

## Where Are The Boundary Stones?

A couple of years ago I had a garage/workshop built behind our house. It was a place to keep my Dad's pickup more than anything else. When we began the process, we started looking for the boundary markers to figure out exactly where our property line was on the east side. There are metal markers in the ground but we couldn't find them. We searched and found one on the back of the property, but even with a metal detector we never found the one on the front edge of the property. The boundary marker had disappeared.

The bible warns about people moving the boundary stones, the markers that indicate the boundary of someone's property. Proverbs warns, **“Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers.” Proverbs 22:28.** In fact, the law of Moses says, **“Cursed is the man who moves his neighbor's boundary stone.” Deuteronomy 27:17.**

You may have been in a dispute with a neighbor over property lines so you understand how important a boundary stone was in the bible. It defined and distinguished your property from your neighbors. It established ownership and boundaries. You knew not to go beyond your boundary stone because you would no longer be safe on your own property and would be subject to the laws of trespassing.

I want us to think about boundary stones this morning in a spiritual and social sense. I want to throw a couple of things at you as introduction so stay with me. Think about the markers, the boundary stones that have defined civil society in America. There were profound and yet simple principles of democracy, faith, free enterprise, common sense, common decency and morality, common definition of marriage and family that served as boundary stones in our society. It wasn't simply the power of these principles, it was the common belief held by most Americans that established these principles as boundary stones. The majority of citizens believed these things. You knew where the boundary stones were. You didn't have to wonder if the majority of Americans believed in God, believed in the bible, believed in democratic principles, believed that we could understand the world using reason and common sense, believed marriage was for life and marriage and family was the cornerstone of society. There was a consensus that this is how we understood life and society. This is how the world works. The boundary stones were in plain sight, but now it seems we can't find the boundary stones. Where are they and who moved the boundary stones?

There are so many contributing factors we can't possibly list them all, but let me give you some simple examples of things that moved the boundary stones in American culture.

Think of the influence of **Science and Medicine** on how we view the world. Big bang theory, evolution, the age of the universe, the discovery of the genetic code and dna, cloning, in vitro fertilization, all of these things have an affect on the way we view the world and our understanding of how the world works. When the church says "God meant for a man and woman to marry in order to procreate the human species", science answers "we don't need a married couple to do that. We can do that in a laboratory so you need to redefine marriage don't you?" Someone is moving the boundary stones!

Think of the influence of **Media: television, the internet and social media** on our life. Any new philosophy, theory and idea can be pitched to you and hundreds of millions of others at any time of the day or night and you get immediate feedback and opinions. Everyone weighs in and every opinion is supposed to be as valid as the next. Think how pervasive and invasive all of that information is upon our culture. For instance, I can preach a sermon outlining what the bible says about human sexuality. You have thirty five minutes of sermon to counter a literal barrage of opinions and influence from media of all kinds in our culture. You have a steady diet of images and information and lifestyle, contrary to God's word, but made mainstream by a world that used to be distant from us but is now brought into our homes and into our thoughts and minds by constant communication! Someone has moved the boundary stones.

Think of **Einstein's theory of relativity and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle**. I know nothing about physics, but these scientific theories were embraced by our culture and led to the conclusion that everything was relative, that the act of observing anything changes the thing observed. Consequently, uncertainty became the only fact that could be accepted as a fact. There is no absolute truth, only truth relative to the person who perceives it. That means the bible no longer can be considered truth. It is only true for the person who perceives it to be truth. Your truth and my truth aren't the same thing. Someone moved the boundary stones!

I could go on and on. The sixties brought the drug culture and raising our consciousness through drugs. Along with it came eastern meditation and influences of Buddhist spirituality. AA brought the idea of a higher power, "**God as we understand him or her to be.**" Someone moved the boundary stones.

The boundary stones have been moved and everything is called into question. **What can we believe? What is the ultimate authority for us? Where do we turn?** Understand this is not the first time this has happened. Occasionally you've heard me refer to the time in which we live as being a hinge period of time in history. Essentially every five hundred years in Christianity there has been a reconfiguration. A challenge comes that leads to a rethinking about what we believe and what will be used to determine correct belief and behavior.

Let me show you what I mean. Just a quick glimpse and if you want to read more about this kind of thing, I recommend a wonderful book, *The Great Emergence* by Phyllis Tickle. Approximately five hundred years after Christ's resurrection and ascension brings us to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the fall of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Dark Ages. Constantine had declared the empire Christian and you basically had a bunch of baptized pagans. This led to the rise of the monastic movement with a lot of true lovers of Christ isolating themselves in monasteries and convents. They became centers of learning and preserved the Scripture. Five hundred years later (1054) brings the church to what is called the Great Schism and the break between the Western and Eastern church. Five hundred years later (1517) comes what we call the Protestant Reformation and now, five hundred years later, we find ourselves in another hinge period, another time of reconfiguring the church and the Christian faith. Look around. The church is changing. The Christian faith is changing. Morality is changing and the consensus concerning morality, the consensus in our culture as to where the boundary stones are, that consensus has collapsed. Christianity is changing. What will it look like in 30 years?

In *The Great Emergence*, Phyllis Tickle wrote, **"Always, without fail, the thing that gets lost early in the process of reconfiguration is any clear and general understanding of who or what is to be used as the arbitrator of correct belief, action and control."** ...Phyllis Tickle In other words, who or what speaks with authority for the church to say, "this is what we believe and how we are to live"? We the church have to decide what the arbitrator of correct belief and action will be. We have to decide who or what we can trust to set the boundary markers! Five hundred years ago in the Great Reformation the answer was *Sola Scriptura*. Scripture sets the boundary stones.

I believe that Scripture is the answer for us again. But let me quickly point out what has happened with regard to reading the Scripture in the Protestant church. First of all, there have been a number of issues over the past 150 years that have caused the authority of the Scripture to

be questioned. The bible was used on both sides of the slavery issue. Then it was used to discriminate against women's place in society. Then we began to reread the Scripture regarding divorce and remarriage. "Surely God didn't mean for me to be unhappy." Then we reread it regarding abortion or same sex marriage or a host of other issues. As Protestants, we don't have a pope to tell us how to interpret the Scripture, we hold to the idea of the priesthood of the believer so ultimately everyone gets to interpret the Scripture for themselves, right? "This is how I see it. I don't think God cares about this...but I think he cares about that..." Part of the problem is, for all of us claiming to be "word churches," there isn't much of the word that gets preached or taught sometimes. Is this book authoritative? I believe it is.

This is the introduction to a sermon series that we will start in about four weeks. But I want to wrap up this little history lesson with why I believe the word of God must be the source of authority for us if church and Christianity is to survive this hinge period and all of the changes.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 2. If we are going to have the wisdom to set the boundary stones then we need to look somewhere besides the changing wisdom of men and of the world. We need to look to something eternal and constant. Look at what Paul tells us. **"We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words...But we have the mind of Christ."** 1 Corinthians 2:12-13, 16.

To understand what God has freely given us, the boundary stones, the truth of salvation and how we are to live this life, we need the wisdom of God, given to us by the Holy Spirit. But notice, Paul switches from emphasizing the wisdom the Holy Spirit gives us to this last verse, "we have the mind of Christ." Here is the truth for us – by the gift of the Holy Spirit we have the mind of Christ. And what does that mean? It means we have an understanding and knowledge of God the Father through the knowledge of the Son. ("If you have seen me you have seen the Father.") The Son was the incarnate Word of God. We know the Father through the Son and that means in part we know the Father through the Word of God.

How did Jesus know the Father? I know I'm speaking of a mystery here. There was a oneness shared between the Father and the incarnate Son that is beyond anything we can begin to

comprehend, but the bible does talk about Jesus growing. It implies he was learning, growing in knowledge. He was learning the Scripture.

Luke's gospel tells us concerning Jesus, **“And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him.” Luke 2:40.** Where did the wisdom come from? The bible says, **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Proverbs 9:10.** Jesus learned and grew in wisdom as he studied the word of God. We know he knew the Scripture. Remember as a boy when Jesus and his parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover and he stayed behind, unbeknownst to Mary and Joseph. They came back looking for him and found him in the temple courts in Jerusalem, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Luke's gospel tells us, **“Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.” Luke 2:47.** They were amazed at his understanding of the Scripture. We learn from Jesus that the key to wisdom, the key to understanding God the father, the key to understanding where the boundary markers are is found in knowing God's word.

In Luke 4, Jesus is tempted by the devil in the wilderness. How did he respond to the temptation of the enemy? **“It is written...”** Over and over Jesus responded, not with his own arguments or opinions, not with how he viewed the world, but rather how the Scripture informed his view and understanding of the world and of the kingdom and purposes of God.

Again in Luke 4, after the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus came back to the area around the Galilee. Notice what Luke tells us. **“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read.” Luke 4:16**

Notice Luke tells us it was Jesus' custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He learned the word of God and he taught the word of God. He was the guest rabbi that day. He stood up to read the Scripture from the prophet Isaiah and explained to the people, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus knew the plan and purpose of God, and his identity and purpose and mission was revealed in the word of God. Jesus knew it and now the people knew it as well. Listen to me: If the boundaries stones of truth and what was to be believed was found in the Scripture for Jesus, friends those boundary stones will be found there for us as well.

Remember on the day of the resurrection, two disciples were walking to the village called Emmaus when Jesus joined them on their journey. They were talking about the events of the

weekend, of Jesus' crucifixion and how they had hoped he was the Messiah. Jesus said to them, **“Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” Luke 24: 26-27.** If we want the wisdom that comes, not from the world but from having the mind of Christ, then we will study the Scriptures and find all that the Scripture says concerning Jesus – who he is, what he has done and all he has freely given to us. Without knowing the Scripture, we are left to the constantly moving boundary stones of our culture. The Scripture testifies of Jesus and Jesus testifies of the Scripture. This book is the source for us.

Look finally at Luke 24:44. Jesus said to his disciples, **“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.” Luke 24:44-45**

Our understanding of Scripture is based upon our understanding of Jesus Christ. We have the mind of Christ, Paul said. To read the Scripture means we read it as Jesus read it. We read the Old and New Testament through the lens of Jesus Christ because he is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets.

After Jesus opened the minds of the disciples so they could understand the Scriptures, Jesus said, **“This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” Luke 24:46-48**

Church, we too are witnesses of these things. We are witnesses that through Christ there is forgiveness of sins to all who will repent and believe upon his name. Salvation and forgiveness and eternal life is found in Christ alone. Now listen, if he alone can save and grant us forgiveness and eternal life, then he alone is the way the truth and the life. Luke said at Nazareth Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the place where Isaiah had written “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...” Jesus looked to the Scripture to announce truth and good news, not just to find stories about the past to inspire the crowd, but to proclaim a living truth for the people that day.

This book is alive. It is a living truth. It is the boundary stone for our lives. The wisdom of the world and of our culture will not see it, cannot see it, but this is the Living Word. Embrace it. Read it. Study it. Honor it. Live by it.

Jeff has challenged the youth to take their bibles to school with them and read it and be changed by it and to allow that living word to change someone else through them. How about if we accept the same challenge? Take your bible to work with you. Read it, be changed by it and allow this living word to change someone else through you. This is the only hope for us and for our society, for America. This is the only hope for the church, that we establish the boundary stones once again, based upon the revelation of Christ through his living Word! Without God's word as the authority for our lives and our faith we may be headed for another spiritual dark ages. Let's truly be people of this book! Not just saying we are people of the book but rather, let's read it and be changed by it! Let's commit ourselves to living according to the truth of God's word, regardless of the cost. It may prove to be an inconvenient truth, but it is the truth!