

Cracking the Code: DaVinci, Jesus and You
Today: The Bible, Conspiracies and the Truth
2 Peter 1:12-21

- I. We began two Sundays ago, by asking some questions and finding some answers.
 - A. The questions were prompted by *The DaVinci Code*, but they were questions that aren't limited to any single movie or any one book.
 - 1) What did Jesus believe about himself? Was he married?
 - 2) How did the Church begin? Do we know the truth or has the truth been twisted?
 - B. For followers of Jesus, these may seem like unimportant questions.
 - 1) But for those still seeking truth, the answers to questions like these make all the difference in the world.
 - 2) At least for that reason, they deserve honest answers.
 - C. Today we continue by taking a good look at the Bible.
 - 1) The Bible is essential the practice and truth of the Christian faith.
 - 2) Without it, we don't have much to go on aside from our own fanciful ideas and good intentions.
 - 3) So let's begin by examining the veracity (the truth) of the Bible.
- II. First, the Bible's integrity over time.
 - A. By the year 200, there was already a growing consensus about the four Gospels.
 - 1) Ireneaus (180) said, "the fourfold character of the Gospel canon had become for orthodox Christians one of the accepted facts of life."¹
 - 2) By that time, thousands of quotations from the four Gospels had appeared in the writings of the church fathers.²
 - B. There was also early consensus regarding the rest of the New Testament books.
 - 1) Origin had completed a list by about 230.
 - a) It included the four gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation.
 - b) He also said that Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, James, and Jude were under consideration by the church for inclusion.
 - 2) Several other early church writers had put similar lists together: Justin Martyr, Tatian, and Eusebius.³
 - 3) Around 170, there is a list of 22 out of the 27 books in the New Testament.⁴
 - C. The "official list" of books wasn't confirmed by the church until 393 at the Council of Hippo and 397 at the Council of Carthage.
 - 1) Also, there are two major branches of Christianity in the world.
 - 2) One in the east, based in Constantinople. The other in the West, based in Rome.
 - 3) The two branches of the church independently developed the canon of the New Testament and they agree in every single instance on the 27 books we have.
 - D. Are there other "Gospels" and "Biblical books?"
 - 1) The Dead Sea Scrolls – contain at least fragments of every Old Testament book except Esther (and a complete copy of Isaiah).
 - a) Rather than support claims that the Bible has significantly changed over time – they show exactly the opposite.
 - b) They are identical in every significant way⁵

- 2) The Nag Hammadi library (250/350) contains 52 Gnostic texts uncovered in the 1940's near nag hammadi Egypt.
 - a) Despite claims to the contrary, these are not the "earliest Christian records."
 - b) The earliest is "the Gospel of Thomas" from 140, but that is 50 years after the last New Testament book is usually dated.
 - c) Most of the Nag Hammadi library is dated 200-390.⁶
- 3) Most of these books were latecomers to the debate about inclusion in the Bible.
 - a) They were excluded because their claims to apostolic connection were obviously false.
 - b) And because their teachings varied so dramatically from the teaching of the widely accepted books.

III. Next, what can we say about the Bible's reliability today?

A. The Bible stands the test of history and archaeology.

- 1) The New Testament books have always been public and widely used.
 - a) Given that, it would be impossible to change the contents of the book without having variant copies floating around.
 - b) It would be like trying to change the Declaration of Independence and hoping that no one notices.
- 2) We have discovered entire manuscripts of most New Testament books and parts of others.
 - a) We can get to less than a hundred years after Jesus' death with some of the manuscripts we have.
 - b) We have over 5600 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament available to study.
 - c) They are virtually the same.⁷

B. The Bible stands the test of textual evidence.

- 1) We can get as close to Jesus' life as death as 100 years.
 - a) There is a piece of the Gospel of John that has been dated as early as 115.
 - b) Textually speaking that's amazingly close and gives the record more authenticity.⁸
 - c) That's closer than we can get to the lives of Plato, Aristotle, and Tacitus. No one seriously questions those texts.⁹
- 2) The New Testament's accuracy is increasingly confirmed by new archaeological discoveries.
 - a) The Pool of Bethesda, Jacob's Well, the reign of Belshazzar, the existence of the Hittites – have all been confirmed by recent discoveries and verify the Biblical information
 - b) These and other extra-biblical verifications give us confidence that the people, places, and events of the Bible are true.

IV. Now let's turn our attention to the bigger picture.

A. The DaVinci Code and other books/movies like it hinge on a great cover-up.

- 1) The idea that the truth is only known to a select few with the knowledge to uncover it.
- 2) This fits the Gnostic view of "secret knowledge" only given to a small group.
- 3) And that there is a great conspiracy to keep the world at large from knowing the truth.

- B. Even more important (in my view) than these specific questions we've been dealing with over the last few weeks is this question of conspiracy.
 - C. So today, I'm going to break the rules and let you in on three of the most important "secrets" of the conspiracy.
- V. The conspiracy is ...
- A. God doesn't do conspiracies.
 - 1) God doesn't want His mercy, His grace, His love for you kept secret.
 - a) He wants everyone to of it.
 - b) That's why "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." {Psalm 19:1}
 - 2) It's not secret knowledge that only a few will possess – God wants everyone to find out.
 - a) "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." {2 Peter 2:9}
 - b) He won't take the chance that you might miss out.
 - B. God does surprises, not secrets.
 - 1) A secret is something you never tell.
 - 2) A surprise is something you find out about at just the right time.
 - a) A surprise is your birthday.
 - b) A surprise a God that cares about you even though you didn't do anything to deserve it.
 - c) Jesus is a surprise. Salvation is a surprise. Redemption is a surprise.
 - d) And it comes at just the right time.
 - C. The surprise is - it's all about God's grace!
 - 1) In spite of the fact that we don't deserve it, don't get, didn't even know it was coming – God reaches out to us.
 - 2) God reaches out to us – before we even knew His name.
 - 3) Even though we didn't know Him, didn't care – He sent Jesus to die for our sin.
 - 4) He sent Jesus to die for our sin so that we could be close to him and really understand what life is all about.
 - 5) It's not a secret.
 - a) There's no conspiracy.
 - b) There's no cover-up.
 - c) There's no code to crack..
 - 6) It's just all about Jesus.
 - a) God's grace in Jesus.
 - b) It's that obvious, that unexpected, and that much of a surprise.

¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p.225. Another quote of interest: "the four gospels known to us were accepted to the exclusion of others from the early part of the second century."

² This number is quoted by Norman Geisler in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Books), p.529-530.

³ For a more detailed discussion of the formation of the New Testament canon, see *Introduction to the Canon* by Daniel J. Harrington in *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume 1*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p.7f.

⁴ A copy of this list (known as the Muratorian Fragment) lists only Luke and John among the Gospels, but calls them the third and fourth Gospels. You could infer that the list affirms 24 out of the 27 books of the New Testament if you include Matthew and Mark, the first and second Gospels.

⁵ There are some cases where there are differences in the two texts, but they fall under the general category of "scribal errors:" spelling mistakes, words that are transposed, etc.

⁶ Willis Barnstone, ed. *The Other Bible* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1984).

⁷ Walter Martin, *Essential Christianity* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1980), p. 19. Martin estimates that a comparison of New Testament documents would produce perhaps as little as one-half of one percent deviation in the text.

⁸ "The interval between the dates of the original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be negligible. F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), p. 20.

⁹ The closest we can get for these authors is 900-1300 years. See F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, p. 14.