

June 23rd 2013: The Jesus The World Sees #2: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5
"Sources That Cannot Be Denied"

One of the issues that we as believers will have to face when we talk to a non-believer about Jesus will at times be their view of the New Testament as a historic record. There are those who openly question the validity of this book that we as Christians believe to be the inspired word of God.

That's why we need to know that the sources that make up the NT are ancient sources and are not denied by secular historians. They may not treat the New Testament as a special Word from God as we do, but they do see it as a collection of historic writings that are authentic, and therefore deserve the same respect that any other historic document demands.

Indeed for any historian to reject the Biblical documents out of hand simply because it is a Christian book would be unprofessional, and they do not do that. They have subjected the NT sources to the same tests that they would subject any other historic documents to, and have found them to be reliable and constant in what they present.

This constancy is a vital ingredient because although we see the NT as one unit, it is in fact made up of 27 separate ancient documents, with the ones relating to the history of Jesus and His church being written in just about complete isolation from each other. So the historians have discovered that the Gospel writers and Paul had access to information about Jesus and the group He formed that was freely available in the first century, and they wrote that down without contact with each other and mostly without knowledge of the others.

We also need to understand that the historians do not just study the ancient Christian texts that make up the New Testament. They are also aware of another collection of 52 separate writings discovered in Egypt in 1945 which have come to be known as the Gnostic Gospels.

The word Gnostic from the Greek word for knowledge, referred to a movement that corrupted certain sections of the Christian church towards the very end of the first and into the second and third centuries. It suggested that certain people had this secret and special knowledge about Christ that other lesser people didn't have. Extra knowledge to what we have in the Gospels that was supposedly passed on by Jesus to a select few in His lifetime. So there is a Gospel of Thomas, and a Gospel of Philip, and a

Gospel of Peter and so on. Yet when you look at this extra knowledge it is just so 'over the top' and sounds ridiculous when set alongside the Gospels. Take the following quote from the Gospel of Thomas as an example:

Saying no.114. ***"Simon Peter said to them: Let Mariham[Mary] go out from among us, for women are not worthy of the life. Jesus said: Look, I will lead her that I may make her male, in order that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter into the kingdom of heaven."***

Not long ago the film 'the Davinci Code' raised interest in these extra Gospels and people were suggesting that all the Gospels were of equal value, and that the Church in the fourth century just picked the ones it agreed with for the NT. But as John Dickson points out:-

"..the reality is that the four Gospels now in the New Testament can be shown to have been written in the first century. By contrast, all of these others come from the second or third century. This is far too long after Jesus lived to be taken seriously as historical records."

In fact these Gnostic Gospels, outlandish as they are, serve to prove the authenticity of the four Biblical Gospels.

Now we all know that the NT is composed of a lot more than the four Gospels and that nearly half of the books are in the form of letters written by the Apostle Paul. Their authenticity is not normally questioned.

It is the four Gospels however that gives the story of Jesus, and they have been intensely studied through the ages by historians, and some of their findings are well worth us knowing.

The first thing to note is the type of writing that the Gospels are. John Dickson writes:-

"The Gospels are a particular example of the Graeco-Roman genre of *bios* or biography. The *bios* was not a biography in the modern sense, in which authors explore their subjects in intimate detail from cradle to grave. It was instead a punchy, straightforward portrait of the deeds and words of great lives".

They were also written with great attention to the facts and used eyewitness accounts to safeguard the truth. This is particularly mentioned by Luke at the beginning of his Gospel in Luke 1:1-4

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

This statement of course, really pleases the historians because it proves how professional Luke was in his writing.

The second thing to note arises out of Luke's statement and concerns the number of accounts of Jesus' life that were written. Luke's opening remark refers to the 'many who have undertaken to draw up an account', and we need to know whether that many was just the four Gospels.

So we turn to the Gospels we have in our NT and we discover that the first Gospel written was Mark's Gospel. Dated between AD65-70 there is good evidence to suggest that Mark got most of his material from the Apostle Peter. On this score, one interesting fact is that in those times you would specify who your main eyewitness was by mentioning their name at the start and at the end of your work. And if you check out Mark you will see that the first disciple mentioned by Mark is Simon Peter in 1:16, and the last is also Peter in 16:7.

So with Mark's Gospel, Peter is the main if not the only source. When you come to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke however, we find that both of these writers used Mark, written a decade earlier, as the basis for their own account.

But as well as using Mark, both Luke and Matthew used another source known as Q, which it seems was a collection of the sayings of Jesus. So you will find some portions of Luke and Matthew that are just about identical to each other which the scholars see as coming from this document Q....a document that has never been found but was obviously one of the many that Luke speaks about.

Other 'not found' documents that the historians believe existed, are a source known as L, which was a source that only Luke used. Another source known as M, which only Matthew used. Then when we come to the Gospel of John which stands as very different to the other Gospels, and we find the scholars speaking about yet another 'not found' source unique to John which is known as 'SQ' or the Signs Source. A collection of miracle stories that John used as a key to his narrative. The following chart gives you a summary of all this:-

<u>SOURCE</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>CHARACTER</u>
Paul's letters	50-64	Very early testimony to the core of the Jesus story.
Q	40-70	An early collection of Jesus' teachings used by Matthew and Luke.
L	40-70	An early collection of parables and stories of Jesus used by Luke.
SQ	70	A collection of miracle stories used by John.
Gospel of Mark	65-70	Our first complete Gospel, penned as a record of the apostle Peter's testimony.
M	40-80	A collection of parables and teachings of Jesus used by Matthew.
Gospel of Luke	75-85	The second Gospel to be written employing Mark, Q and M
Gospel of Matthew	80-95	The third Gospel to be written, employing Mark, Q and M
Gospel of John	80-100	The last of our first-century Gospels, employing the Signs Source, SQ.
Gnostic Gospels	120-300	The product of second century and later Gnostics in reaction to the traditional Gospels

(From John Dickson "Jesus A Short Life" page 32)

The third thing is that these sources, with the exception of the Gnostic Gospels, hand us all the knowledge we have about Jesus. And the important thing that they tell secular historians is that the information we are given is confirmed again and again by writers who had no contact with each other.

John Dickson puts it this way:-

"It is the same logic you apply when you hear some surprising news. If it comes from one friend, you might accept it on face value. If it comes from several friends, and you know they have not colluded, you are very likely to trust what they say. It is partly on

this basis—and on various other historical criteria we will meet along the way—that the broad narrative of Christ’s life is not in dispute amongst mainstream scholars.” (Jesus A Short Life p33)

So the outcome of all we have looked at is that the secular historians have no hesitation in accepting the NT as an authentic and historic record of the life of Jesus. And of course this doesn’t surprise us because we know something about the Bible that the non-believer may also know, but doesn’t accept. And that is this incredible Faith Statement that I want to leave with you today. We find it in 2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

Paul is writing to a young pastor, and for Paul at that stage Scripture was the Old Testament. Little did he know that all Scripture would eventually include the whole Bible as we now have it, including Paul’s own letters.

But the wonderful truth is that this Bible is God breathed. Every word directed by the Holy Spirit, as God used human beings to give us His written word. Documents that have been miraculously preserved by God for us His people. This is what we believe by faith.

Yet so often we do not give the Bible the place in our lives that we should. Too often we treat this holy book with unintentional disrespect. It remains on a shelf collecting dust when it should be read often as the very word of God to our hearts.

Another translation puts 2 Timothy 3:16 like this:-

¹⁶ God has breathed life into all of Scripture. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right.

Paul earlier had explained to Timothy how the Scriptures had made him wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, and it is the truth of the Scripture that does that for us all. But that is only the beginning of the Bible’s mission.

It teaches us what is true, and in this age where every person has their own opinion about everything, we need a God given guide to show us God's truth.

It helps correct our mistakes, and the alarming thing is that we can so easily go through life making the same mistake constantly, without realizing it's a mistake that may be ruining lives. The Bible read or listened to has this way of getting into our heads and revealing those mistakes to us.

It makes our lives whole again for it stands against the lies of the devil who attempts to convince us that we are still worthless, un-forgiven, un-loveable failures. Yet God's Word shares with our hearts a different story.

It trains us in the way we should be living every day for Jesus.

It is the manual for Christian living prepared especially by God for every one of His children, but like all manuals it is only effective if it is read, studied, turned to and listened to.

The challenge for us is not whether we accept the Bible as God's Word but whether we are valuing it, reading it, and studying it, because it is God's inspired Word.

To receive a gift from someone in the knowledge that they have put a lot of love and thought into a gift that has cost them greatly, and then to have to admit to them one day that we have hardly used it, would be hard. To admit the same thing to God about His precious Word would surely be unthinkable.

Read your Bible often. Study it with others. Cherish it. For the most precious gift God gives you other than the gift of His Son for your salvation, is the gift of His Word