The B-I-B-L-E Sermon Series
Is the Bible Still Relevant?
November 8, 2026
Rev. Kory Wilcoxson

I have a confession to make. I never read "Beowulf." All apologies to Miss Cunningham, my high school English teacher, but she probably figured this out from my quiz answers. I'm sure it's a good read, but as a high school freshman, my attention was drawn to much more interesting things than a 1000-year-old book about a wolf named Beo. That is what it's about, right? I probably should have paid more attention in English class.

There are a lot of old books that are considered classics for good reasons. They are masterpieces, timeless stories. But do we turn to them for guidance on how to live our lives? Do we get relationship advice from "Romeo and Juliet?" Do we learn how to treat others from "The Scarlet Letter?" There's only one ancient book we turn to, sometimes daily, to hear a story that is as old as the hills yet as relevant as today's news. How can the Bible, written in a different time and place, in different languages, to a much different audience, continue to have such a profound influence in our lives?

Today we continue our sermon series on the Bible, asking hard questions like is it really true and what kind of authority it should have for us. Today, we're going to ask if the Bible is still relevant for us today. If we believe that the Bible was divinely inspired but humanly written, then we have to acknowledge that its pages are smudged with the fingerprints of history and its stories are saturated with the culture in which they were written, a culture in which slavery was accepted, women were often marginalized, warfare and conquest were common, and scientific and medical understanding was vastly different from ours. In other words, a culture about as far removed from ours as you can get. At yet, we still read the Bible today to hear this story and learn how to live our lives. Why? Wouldn't we be better served reading "Chicken Soup for the 21st Century Soul?" No, but with the Bible we have to do some bridge work.

A few years ago, I made my first trip to San Francisco and finally saw in person the iconic marvel we know as the Golden Gate Bridge. It's even more impressive in person than I had imagined. I took the journey from downtown San Fran, across the 1.7-mile structure, and into the Marin Headlands and the town of Sausalito. The bridge is a marvel for many reasons, but one of them is that the bridge starts in a bustling downtown metropolis and ends in the wild expanse of the Golden Gate Recreational Area.

Keeping the Bible relevant is like going across the Golden Gate Bridge. On one side you have our bustling modern world and culture; on the other side you have the Bible's very different Greek and Hebrew world and culture. And in between us is this huge bridge, spanning at least 20 centuries, across which must travel all our interpretations and understandings. Too often what we do is try to drag the Bible's words across the bridge into our world and apply them literally without doing any of the interpretive work. "If the Bible says it, then it must be right." Unfortunately, those words don't always travel well, and much of the meaning can get lost along the way. Instead, we have to be willing to travel across that bridge. We have to learn about the world in which the Bible was written, understand what its words meant to the people who first heard them, and then bring that understanding back into our world. The goal isn't to simply transplant ancient words into modern situations. It's to discover the deeper truth those words were trying to communicate and figure out what that truth means for us today.

I know a lot of people who believe we shouldn't mess with the words of the Bible. It sounds sacrilege to some to even think about taking the words of the Bible in any way other than face value. But thankfully, we have a pretty powerful example of someone who said, "I know the Bible tells you this, but I think it actually means something different today." Sounds a bit scandalous, doesn't it? Who is this vagabond who dares to tamper with the Holy word of God? Who is this rogue theologian who shows no regard for the sanctity of the Good Book? He's a woodworker named Yeshua from a remote town in the Middle East, but you may know him by his alias: Jesus Christ.

During the Sermon on the Mount, six different times Jesus takes a piece of Hebrew scripture and reinterprets it for his modern context. For example, in the book of Exodus, the law seeks to limit retaliation by saying, "But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise." That's nothing less than God's law, handed down to Charleton Heston himself! If anything in the Bible is timeless and unchanging, it should be that.

In Matthew, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also." Right there, Jesus sets the precedent for reinterpreting scripture for a current context. The rule of an eye for an eye was no longer applicable in Jesus' society, but rather than throw out the Bible as an antiquated rulebook that no longer applied, Jesus travels across the bridge to imaginatively reinterpret God's law so that it spoke a fresh word to his hearers, encouraging them not to retaliate but to respond to wrongdoing with generosity, grace, and love. He does this dozens of times in the gospels. Because of that, the Bible remained a living document for his hearers.

This precedent has been followed down through history. Theologians and biblical scholars have worked hard to figure out what word the Bible had to speak into their current context. There was never any belief on the part of the original authors that the Bible was meant to be this static document to be read literally for all eternity. But in the last hundred years, a system of belief has developed that is built upon the Bible being a rulebook with no errors or inconsistencies, rather than it being a love story about God and God's people. Buyt the more we try to make the Bible speak to us today without bringing it across that interpretive bridge, the more irrelevant it becomes. The more we try to make the Bible FIT our worldview, instead of letting it SHAPE our worldview, the more we are creating God in OUR image, not the other way around.

As soon as we try to thump the Bible as a black-and-white answer book to all this world's complex dilemmas, we lose all those people who live in the gray every day, the shaded nuances that call for a fresh interpretation that takes into consideration their real-world issues and the doubts they have. We have a neighbor here at Crestwood who is a great example of the challenge of keeping the Bible relevant. He's an evolutionary biologist. He's not a believer, and I would have to guess part of the reason is because what he studies in his work and what the Bible says don't match up for him. I love our conversations, and I've told him that we Christians believe God speaks to us through the Bible, but also through nature, through science, through our experiences. But still, to him, the Bible is completely irrelevant.

So how would you help someone like him see the Bible differently? It's not by asserting you're right and he's wrong, but so often, that's the stance the church takes. If we just shout loudly enough, people will realize we've got the answers. There are so many people like him, people who have been told the Bible says one thing, but who experience something completely

different. “Because the Bible says so” is no longer a valid answer when what the Bible says is used to promote hate or exclusion or an elitist attitude. Just because the Bible says it doesn’t automatically make it a relevant word for today. We have to do the bridge work.

Sometimes the Bible isn’t seen just as irrelevant, but as destructive. I’m in a conversation right now with someone struggling to understand how God could love him, because all he’s been taught growing up is that God condemns people who are like him. I’m trying to help him see that that story he’s been told isn’t the only version. There’s another story we can tell, a story of love and hope and acceptance. He’s been told that his existence violates the capital-T truth of the Bible. But there’s another truth we can offer, the truth of God’s grace and God’s image in each of us. The Bible is relevant in that it helps us find our story in the bigger picture of God’s story, and it speaks a word of hope to us.

In this age of consumerism, we have a story to tell about who we are, not what we have. In this era of racism and sexism and homophobia, we have a story to tell about a God who created every person in God's image, a God whose love extends beyond the boundaries we keep trying to draw. In this time of violence and despair, we have a story to tell about the Prince of Peace who gives us reason to have hope, a hope that is so incredible, so out of this world, that it just might be true.

We can’t tell that story if we insist that the Bible has to fit within certain parameters. We have to be willing to let scripture speak a new word to us in our world today, one that may challenge our previous assumptions. We have to be willing to wrestle with parts of the Bible that contradict our understanding of God. And we have to figure out what to do with the parts of the Bible which no longer have a relevant word to speak. Are we willing to admit that some of the passages in the Bible are no longer relevant for us, and actually may be doing more harm than good in our world today? When the Bible was written, God let God’s children tell God’s story in their language and culture. And now God wants God’s children of today to tell the story in our language, in a way that speaks a word of hope and comfort and welcome into our world. We are called to continue the conversation that scripture started using our tradition and reason and experience to inform that conversation. We are called to do bridge work.

It probably seems absurd to an outsider, how much time and attention we give to this ancient document. But what we know, and what we are compelled to share, is that this book contains truth and hope and power that goes beyond anything our world has to offer, that it tells the story that makes sense of all the other stories in our lives. Our challenge is to speak and live the Bible's story in a way that balances the timeless nature of God's word with the urgency of hearing a relevant word for this moment. That word is there, if we have ears to hear it, minds open enough to receive it, and the courage to live it. The Bible is still relevant. But it's up to us to keep doing the bridge work.