

THE S IN ROPES: MAKING SCRIPTURE YOUR HOME**JOHN 8:31-32**

Early in his ministry, Billy Graham wrestled with whether he was going to embrace the Bible as the inspired, revealed Word of God and source of truth for his life, or dismiss it as a fallible, unreliable book of human insight. He knew that everything about his life and ministry was on the line. It all came to a head at a retreat center near Los Angeles where Graham was attending a conference. He went for a walk in the peaceful pine forest surrounding the retreat center. About fifty yards off a main trail, he sat for a long time on a large rock and his Bible spread open on a tree stump. It was there and then he made a choice. "Oh, God," he prayed, "I cannot prove certain things. I cannot answer some of the questions some people are raising, but I accept this book by faith as the Word of God." A bronze tablet now commemorates Graham's decision on that very same rock. He observed that single resolution gave an enduring power and authority to his preaching. He said, "The gospel in my hands became a hammer and a flame. I felt as though I had a sword in my hands and through it the power of the Bible was slashing deeply into [people's] consciousness, leading them to surrender to God." Today, I want you to think with me about the value of the Bible.

Our church has developed its own picture of a disciple of Jesus Christ. From time to time, it's important for me to remind all of us of the importance of discipleship, generally, and of the KRBC picture or definition of it, specifically. We refer to it as ROPES. It's an acrostic with each letter standing for an important part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. R is for Relationships, O stands for Obedience, P is the first letter of Prayer, and E is for Evangelism. Today, I want us to think about the S in ROPES. It stands for Scripture, the Bible, God's Word. Today's message is built around an interesting English translation of John 8:31-32. Let's read those two verses just now. There are many English translations of the Bible. One of those is called the Jerusalem Bible and it renders those same two verses like this: "To the Jews who believed in him, Jesus said, 'If you make my word your home, you will indeed be my disciples, and you will learn the truth, and the truth will make you free.'" (Jo 8:31-32 JB) I'm fascinated by that image or metaphor of Jesus' words being like a home that you live in. Let's explore it by asking two questions.

HOW IS THE BIBLE LIKE A HOME?

Well, certainly the Bible provides, just like a home, an environment in which you can live. A home is always more than just a physical place where you sleep, eat, and hang out. Home is a much richer, deeper concept than a house, for example. Home suggests a place where you have connections with the people you love and care about the most. Home is a place where you're accepted for who you are – your strengths, your weaknesses, your endearing qualities, and, yes, your bad habits, too. Home is a place – an environment – that shapes and molds you. Certain things are valued and not valued in a home. Other things are important and not important in a home.

Now, the word that the Jerusalem Bible translates as "home" is the Greek word meaning "to remain, to abide, to stay, to hold on to." It's a word meant to convey living

someplace permanently. In John 15, Jesus compares a relationship to Him as being similar to the relationship of a grape vine to the branches on that vine. He says, “But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!” (Jo 15:7 NLT) That word “remain” is the very same one that the Jerusalem Bible translators render as “home” in John 8:31. It really is a very appropriate translation. Isn’t Jesus really saying there in John 15, “If you make your home in me, and I make my home in you, then you can ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you”? In other words, the Bible can become like a home for you and me – a spiritual environment in which we live every day.

You might ask, “But how can a book – any book – be like a home to me?” As you begin to read God’s Word regularly, as you study it, as you absorb it, as you meditate upon it, as you let it get inside of you, as you begin to live by it and put it into action, the Bible can become a spiritual environment. Just like a home, the Bible has the power to shape, mold, and change you. But you have to interact with it. Some years ago now, I was listening to “The Bible Answer Man” radio broadcast on the car radio. The host, Hank Hanegraff, takes calls from people around the country on how to interpret different Bible passages. One caller suggested that the biggest problem among Christians today is their willingness to believe teachings that aren’t biblical. Hank’s answer was that the even bigger problem is that so many Christians are largely ignorant of what the Bible says about anything! Because so few Christians ever actually read the Bible, he said, there’s no way they can evaluate whether a teaching is biblical or not.

As you can imagine, climbing Mt. Everest, the highest mountain in the world, is very dangerous. Back in 1996 there was an unusually high loss of life during the climbing season. One of those who died was Andy Harris, an expedition leader. Harris had stayed at the peak of Everest past the deadline. On his descent, he ran out of oxygen. He radioed his problem down to the other climbers at the base camp. He told them he had come upon several oxygen canisters left by other climbers, but they were all empty. But those in the base camp knew, in fact, that those oxygen canisters were indeed full. They pleaded with Harris to make use of them. But it was of no use. Andy Harris’ brain was already starved for oxygen. He had become totally disoriented and kept arguing that they were empty. Here was the awful irony. Andy Harris was surrounded by oxygen, but he continued to complain of its absence. The very thing he held in his hand – a canister full of oxygen – was absent from his brain. He lost the ability to recognize what was right in his grasp and available to him.

We can do the same thing with the Bible. You can die spiritually surrounded by what gives spiritual life – God’s Word. I’ve had people say to me, “But I just don’t like to read.” People read plenty when it comes to areas they find interesting. If you like sports, you read the sports page or check the online stories. If you like business or investing, you keep up on the news of new ventures and how stocks are doing. If you find people interesting, you read the gossip outlets about certain celebrities. If you’re into cars, you read car magazines. Let’s face it - most of us who don’t read the Bible with any regularity, because we just don’t find the Bible interesting. Sure, developing an appetite for God’s Word can take some time. Get an updated translation of the Bible.

Join one of our Sunday Bible classes or weekday small groups. Join one of our discipleship triads. Listen to or watch Bible teachers on radio or TV and read the Bible portions they're teaching from. But, at the end of the day, it really is all about personal perseverance. The more you read God's Word, the more you'll develop a taste or an appetite for it. The more you read, the more you'll understand. The more you understand the Bible, the more it will shape, mold, and change you. And the more that happens, the more the Bible becomes like a home – a spiritual environment – in which you live and out of which you live. If you truly believe the God of the universe has spoken to us in the Bible, isn't it worth your effort to get very familiar with it?

How else is the Bible like a home? Like a home, the Bible provides security and stability. That's what makes a home a great place! At home, you know you're loved. At home, you know you're secure. At home, you find a stability that helps you to make sense of the chaos going on outside of your home. Home is the place where you recover, where you relax, where you get re-energized. When you make the Bible your home, that's what happens to you spiritually. As you read, study, and meditate, you're constantly reminded God loves you eternally and perfectly. You're constantly reminded that God is in control and all the things you're anxious about can be surrendered up to Him. You begin to make some sense of the chaotic things that happen to all of us in this life. You're reminded that in God you are secure, safe, and stable. God's Word helps us to recover spiritually, relax spiritually, and get re-energized spiritually.

There's yet another way the Bible is like a home. It provides perspective on life and living – just like a home. Parents are always passing along values to their kids whether you intend to do so or not. Kids learn what we truly value, Mom and Dad, by what they see you doing and saying. Home might well be the greatest place of learning or education that a person can experience, but it's informal, subtle, and often unintentional education. As you read, study, and meditate on God's words, you gain perspective about what really matters in life. You learn what pleases God. You learn what makes for healthy relationships with others and what doesn't. You get fresh perspective on what it means to be a success in life, to be a leader, a spouse, a parent, a boss, or an employee. Just like a literal, actual home, the Bible gives you and me an ever enlarging perspective on life itself and how it works. It provides an education that never ends.

A Christian and a Muslim shared a room together at university. They became good friends. One day, their conversation turned to their spiritual beliefs. The Christian asked the Muslim if he'd ever read the Bible. No, was the answer. The Muslim asked his roommate if he'd ever read the Koran. The Christian said, "No, I haven't, but I'm sure it would be interesting. Why don't we read both together, once a week, alternating books?" The arrangement was accepted. During the second semester, the Muslim became a follower of Jesus. One evening, the Muslim convert to Christianity burst into the room and shouted, "You deceived me!" "What are you talking about?" his friend asked. This former Muslim - and now a new follower of Jesus - said, "I've been reading this Bible through, like you told me, and I just read right here that God's Word is living and active." Then he grinned and added, "You knew all along that the Bible contained God's power and the Koran is just a book like any other book. I never had a chance!"

There is no book like the Bible. It will give you a perspective on life and living – an ongoing education - that is absolutely unique and straight from God Himself. How is the Bible like a home? Now, here's a second question to ask and answer.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF MAKING THE BIBLE MY HOME?

Well, one result is that you will become a true follower of Jesus. Jesus said, "...If you make my word your home, you will indeed be my disciples..." (Jo 8:31 JB) Here's something I know for certain after being a pastor for a long time. You can't be a growing follower of Jesus and remain ignorant of the Bible. Now, you can become a follower of Jesus without ever having read one verse in the Bible. All you have to do is put your trust in Jesus for this life and the next and receive Him as your Lord and Savior. No one has ever earned a new relationship with God through His Son, Jesus, by reading X number of chapters in the Bible! But if you sincerely desire to become the man or the woman God has destined you to be, you just have to get to know God's Word. There's no other way it can happen. You must interact with it regularly for the rest of your earthly life. It must become like a home to you – a spiritual environment that shapes and molds your values, your priorities, your thoughts – everything. If you don't, I guarantee that you'll only ever be a weak, ineffective, and essentially useless follower of Jesus. God will not be able to do much in or through you.

That word "disciple" – what does it mean? The KRBC answer is ROPES. Being a disciple is living out relationships, obedience, prayer, evangelism, and Scripture. But here's yet another way to answer that question. First, a disciple is someone who listens to Jesus. How can you listen to Jesus 2,000 years after He was here on Earth? You read, think about, and apply what He said to your life. You read what other writers – who were inspired by the same Holy Spirit who indwelt Jesus – wrote in the Bible. You humbly ask God to show you how those words apply to your life each day. Second, a disciple is someone who learns from Jesus. That's the most basic definition of that word "disciple" – just someone who is a learner, who's teachable. How can you be a learner if you never open the Bible and read it for yourself? Third, a disciple is someone who internalizes what Jesus said. I've read the Bible through many times now, but it's always saying fresh things to me or it's reminding me of important truths I'd forgotten. When the Bible is your home, you're constantly thinking about what Jesus said. You grow in your understanding of His words and how they apply to your life today. Fourth, a disciple is someone who obeys what Jesus said. You don't just learn in order to satisfy some intellectual curiosity. No, you learn in order to do. Many people know more about the Bible on an intellectual level than they put into practice. But when the Bible truly becomes your home, you're obeying it, doing it, and living it out.

If you're going to be a true follower of Jesus, you ultimately need to read the Bible for yourself. I know that sounds obvious, but sometimes all of us need to hear the obvious. It's important to come to church on Sunday and hear messages based on God's Word. It's helpful to study the Bible in a Sunday class or a weekday small group. Our discipleship triads provide a very intentional interaction with Scripture with built in accountability. But all those are supplements. They can never replace your own

interaction with God's Word regularly. That's one reason we've offered a couple of two hour long devotional life seminars here at KRBC and we will likely do so again early next year. The seminar provides just some easy to understand strategies to read and get something out of God's Word for yourself. There's a difference between having someone feed you and learning how to feed yourself. What do you call someone who always has to have someone else feed him or her? A baby, right? Now, there's nothing wrong with being a baby unless you're content to stay a baby for ten, twenty, or forty years! Then, it's just weird and pathetic. Do you "eat" and "digest" God's Word for yourself or does someone else have to feed you all the time?

Here's another result of making the Bible your home. You will know the truth. Again, Jesus is the one who said that. "If you make my word your home, you will indeed be my disciples, and you will learn the truth...." (Jo 8:31-32 JB) The Bible says that God Himself is absolute truth. Jesus said of Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (Jo 14:6 NLT) It's almost as if the word "truth" there is another word for God Himself. When you make God's Word your home, you come face to face with Truth. At the end of the day, truth is a Person not a concept, an idea, a philosophy, or a set of propositions that you can sign off on. Here's another truth about truth. The Bible provides certain truth, but not comprehensive truth. God never intended His Word to provide insight into everything that can be known. You won't find much in the Bible about car repair or computer software! But what you do get in the Bible is a reliable, certain, and trustworthy framework or foundation to understand every other kind of truth out there. It provides truth into what matters most. Who is God? What is God like? Can I know God? What does God expect of me? Certain truth, not comprehensive truth. This is truth that you can stake your life on, truth that makes sense of both triumph and tragedy in life, and truth that provides comfort and perspective.

A final result of making the Bible your home. You will experience true freedom. Jesus Himself said it. "If you make my word your home, you will indeed be my disciples, and you will learn the truth, and the truth will make you free." (Jo 8:31-32 JB) Jesus was referring to a different kind of freedom than being freed from literal slavery or being freed from some kind of political bondage. Here's a few examples of the kind of freedom Jesus is pointing to there. When the Bible is your home, you experience freedom from fear. You're reminded over and over again that God will never leave you alone. God is always with you and will never forsake you. When the Bible is your home, you experience freedom from self. There are times when we have to face the fact that we are our own worst enemies. You'll cry out to God saying, "God, I can't change myself!" But the more you make God's Word your home, the more you'll receive God's power to overcome what trips you up spiritually. When the Bible is your home, you'll experience a healthy freedom from other people. Sometimes the opinions, preferences, and values of other people can dominate or control your life in an unhealthy way. Sometimes the voice of your family or your friends can be louder than the voice of God Himself. But when you live in the Word of God, you learn to put God and His will first. And then, when the Bible is your home, you discover a growing freedom from sin itself. I'm not saying you'll ever become sinless in this life, but the more you soak yourself in God's Word, the more transformation you will experience.

Some years ago now, a Moroccan man by the name of Bouch, who works at a bar in downtown Chicago, decided to write a letter to the king of his homeland, Morocco. That would be Mohammed VI who is immensely popular because he often interacts personally, directly, and publicly with his subjects. He has also freed political prisoners and has a reputation for helping the poor and disabled. When Bouch wrote to his king, Mohammed VI answered. Not once, in fact, but several times. Bouch would sometimes show these letters to people who came into his bar in Chicago saying, "Look at these letters. These are letters from the King. If I ever meet him, I will be so happy!" How many guys hauling beer and burgers in a Chicago bar are exchanging letters with a royal monarch? Apparently, it's not unusual for Mohammed VI to write letters even to his subjects who live abroad. Why? Because he cares about his subjects.

If you think Mohammed VI cares about his subjects, you ought to consider Jesus, the King of kings, and read His precious letters to you. There are 66 of them and they're all put together in this one book – the Bible, God's Word. There are so many things for which to thank God this coming Thanksgiving Day. At the top of your list and mine should be God's Word. May it increasingly become your home and mine!