapter 4. It's right at the beginning of Jesus's ministry.

**1** Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the (river) Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, **2** where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

**3** The devil said to him, “**If** you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

**4** Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”

**5** (Then) the devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. **6** And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendour, for it has been given

to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours.”

8 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

9 (Then) the devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. 10 For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you carefully;

11 they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

12 Jesus answered, “It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

## **Talk**

[Graham Archer:]

Well good morning everybody, it's, it's great to be here, sharing God's Word with you today. I feel a bit rusty actually! It's been quite a while since I've been to a church and preached anywhere, so it's lovely to be able to do that today. As Andrew said, we're starting a series thinking about the power of God's Word, and we can't cover everything in this session, but next week there'll be a little bit more, and the week after more too.

I want to start by asking you a question. I want you to think about when someone recently said something to you that had a good and positive effect. The answer doesn't have to be Jesus, it might be a relative, it might be somebody that you respect, it might be all sorts of things, but I want you to think, when did somebody say something recently to me? It may have been somebody on the news, it may have been a politician, it may have been a doctor or a friend. When did somebody say something that had a good and positive effect upon you?

[pause]

People are paid thousands of pounds, aren't they, to try and give influential leaders a soundbite that will stand the test of time. I just picked up something that Joe Biden said this morning about "There won't be red states and blue states but the United States." I thought, "That's the kind of thing that is said in order to have a really positive impact on others." The thing that had impact on me this week, at the beginning of the week, our grandson's had some surgery today and we were nervous about it, not today - this week, and we were nervous about it. And Bishop Christopher said a few words in a video, and he quoted the poem *The Gate of the Year* by Minnie Haskins. She actually called her poem, *God Knows*<sup>1</sup> but it's often known as the *Gate of the Year*, and King George quoted it in his Christmas address during the war. He said this,

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

“Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.”

And he replied:

“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

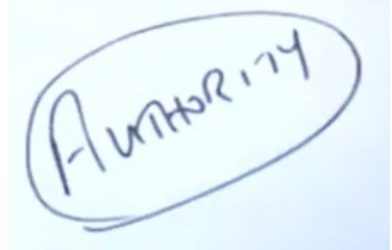
"Go into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God," and maybe like me you've had situations that you've faced: I think of Moses going into the wilderness, but for us, just going into the uncertainty as to how this surgery

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1 <https://alongthebeam.com/2017/12/31/god-knows-by-minnie-louise-haskins/>

would work out, I suppose I wanted light to tell me exactly what would happen. But actually what I was offered was the Hand of God, who would walk with me through it. Words have great influence over us and so that led me to think, "What makes words powerful? What makes them have an effect on us?" And I have here an audio-visual, it's not very audio but it is visual. Okay, ready?

Words are powerful when they come from someone who has **authority**. Let's think a little bit about Boris, whether we voted for him or not or whatever, he is the prime minister, and therefore, when Boris says no more than six people can meet, or you can't stay overnight, or you can't plan a party or whatever, whether you agree with him or not, he has authority, and that authority is backed up by the police. So, you may think "Well, I don't want to take any notice of that. I'll go and have a party anyway." But you may find that you're fined £10,000 because the words have power, because they came from someone with authority.

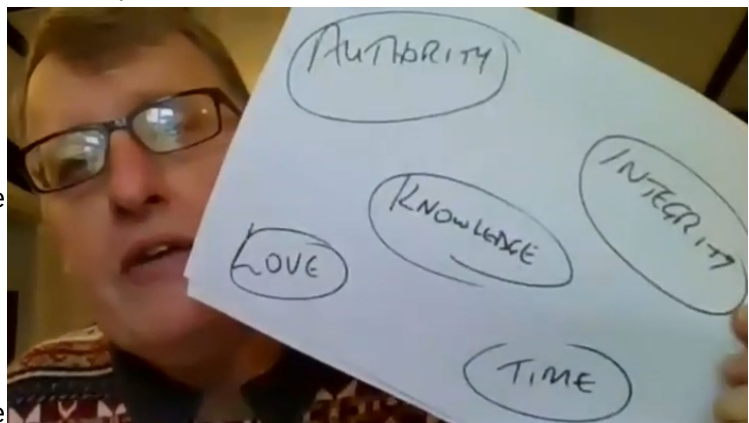


Number two: words are powerful when they come from someone with **integrity**. Think of the people that you know that you think have integrity. You listen to them a little bit more carefully, don't you? So when Donald said this week, "We have won big," I found myself thinking, "Really? Have you really won big in Arizona, in Nevada and all these other places?" Just because you say the words, I don't necessarily agree with them, because I'm not sure that your words have integrity. See what I mean? So if words come from somebody with authority, words come from someone with integrity (there's five by the way).

What's the third one? Can't wait to see, can you?

The third one is: words have power when they come from someone **knowledgeable**, somebody who knows their stuff. Now, I think that's the reason why Boris has had Chris Whitty standing next to him in the briefings, because you might want to say, "Well, Boris, you've got all authority but I don't know it's just what you got to say, because, what do you know about epidemiology?" I mean we're all amateur epidemiologists now, aren't we, with regard to coronavirus. "What do you know?" "Well, standing alongside me is someone who does know, he does understand and so my words have more power because people who know stuff are here beside me."

Why else do words have power? I think words have power when they come from someone who **loves** us. When somebody loves us, their words have power. In fact, they may be the most powerful phrase in the world when said by someone with integrity. Maybe the most powerful phrase is, "I love you." I was doing something in the workshop yesterday and remembered a phrase that my dad often used to say, he would always say, "If a job's worth doing, it's worth doing properly." I always used to think, "I think, if it's worth doing it's worth getting done quickly," but anyway, that phrase sticks with me. Now, it doesn't necessarily mean he had knowledge. He also used to say, "I don't think computers will catch on in the accounting world." So, you know, he didn't know everything, but I remember his words because he loved me, he was somebody in my life who had influence.



And then finally, what's the final one? [...] There's the final word: **time**. I think words have power when they've stood the

test of time. A little bit later on we may say the words, "They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old. Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them." These are words that we've said for years ever since the first Armistice Day, and they've become part of our language, they've become things that we return to, and sometimes you and I will have people of integrity, people of authority, and we have leant on their words because they've stood the test of time. I remember Nelson Mandela saying that courage isn't the absence of fear, but it's the triumph over it. You may have famous phrases by William Shakespeare or Oscar Wilde or Nelson Mandela or whoever: things that you have heard and you've thought, "I'll carry that phrase with me," and others have done the same because it's stood the test of time. St. Irenaeus many, many years ago, centuries ago, said, "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." Great phrase, isn't it, and it's stood the test of time. Still quoted 1700 years later.

Well, it won't surprise you, having said that I didn't want you to think about words that Jesus says, that we are now moving on with my highly technical audio-visual to think about Jesus. Why is it that Jesus' words have such authority? And I want to suggest to you that that which we know by instinct, these five words, these are ultimately true and found to be realistic in the life of Jesus. Firstly, do you remember it was those with **authority**, the Pharisees, who said<sup>2</sup>, "And He was one who spoke with authority. They were amazed at His words." In fact, Jesus said to us<sup>3</sup>, "I don't speak on my own authority, but I speak the words that the Father gives me." There is no greater authority than the God of heaven and earth, the Lord of lords, the King of kings, and His words, Jesus' words, have authority, because He spoke what the Father told Him to say.

Number two, **integrity**, Jesus had ultimate integrity. Many people who don't believe the Christian message would still look at the life of Jesus and say, that was a life that had integrity about it. One of the best examples I think is when John's disciples came to see Him and said, you know, John's rotting away in prison, he just needs a bit of reassurance. And Jesus says<sup>4</sup>, "Well, tell him what you see." Because what Jesus was doing matched the words in the manifesto that He read at the beginning of His life. Jesus said<sup>5</sup>, "I've come that you have life and have it to the full. I've come that the blind may see, that the deaf would hear, the lame would walk, that those who are in darkness would discover light, those who are in prison, prisoners, would be released from captivity. And when we hear His words and look at His life we see that they matched up. It's not, "Oh, I'm using my authority to be this character." A common theme in politics is, "Does it matter what I believe, if I say the right things, if I do the right things." And and I think we instinctively want people in authority to have integrity, to live lives that match the things that they think they want us to do. I was struck recently by the by the power of some of the feedback that was coming back over the COVID restrictions. The people saying, "Well, if the government don't live up to these things then we won't do so either."

The third thing is **knowledge**. We often say of God, the technical term is omniscience: He knows everything<sup>6</sup>, "My thoughts are higher than your thoughts." One of my favourite phrases<sup>7</sup> is, "If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all generously and without reproach." I remember Francis Collins who unfolded the mystery of DNA, talking about his work being like an act of worship, as he worked with God to understand that which currently was hidden. God knows everything and perhaps more significantly, He knows you better than

2 Luke 4:32, Mark 1:22, Matthew 7:29

3 John 12:49

4 Matthew 11:4

5 Luke 4:16-22, Matthew 11:5

6 Isaiah 55:9

7 James 1:5

you know yourself. He knows me better than I know myself. So if I wonder what the future holds, or where I should be going or what I should be doing, the words of God will speak into our situations.

What about **love**? "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son."<sup>8</sup> Jesus said<sup>9</sup>, "Greater love has no man but that he lay down his life for his friend." "God is love," says John's letter<sup>10</sup>. "God is love and those who live in love live in God."

Ultimate authority, ultimate integrity, knowledge, and love and what about **time**? Have His words stood the test of time? You bet they have. It's still the most read book in the world, it's translated into more languages than anything else. Has the Word of God stood the test of time? Even those who do not know or trust in Jesus will use His words and His phrases, because they have stood the test of time.

So that leads me in conclusion to just ask simply the question, "What are we going to do in the light of this? What are we going to do in the light of it?" Well, you will notice that the reading we had from Luke's Gospel, the temptations, Jesus clearly knew God's words. Let me remind you,

full of the Holy Spirit, [he] was led [...] into the desert, **2** [and there] he was tempted by the devil. [...]

**3** The devil said to him, "[...] tell this stone to become bread."

**4** Jesus [replied] (We can tell what Bible study Jesus had been doing recently because He quoted three verses from the book of Deuteronomy, they were there in the top of His head, He could pull them down!), **3** The devil said to him, "[...] tell this stone to become bread."

**4** Jesus [says] "[God says, the Bible<sup>11</sup> says]: 'Man [does] not live on bread alone.'"

You know, even the Son of God didn't defend Himself by His own personality or His own, you know, kind-of integrity. He defended Himself with words that have stood the test of time and said, "Man doesn't live on bread alone." The devil says, "Ah, I can give you all this stuff in the world, look at it! Worship Me and it'll all be yours." And Jesus said, "No, that doesn't work, because I know that God's Word, Deuteronomy chapter 6, says 'worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'" In fact it says<sup>12</sup>, "Fear the LORD your God and serve Him only." "I'm serving my Father, not you." Then it's like the devil suddenly thinks, "Oh, I get this game, quoting scripture is the way to win an argument." And so the devil says, "Well, didn't God say<sup>13</sup>, 'He will command His angels concerning you and guard you,' and so you do not... Why don't you jump off this cliff and God will perform some amazing miracle, because His Word says. And Jesus says, "Yes but His Word also says<sup>14</sup>, 'Don't put the Lord your God to the test.'"

We live in a world that is full of words, don't we. As I said, we're all amateur epidemiologists, we all have access to knowledge about lockdowns, knowledge about American politics, wisdom about this, that and the other. We're full of words. We're surrounded by words, we're awash with words. Amos chapter 8 says this,

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8 John 3:16

9 John 15:13

10 1 John 1:5, 1 John 4:16

11 Deuteronomy 8:3

12 Deuteronomy 6:13

13 Psalm 91:11

14 Deuteronomy 6:16

11 'The days are coming,' declares the Sovereign LORD,  
'when I will send a famine through the land –  
not a famine of food or a thirst for water,  
but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.

We'll come back to this next week, but, let me just suggest three things as we close. Firstly, where and how do we read the Scriptures? How do we give ourselves a chance to remember what God has said amid all the words? Has the pattern of lockdown has thrown into confusion our normal pattern of studying or reading? Maybe you use the Bible app, and it just gives you a verse to think about each day, or maybe you're working your way through one of the Scriptures, maybe you have Bible reading notes. But, but has that bit of it been edged out by all the other words, because these are the words that have authority and power. These are the words that will stand with you against the devil's schemes. These the words which, when they're spoken, change lives. So, is there a way that you just need to reconnect with God and His words in these times?

Number two: are there ways that you can capture God's words and pass them on? And sadly, I think the phrases fake news and post-truth have been incredibly influential over the last few years. Post-truth was actually the dictionary's word of the year, I think it was three years ago. And I was interested that Joe Biden said today something about, "You know, we are celebrating truth and science and knowledge and wisdom and things like that." You know, have we begun to think, "Well actually nothing's really true, everything's just, you know, how it how you interpret it." One of the things I've tried to do is just read a few verses each morning and then see if God will give me a chance to pass them on during the day. And it's amazing how often – I've just been reading the Psalms – how often in a phone call, the opportunity's there to say, "Do you know what? I was reading this morning from Psalm 146. And that reminds me of what you just said."

And finally I think this is a good week to pray for the Church of England, there's a lot happening at the moment as we've said, but this week, their *Living in Love and Faith* document is being published by the Church of England, which is a reflection document on issues in human sexuality. Now one of the things that may be the case over recent years is that we've engaged with quite a lot of discussion about some of the pastoral implications of these issues in human sexuality, but what the House of Bishops thought is that we actually need a study document that reflects on what God might be saying, according to the Scriptures. And that's how this document is being built. It's great for us to have ways and times of of engaging with God's words, so that rather than drifting away from the Kingdom of God, we might as individuals, as a church, and as a nation, draw closer to God.

Just in conclusion, you may or may not be aware that the Archbishops have invited us to a day of prayer<sup>15</sup> on this coming Friday, Friday the [13th]. Perhaps that would be a good day just to set aside some time to be with God, to receive His Word, reflect on what it means to you and make yourself available to pass it on. Let us pray.

Father, we thank You for men and women and boys and girls who've said things to us that have been incredibly powerful, influential and life-giving. And we thank You that Your Word, in a sense, is the ultimate source of wisdom, knowledge, authority, integrity, and love. And we pray for one another today, that in the challenges of life the things that we face, the

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15 Archbishops' month of prayer – November – <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/call-prayer-nation>  
Evangelical alliance: Day of prayer – Friday 13<sup>th</sup> November - <https://www.eauk.org/what-we-do/prayer-centre/uk-day-of-prayer-november-13th-2020>



opportunities that we want to grasp, may we be underpinned, defended and empowered by the true and the living Word of God.  
Amen.

### ***Prayerful response***

[Andrew:]

Amen. Thank you so much, Graham. Really good to hear from you, really helpful words as usual. I'm just going to lead us down into just a couple of minutes of reflection. I'm hoping that some of you have access to a Bible. It might be that some of you are watching it on your phone, or reading it on your phone. I just wanted to encourage you, whichever one of those it is, that just for the next minute that you will hold it. We're going to have a minute of quiet, where you hold whatever it is you read God's Word in. And we're going to have a minute of quiet, where we consider our relationship to this extraordinary gift of God's Word. So let's be quiet, as we consider what He's given us.

[pause]

So, Lord, chiming in with everything Graham has been saying, we thank You for this gift. We thank You, Lord, for the example of Jesus Christ who could say, "This is written. It is written." We thank You for what is written. We pray Lord, that we would be people of Your Word. And that we wouldn't turn to the left or to the right but that we would stay in step with Your Word.  
Amen.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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