

## 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020 6 pm. Andrew Attwood on “How to Read the Bible”.

[Revd. Andrew Attwood:]

Just to reiterate what I said earlier today, on the Facebook page there will be a list of notices for today – the same for this evening’s meeting as well as this morning’s. I do want to emphasise the idea of people experimenting with videoconferencing. If you can watch a livestream on Facebook, then it’s perfectly within your capability to experiment with some videoconferencing. A number of us are experimenting with that already – there’s a bit of take-up for that, and it’s already bringing a lot of life to people who haven’t had a chance to talk to someone properly for a day or two. We are living in very unusual times. By using technology to meet online, is probably more important than we thought.

This evening’s talk is going to be focusing on how to read the Bible better.

[... housekeeping associated with the livestream ...]

What I’m hoping to do this evening will cover a range of things, some of which are familiar, some of which might be new to you.

So just to begin with, I wanted to read a Psalm to you: a Psalm that seems appropriate at the moment. So let me just pray, and then I’ll read.

Lord Jesus, as we gather again, together as church, would you help us to gather around your Word, would you help us to be open to your Spirit, and Lord Jesus, would your presence be with us as we study, as we learn, as we think, and I pray that it would give us a deeper heart, an increased appetite for the Bible. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

I’m going to read from Psalm 46:

- <sup>1</sup> God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.
- <sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
- <sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam  
and the mountains quake with their surging.
- <sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
- <sup>5</sup> God is within her, she will not fall;  
God will help her at break of day.
- <sup>6</sup> Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;  
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
- <sup>7</sup> The LORD Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.
- <sup>8</sup> Come and see what the LORD has done,  
the desolations he has brought on the earth.
- <sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease  
to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the shields with fire.

<sup>10</sup> He says, 'Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth.'

<sup>11</sup> The LORD Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

It's a pretty apt Psalm for our current context.

It would be useful, while we do this study, if you have your own Bible handy, and maybe a pen and paper if you want to make notes, because I'll be guiding you through a handful of helps, a handful of key words, to help you explore Scripture more carefully.

When I first became a Christian, which was around the age of 19, my Mum bought me this: it's a soft-bound Jerusalem Bible. You may remember I was raised a Catholic, and so she bought me a Jerusalem Bible, which is the Catholic version, that has some of the apocryphal literature in the middle as well. And we used to joke that this was my woolly Bible, because it has a nice woolly cover. And I treasured it, I went pretty much everywhere with it for some time, which made my arms pretty strong in the end! And it gave me an appetite to read, because being a young Catholic, I didn't really have a culture where I was encouraged to read the Bible for myself. I just went to church services and just listened, and then went away. But on actually knowing Jesus personally, everything changed, everything switched on. It gave me an opportunity to dive in myself. And so a question I put to you is, where is your story in terms of the attitude to the Bible. Is there a hunger in you to learn more? Is there a desire in you to go deeper? Because this book is not simply for Sundays or even just for small groups. It's for *your* life, Monday to Monday.

Now, there's a set of words I'd like you to jot down, if you do have a pen:

- Purpose
- Form
- Language
- Overarching Narrative
- Structure

When you think of the Bible, it's not like any ordinary book, it's not a novel, it's a collection of books. The word Bible basically means Library, a collection of books. It's made of many different writings, many different forms. So it's important that we understand how to engage with the Bible in its different forms. The most obvious thing that is going to unlock for us a reading of the Bible is getting to grips with the original purpose of each text in the Scriptures. We are coming at this book like two thousand years on from when it was finally finished as a compendium, and it had been written like a couple of thousand years before that: it's millennia old in terms of the writings in their original form. So we need to understand when was it written, and by whom, and to whom, and why was it written? For example, if you were to flick into the Old Testament, you would find the book of Daniel. Daniel is listed amongst a set of people called the prophets, and Daniel is pitched kind of around [600] BC, and his ministry goes all the way through to about 520 BC - something like that. His particular context is, Daniel travelling with the people of Israel into exile, into captivity, where there's prophetic ministry about the fall of Judah, then all kinds of decrees that happen while the people of Israel are in exile, and

Daniel speaks into situations along the way. It's really important to understand that, otherwise you wouldn't know how to read what he's talking about, you don't know what is really going on. So "purpose" is vital. We live in a marvellous age when you can just click online and find an introduction to each and every book of the Bible. It's very important before you just read a book, to understand what is this about in general: who wrote it? What's it for? Who was it written to? Why? So "original purpose" is really, really, important.

The second word I want to come onto now is the question of "form": we can understand the purpose, but if we miss the form, we will read it in a strange way. The Bible contains a whole host of different forms.

Some of it is historical narrative, where it is simply describing what happens: like Chronicles, like the Gospel accounts are a kind of historical narrative - although Gospel is another kind of biographical form, with its own nuances as well.

There is poetry in the Bible, that's where we get the Psalms from, that's what I read just before. You will find in the Psalms, they come across in a very particular way, that is different from, say, for example, some of the Law books that are written in the Old Testament. When you get Law written, it functions differently to poetry.

You get letters in the New Testament. And the letters of the New Testament are written in a Graeco-Roman form, where you have beginnings, endings, middle content, ways in which they are shaped and put together. And of course letters are written to a particular audience, so letters written to address particular situations.

If you don't understand what the form is, you might miss something very, very easily.

For example, when I look at a Psalm, another Psalm: Psalm 70 says things like,

<sup>1</sup> Hasten, O God, to save me;

    come quickly, LORD, to help me.

<sup>2</sup> May those who want to take my life

    be put to shame and confusion;

may all who desire my ruin

    be turned back in disgrace.

<sup>3</sup> May those who say to me, 'Aha! Aha!'

    turn back because of their shame.

<sup>4</sup> But may all who seek you

    rejoice and be glad in you;

may those who long for your saving help always say,

    'The LORD is great!'

[<sup>5</sup> But as for me, I am poor and needy;

    come quickly to me, O God.

You are my help and my deliverer;

    LORD, do not delay.]

Psalms are emotional. Psalms are relational. Psalms are heart-cries to God. You don't find complex doctrine, complex teaching in the Psalms, you find heart-cry, core things to do with faith in God, to do with doubts, to do with fears, to do

with rejoicing, to do with worship. It's an intense, poetic, very human kind of form, whereas if you were to look at Paul's letter to the Romans, you would find something much more critically and carefully written to convey meaning, to convey doctrine and teaching. In Romans 5, verses 6 to 8, it says, this:

<sup>6</sup> You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And that's set in the context of Paul making an argument, he's laying out a proposition. And so you can read that differently to reading a Psalm. The Psalm gets you in your guts, and helps you to lift up to God from where you are, whereas the letter to the Romans is to inform our thinking and help our understanding. And it will stir our hearts too! But it's mostly aimed at conveying truth, as opposed to engendering just a simple if you like spontaneous worship.

So different forms have different functions, so you need to understand what it is as you read each part.

Then you get the question of "language". This is probably obvious to most of us, but the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the New Testament was written in Greek. I'd be interested to know how many of you are familiar with the Hebrew language or familiar with New Testament Greek. I had a little bit of that at theological college, not tons. But one of the things that you realise once you dive in a book written in a foreign language to ourselves is, some of the terms in there have different meanings to what we might think, and therefore if you don't understand how the language works, it's very possible that you might miss something. You could end up thinking a word means x whereas actually it means y, which is slightly different to x. You've got to have some insight into the language. Now, for those of us who don't necessarily have the chance to go to theological college or dive deeply into learning Greek or Hebrew, there are some marvellous online helps for this, and you don't to be very sophisticated to use them. I'm looking at the moment at a page called "online interlinear Greek". If you do a Google search for "online interlinear Greek" [e.g. [https://www.scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/Greek\\_Index.htm](https://www.scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/Greek_Index.htm)], it will give you a kind of spelled-out word-by-word description of all the sentences in the New Testament, from the originals, from the copies that we have, from the manuscripts.

So for example, Matthew 8. If you read Matthew 8 verse 16, it says this: When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with [his] word, and healed all that were sick. [KJV]

When English translators write things down, they are often straining and wrestling and struggling to capture in English words what the original Greek says. And time and time again, I've used this verse in particular. Time and time again, when they describe the activity of Jesus regards the dealing of people who have demons, they talk about demon-possession in English - that's what you read in the English translation. "Demon possession" - that's not actually what the Greek word says. And you are beginning to get a different level of translation emerging over these past few decades. The Greek word is

δαμονιζομένουσ (pronounced daimonizomenous), which is a long compounded word, meaning "ones being demonized", not "people who are possessed by a demon". That subtle difference means that, instead of thinking, "a person who is possessed by a demon, has lost all control, and can't do anything without the demon saying so" - actually, that's not the case at all. A demonized person is one who's

infested with the problem, that will inflict them in certain ways, but they are still free to choose some things. These kind of insights that you get from diving into the language help you understand each sentence, each phrase, in a different way. And you can find that out if you have a look online: "online interlinear Greek" will open some of that up for you. If you hit a sentence in the Bible, and you just don't get it, why don't you go and have a look and see what it looks like in the Greek? It might open your eyes to something you haven't seen before.

So that's just a clip to do with "language".

Now, if you want something even easier to engage with in terms of language, I want to commend to you another set of videos that have been made public for the last five, six, or seven years by a group called "The Bible Project" [<https://bibleproject.com/>]. It's very much worth writing this one down. Some of you will be familiar with it already. The Bible Project is an organisation that lives on YouTube [<https://www.youtube.com/user/jointhebibleproject>], and they have been making extremely high quality videos, kind of cartoon form, but very visual, with a narrative, explaining overarching issues and word studies to do with the Bible. So, for example, they do a word study on the word "Shema" [<https://bibleproject.com/blog/what-is-the-shema/>]. They do word studies on a whole range of things: they dive into what a particular word means throughout the whole of Scripture, so that you get not just one perspective from one place, but what it means throughout the whole of the scriptural witness: so if you can understand it *here*, then you can understand it *there* much more easily. So the Bible Project: go to that on YouTube and you'll enjoy many, many insights that these good theologians have been working on. I highly commend that to you.

So from "word" [and "Language"] it moves to this important issue of understanding the overarching narratives and themes of the Bible.

One of the things that transformed my own personal reading of Scripture was that instead of just reading what was in front of me the passage for today, or the passage for this week, or the book that I'm reading, was understanding how that particular passage fit inside a book, fit inside a big story: it runs from the beginning all the way through to the end of the age: "overarching narratives and themes".

The Bible is in literary terms what you would call "miraculous". Over millennia, authors have been writing different kinds of stories or accounts or poems or whatever, and yet there's this incredible coherence all the way through, focusing on these different themes and topics in ways that shine like facets of a diamond. It's beautiful how they all fit together. And if you can start to understand and trace through some of the big themes of the Bible, it helps you understand the particular context or meaning of any individual passages. For example, if you were to do a study on the theme of "Heaven and Earth", that occurs again and again and again, all the way from Genesis through to the building of the Temple, through to the coming of Jesus, through to the birth of the Church and then into the new Heavens and the new Earth. "Heaven and Earth" is a theme that holds it all together.

Two other words, "Kingdom and Covenant": these two words that go together that help understand how you can have the people of God to do the work of God - the "Covenant" and the "Kingdom", the Covenant being the people, and the arrangement that God has with them, and the Kingdom being His activity, and His rule in Earth from Heaven.

Likewise "Temple and Sacrifice", likewise "Slavery and Exodus".

Another theme that you find running through all the Old Testament first is "Exile and Return". The people of Israel are forever moving from Exile, falling

down into captivity, and then returning back, and then back into Exile, and then back into Return, and that's captured in remarkable ways in the ministry of Jesus, who goes into Exile, if you like, on the Cross, in our place: He goes into captivity and suffers, so that we can then truly return to God.

"Fall and Redemption": all the way back from the start of the Bible, with Genesis, with Adam and Eve, the beginning of humanity turning away from God and diving into a rejection, and a stubbornness and rebellion, where they're away - and again enslaved in captivity into all kinds of forces, as well as their own sin, and then being brought back and then lifted out and rescued, in different kinds of ways in the Old Testament, but profoundly through Jesus and the coming of the Spirit in the New.

So these are overarching themes. You will find the theme of Exodus all the way through the New Testament: when Jesus breaks bread and wine, He's using Exodus language. When Jesus offers bread and wine, He's using Sacrificial Temple language. So if you understand how all these different things fit together, it makes sense of what Jesus says in the Last Supper. So the Overarching Narrative helps unlock those kinds of things.

In a related way, it's also very important to understand how Old Testament and New Testament fit together. Two words: "Continuity" and "Discontinuity". I can remember being introduced to this at theological college. There's probably a bit of a naïve idea that Christians are sometimes falsely taught, that we have the Old Testament, when everything didn't work, then the New Testament comes with Jesus and the Old Testament's kind of gone because it didn't work and we now have the real deal. It's not like that at all. This is one continuous story, where God is present and active and ruling all the way through, and there's continuity. There's remarkable continuity, where God is with His people all the way through. But of course there is discontinuity, where something does change. When you think of the coming of Christ, some of the things that were in the Old Covenant are superseded and replaced: the sacrificial system goes, some of the cultural items to do with separation go, because Jesus reaches out beyond the Jewish people, beyond the social conventions: He touches the leper, He relates to the centurion; and so there are some discontinuities that break and change how the original story was going. But you need to make sure that you don't kick the Old out and simplify it to say that, "Oh, we've got Jesus now, we don't need the Old." You absolutely do need to hold the whole story together, because Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. If you don't understand the Israel story, you won't understand Jesus. So you need to understand how the Old and the New relate together, Continuity and Discontinuity. It's important to suss out those different kinds of things.

Let me wave a book at you: this is a book by a guy called Richard Hayes: he's kind of from the same stable as Tom Wright is from, he's an American. I think he's pretty much retired now. He's a bit of a big guy at one of the premier Bible colleges in America. Now he wrote a book called *Reading Backwards* not that long ago, and this is the smaller version, a thinner version. I've got a great big fat one that is more comprehensive. But this book talks about something called "figural reading". This is worth concentrating on, because sometimes we have an over-simplified way of relating Old and New Testaments together. Let me say this phrase to you, and see how you respond to it: there's a poet called T.S. Eliot, that some of you will know, some of you who are interested in English literature. Here's a question: what was T.S. Eliot's influence on Shakespeare? Now, anyone who knows anything about history will be confused by the question at first, because T.S. Eliot came *after* Shakespeare by quite a long time. Shakespeare came first, T.S. Eliot came many, many, many years later - a few centuries later. And so you've got the idea of T.S. Eliot influencing Shakespeare? How can something new influence something old? Well, that's what Richard Hayes talks about in his book. The idea of reading backwards is where we don't just say, the Old Testament prophesied Jesus, it's not like that, it's

broader than that, it's deeper than that. The Old Testament pointed towards something that the Old Testament writers wouldn't fully understand, and the New Testament people who saw Jesus couldn't understand the Old until they saw it through the lens of Jesus. The classic example: when you get towards the end of Luke's gospel, you have the Road to Emmaus scene after the Resurrection, where two despondent disciples are walking along the road, heads down, feeling miserable, because they had their hopes that Jesus was the Chosen One, the one who would redeem Israel, and Jesus himself now raised, but hidden from them, is walking alongside them. And they're sharing their heart with Him, and He's asking them some questions, and at a certain point, He says, "O foolish people! Could you not see that all this was meant to happen?" And then He spends the rest of the walking journey describing how all of the Old Testament was pointing to Him. Now, as He does that, He opens up their heart and their understanding to see things that were there all the time, but they couldn't have seen them unless He shed some light on it.

Figural reading means that the Old changes because of the New. It's still the same, but we now see it differently. So when we read Isaiah 53, that talks about a suffering servant, originally Isaiah was writing about the people of Israel, but clearly the prophet was hinting at something else. And then Christ comes, and Christ dies, and it shines light on something old, giving it a brand new meaning. And that reflects back onto the Cross. So when Jesus is silent before Pilate, when Jesus is like a lamb led to the slaughter, you can see that one is feeding the other. It's not that one is dominant over the other. Figural reading means that both Testaments speak to each other and open things up in a way which you haven't really seen before. It's very important that we get as Jewish as we can. If we can absorb more and more of the Old Testament story, our understanding of the New will come alive in ways that we've never seen before.

There's a beautiful bit in the book, where Richard Hayes is talking about how Mark describes the Messiah in a very subtle, hidden kind of way, and he talks about Jesus walking on the water, and it talks about Jesus walking as though he were to go to go past them, in the boat, in Mark's account, he was walking on the water going past them, and you think, "Why did Mark say that?" and you find a reference in the Old Testament that talks about God somehow walking on the water and passing them by, and so Mark is subtly saying, "the one who is walking on the water right now is Almighty God!" - a reference back to the Old.

So things like that, figural reading, open up to us how the Old makes sense of the New, and *vice-versa*.

Now, I need you to get your Bibles out in a minute, because we're going to see if we can do something a little more complex. We're going to look at things called *Pericopes*. I was talking to Michelle Harris about this a number of weeks ago, and *Pericopes* are to do with "Structure" - I said I was going to talk about Structure as a way of understanding things. We're reasonably familiar about the idea of Context explaining things, what different passages mean. Just to briefly cover that: if you're reading a passage in the Bible, what comes before it and what comes after it makes sense of what you're reading in the middle. That's usually a common way of understanding context. What comes before shines light on what is in the middle, and what comes later. But you get some wonderful examples of this in the gospels and in some of the letters, where they carefully arrange the story to make a big point.

If you can turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 11, and we're going to go to verse 12. Mark chapter 11 is focused on Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. This is where Mark is turning up the temperature, the story is getting pretty intense here, and we have this peculiar set of stories to do with the fig-tree and the temple and faith to throw a mountain into the lake and whatever: it's all a bit confusing. You get in verses 12 [to 14] this happening:

<sup>12</sup> The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. <sup>13</sup> Seeing in the distance a fig-tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup> Then he said to the tree, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard him say it.

OK, so you've got this unusual little passage where Jesus being hungry, seeing a fig-tree, but it's got no fruit on it, and he curses it. To our Western ears, that doesn't make any kind of logical sense at all. Let me just skip on a bit. If you can look on at that chapter and get to verse 20 - we'll miss the middle bit out for now, and we'll go to verse 20 and find out what happened:

<sup>20</sup> In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig-tree withered from the roots. <sup>21</sup> Peter remembered and said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, look! The fig-tree you cursed has withered!'

<sup>22</sup> 'Have faith in God,' Jesus answered. <sup>23</sup> 'Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, "Go, throw yourself into the sea," and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. <sup>24</sup> Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. <sup>25</sup> And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.'

Another weird passage: what on earth is going on? What's this to do with a withered fig-tree? Why is he now talking about throwing a mountain into the sea? It's all seemingly convoluted - unless we look at the structure of Mark's gospel. We talked about the cursing of the fig-tree (part one), the withering of the fig-tree (part three), but what's part two in the middle? Let me go back now, to part two in the middle, starting at verse 15:

<sup>15</sup> On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves, <sup>16</sup> and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. <sup>17</sup> And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it "a den of robbers".'

<sup>18</sup> The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

<sup>19</sup> When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

So just to remember the structure: the start of it is Jesus cursing the fig-tree, the second part of it is Jesus tearing into the Temple and kicking over tables and condemning the Temple practices, and then the final third is discovering of the withered fig-tree and comments about throwing a mountain into the sea. The context of the two makes sense of the middle part. What Jesus is doing is using figurative language about a fig-tree, and saying, "Just as with the fig-tree, so with the Temple." The fig-tree is a picture of what is going to happen to the Temple. So when Jesus goes into the Temple, he symbolically kicks over the tables. He kicks over the tables to disrupt the normal system, the normal sacrificial system of the Temple practice. He's basically saying, "Redundant! This is coming to an end. This is going to be replaced. This is in fact going to be destroyed." Jerusalem is on a mountain. Jerusalem is on a hill, and the Temple sits on the top. So when Jesus says later, "If you have faith, you can speak to this Mountain, and command it to be thrown into the sea," symbolically again, he's probably talking about Jerusalem as a whole and the Temple in particular, and saying, "This is going to be thrown out. This is going to be replaced by Myself, the Messiah." And so the fig-tree sits either side of the story about the Temple, and the fig-tree makes sense. The fig-tree in the



first part of the story is fruitless. The fig-tree, to Jesus' disappointment, is not bearing the fruit that it should bear. It should have been fruitful. And Jesus comes to the people of Israel expecting and hoping that they should be fruitful, because they're meant to be the Light of the World, they're meant to be God's Covenant People, they're meant to be reflectors of God. But they're not! And so he curses them and replaces them with Himself. And symbolically the fig-tree is representing the people of Israel as they are, and the Temple and Jerusalem as it is. And he's calling them, and he's saying, "You need to come to Me now, because that is all going, that is all going to be replaced."

Now that sequence, where you have something before, something afterwards to make sense of something in the middle, is called a *Pericope*. A *Pericope* is a careful arrangement of the structure of the text, the structure of the story, to make sense of it. You'll be able to find lots of examples of that as you make your way through the Bible. Once again, it's another way, another key to understanding passages of the Bible.

Let me give you one other wonderful little key that unlocks, for example, John's gospel. Most of you who have read John's gospel before will understand that it's different from the other, synoptic, gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. John's gospel lists a set of signs all the way through, and it names them as the first sign, the second sign, the third sign, the fourth sign, and it goes all the way through to seven signs. John carefully describes the story of Jesus' ministry as a structure of seven signs and then we get to the ending with the death and resurrection. You get water into wine, sign number one - kind of a picture of Creator - Jesus creates wine. Sign number two, the healing of the official's son, demonstrating God's power. Sign number three, healing of the lame man, sign number four, feeding of the five thousand, sign number five, walking on water, sign number six, sight to the blind man and power over his sin, sign number seven, the raising of Lazarus, conquering death. Seven. Those of you who know anything about numbers in the Bible will recognise the number seven is the perfect divine number. John is structuring the shape of his gospel message around seven particular signs that point to Jesus doing something new. This is really important. What else in the Bible is a seven? What else in the Bible is formatively a seven? Think all the way back to the creation story. You have six days of creation and God resting on the seventh. The story of the Genesis creation is a story of one, two, three, four, five, six and seven. It's the original creation. And now we have John describing the coming of Messiah with one, two, three, four, five, six and seven of the *new* creation. He's paralleling the creation narrative in Genesis with his own description of Jesus' life story, the seven signs parallel to the seven days of creation. And here's the clue that helps unlock some of that: remember in John's account of Christ's death on the Cross, where Jesus gets to the very end of His work on the Cross and He says, "It is Finished!" Think of that as a parallel now to the Genesis account: when God gets to the end of the sixth day, it says, "He Finished His work and he rested." What do we find in the ministry of Jesus? He dies on the Cross, saying, "It is Finished," and He rests in the tomb, and then He is raised from the dead on the first day of the week, in other words there's an emphasis in John's gospel all the time in the resurrection stories, it's the first day of the week, the first, a new day. It's a new day! It's new creation! When Jesus is risen from the dead, it's no longer like the old creation that we are all used to. This is brand new! This is like nothing that's ever happened before!

So the structure, the shape of John's gospel with its seven signs and "It is Finished!" on the Cross, and then a new day of resurrection, is a parallel with the Genesis story being reflected in Christ's biography written by John. Can you see how structure helps you understand what the authors are trying to do?

So in simple terms, that describes, then, a handful of ways of going into the Bible more deeply: Purpose, Form, Language, Overarching Narrative of the story and Structure that helps you understand how the different parts mean things

according to how they're arranged.

Well, I'm going to be finishing there - I've talked for quite a while. I just hope that you can kind of return to this, and maybe use some of those different words, Purpose, Form, Language, Overarching Narrative and Structure, to see if it can whet your appetite to go into the Bible a little bit more carefully than ever before.

Now, let me kind of have a pause, and I'm just going to pray, and then we'll finish.

Lord Jesus, we want to thank you for the Bible. We want to thank you for this Living Word. We want to thank you for this miraculous book, and we want to thank that there are layers in it and riches in it that we have not even seen yet. Lord, for everyone who is watching or will watch later, I want to pray that you will make our hearts sing with the desire to understand better your Word. Would you help us, would you teach us, would you help us to work together to open up the Scriptures so that we might understand ourselves and perhaps more importantly Yourself more and more and more. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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