

## People of the Book!

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Theme: The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament tell the God-inspired story of salvation in Jesus Christ and is the reality upon which we build our life.

Text: II Timothy 3:1-17

Series: Live With the End in Mind

We trace our roots as a church to the Protestant Reformation in the early 1500's. Our core doctrine has a direct line right back to the rediscoveries made by a man named Martin Luther. As an Augustinian monk he lived in terror of a holy God whose very wrath toward sin seemed to Luther to be insupportable. Luther attempted to placate a demanding God. Luther wrote of his own devotion, "I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, readings and other work." But then a gracious light relieved his torment. He discovered what has become our cardinal doctrine—justification by faith alone. In Luther words, "Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God makes us right by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise." Far from God being the One who could never be pleased, God himself through Christ had paid the guilt of our sin. By faith we receive the gift of forgiveness.

But dare I say, running a close second to justification by faith, Luther redirected us to the Scripture as the final authority of the church. Luther was in hand to hand combat with the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. He had the audacity to teach that the Councils of the Church and even the Pope were subject to error. A trial ensued. The nimble minded Johan Van Eck represented the Catholic Church and declared that Luther's errors about justification by faith were the same as the Check heretic Jan Hus who had been martyred a century earlier. Luther was excommunicated by issue of a Papal Bull. Luther in his usual bombastic fashion burned the papers. This led to a final confrontation where Van Eck demanded that Luther recant his teaching. When the moment of truth came, Luther declared the following statement about Scripture which has reverberated through the corridors of history, "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or evident reason, for I believe neither in the Pope nor councils alone, since it is established that they have erred and contradicted themselves. I am the prisoner of the Scriptures cited by me and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God. I neither can nor will recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

I can't think of a better lead-in to our text of Scripture this morning, which concludes with a statement about the origin and the purpose of Scripture. How did Luther come to have unshakeable confidence in the word of God and raise it to the supreme authority? Certainly it was in part because of what Scripture

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claims about itself. Our focus this morning will be primarily on verses 16, 17—“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” But let us read II Timothy 3:1-17 so that we can put these two verses in context.

### Read II Timothy 3:1-17

Before we go directly to the end of the chapter, let me reflect briefly on the context that Timothy finds himself. In v. 1-9 Paul describes the perilous times in which they live. Note in v. 1 that Paul calls these “the last days.” “There will be terrible times in the last days.” In common usage today that phrase “last days” generally refers to a period of time immediately preceding the return of Christ. This understanding of the “last days” has been popularized in the series of 12 novels known as *Left Behind* book series that describes the period called the Great Tribulation leading up to the second coming of Christ. Yet Paul does not speak of the “last days” as some future cataclysmic period preceding the end. When the New Testament uses that phrase it refers to the present age ushered in by Jesus Christ. The writer to the Hebrews begins his letter, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb. 1:1, 2a). When Peter stood up to speak at Pentecost witnessing to the coming of the Holy Spirit, he quoted the prophet Joel, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people” (Acts 2:17). According to Paul, we have been in the last days for almost 2000 years, in the way the Bible uses this phrase.

In other words, Paul was describing the time in which Timothy lived, not some future era. These last days were “terrible” times. The word here could be also translated “stressful” or “fierce”. In fact, it is the same word used to describe two demon-possessed men in Matthew 8 who were so violent that “no one could pass that way.” In v. 2-4 Paul goes on to list 19 adjectives as characteristics beginning with “lovers of self” and concluding with “rather than lovers of God.” Not all times or seasons are to this terrible degree, but there are periods when this appears to be an apt description.

When I first started reading Scripture seriously while in college about 35 years ago, I remember thinking, this pagan era must have been an awful time. I had a difficult time making the connection between this description and the world in which I lived. Now when I read it seems to be an apt description of contemporary life.

How do we experience our world today? We live at a time of *the clash of the civilizations* to borrow Samuel Huntington’s phrase. One front of that battle that Huntington predicted in his mid-90’s book was between radical Islam and

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Western civilization that at least has its roots in Christendom. Within our own society there is a *clash of orthodoxies* to borrow another book title by Robert George, a law professor at Princeton University. This clash is between what he calls the orthodoxy of secularism and the orthodoxy of those who believe in revealed truth rooted in the Judeo-Christian worldview.

How do we experience time of tension? My sense is that diligent Christian parents today feel like they live defended against toxic culture. Parents feel as if they must constantly be vigilant to fend off the negative influences of popular culture. I was watching the NBA playoffs Sunday evening and noticed a number of times an advertisement for a Fall series on ABC entitled "Wife-Swap". This is portrayed as the ultimate TV reality show. This is just one point of stress we feel when we are trying to raise our children in a Christlike fashion.

Paul twice draws a contrast to this pagan culture for Timothy, "**You, however, know all about my teaching...But as for you, continue in what you have learned...**" (v. 10, 14) Paul leads Timothy to the place, like Luther, on which he is to take his stand. "**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**" Let's look at these verses under two headings: first, the origin or source of Scripture, second, the purpose of Scripture.

### Origin or Source of Scripture

"**All Scripture is God-breathed...**" Though Paul is referring here certainly to what we call the Old Testament, I am going to make an assumption that this description refers to what we now know as the New Testament as well. "God-breathed" is a literal translation of the Greek text here. *Theo-pneustos*. *Theos* is God and *pneustos* is wind, spirit or breath. Most translations would read, "**All Scripture is inspired of God.**" I prefer all Scripture is expired by God. The focus here is on the source or origin of Scripture, not on the means of transmission.

Paul is not concerned to tell us about the mechanics of how this Scripture came into existence. The parallel analogy that comes to mind regarding the focus on source is the Virgin Birth. God chose a young virgin by the name of Mary to be the instrument through which God became man in Jesus Christ. We are not told the mechanics of the conception of Mary by the Holy Spirit. We need not speculate about the biology of it all. The source of Jesus Christ is the divine Spirit that gave birth to the perfect God-man. Just so, we have in God's word through human instrumentality the truth that God wanted to preserve.

I could wax eloquent this morning from lofty heights about the inspiration of Scripture and never truly land in the real world in which we exist. But for

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many of us, our experience of Scripture may be something less than the lofty picture I have described.

1. Some of us view Scripture, not so much as an inspired book, but **an inspiring book**. By that I mean, we read it to get a nugget for the day on which we live. We find the Scripture to be morsels of wisdom for the soul. I take my daily vitamin and my daily dose of Scripture. I don't want to make light of this, for it is a great habit and good place to start.

Yet there is a difference between the Bible being inspiring and the Bible being inspired. We might view the inspiration of Scripture as no different than human beings who are inspired to create an artistic masterpiece. Certainly Handel was inspired when he composed the "Hallelujah Chorus" (Handel himself said, "he saw the heavens open", when composing this piece). Though there are inspiring works which fill our souls with beauty, and enrich our lives, the Scripture of the Old and New Testament are unique among the writings of this world. For in Scripture, we encounter the accurate witness to the one True, Triune God who has revealed Himself in the unfolding story of humanity.

2. Some of us have come to experience the Scripture **as a rule book**. The Scripture may have been in our experience, reduced to a set of principles to live by, or even worse a set of restrictions, the "thou shall nots." The God that comes through this caricature is like a Celestial Scrooge who looks around for people having a good time, and says, "Cut that out." But far from the Bible being a rule book, it is a love story of God pursuing humanity even while in full flight from Him. God is the suitor wooing his lost creation to Himself. I will let you in on a secret—the Lord gets His bride in the end--us.

3. Some of us have concluded that the Bible is an **irrelevant book**. After all how can anyone put any stock in a book that has stories about the parting of the Red Sea or the deliverance of people from demons. This ancient text is a relic from a by-gone era when people didn't know any better than believe in demons or attribute healings to miracles. Yet in our age of sophistication, we have drunk the cool-aid of modern culture with its naturalistic perspective and have killed our souls in the process. In the scientific world of a closed universe, we say, there must be a natural explanation, for all phenomena must have an understandable cause. Certainly, there is a clash of worldviews, for the Scripture does assume a supernatural belief that God has broken into the natural world in Jesus Christ, and that history, is in fact, His story.

4. Finally, for many the Bible is a **difficult book**. Let's face it Scripture is set in a Near Eastern world of thousands of years ago. It is a world apart from us. To get into Scripture means to dive into a culture that appears primitive and barbaric, is agricultural and unmechanized. We might think, what does that world have to do

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with the one I live in today? In fact, the Bible is timeless and cuts across all cultures. The nature of human beings and the issues they dealt with in daily life are remarkably unchanged, and the God they encountered is the same God we encounter, because he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Mark Twain said it best, "It is not the things in Scripture that I don't understand that bother me, it is the things that I do understand that bother me."

Thankfully we live in a day with myriads of modern translations into our vernacular that has made Scripture readable for the common person. So we do affirm that "All Scripture is God-breathed"...and because it is God-breathed, because of its unique origin or source..."it is useful for" four things: Teaching, Rebuking, Correcting, and Training in righteousness.

### Purpose of Scripture

These four purposes of Scripture fall nicely into two categories: The first two characteristics of teaching and rebuking relate to *creeds or doctrine*; whereas the second two: correcting and training in righteousness refer to *conduct*.

**1. Teaching:** Paul tells us the purpose of Scripture in v. 15. For what purpose is it inspired? Paul writes Timothy, "how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ." For what reason do we read the Bible? We read it because it paints a picture of reality of God's pursuit of lost humanity culminating and pointing to Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself affirmed this purpose. After his resurrection Jesus joined two of his followers on the road to Emmaus who did not recognize him in his resurrected state. They began to speak of the events of the days, the rumors about how Jesus had died and the reports that he was now alive. In response to their doubts about his resurrection, Jesus said, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 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 24:25-27)

Scripture is profitable for teaching. It create a coherent picture of reality; the way things really are. It answers the five basic world view questions:

**1. What is the purpose of life?** To be invited into the love life of the triune God through a relationship with Jesus Christ. We were made for relationship with God and each other.

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2. **Who is man?** We are fundamentally image bearers. We bear the mark of God upon us as eternal beings of infinite value to God and of qualitatively more significance than any other aspect of creation.

3. **What is salvation?** It is to be redeemed from the guilt of our sin before a holy God who put forth Jesus as the substitute to pay the price for us. It is then to be recreated into the true likeness of God as people in Jesus Christ.

4. **How do you explain evil in the world?** There is a stain on the human heart called sin that comes as a result of our rebellion against our Creator. We also have an archenemy, named Satan, who is the rival to God. How else can we explain the power of demonic depots and the blindness of humanity than to posit the reality of a supernatural personified evil.

5. **Where is all history going?** History or time as we know it will end in the consummation of life in the return of Jesus Christ who pulls down the curtain on history.

Larry Richards sums it up, "That is in the word of God, the Spirit of God has revealed the true nature of the world we live in, the true nature of man and of God, the ultimate consummation of history, the pattern of relationships and responses to God and to life which corresponds with the way things truly are."

We frankly live at a time when we desperately need to systematically be taught the truth of the word of God. The ignorance of the Bible is startling, especially when we think about what we claim it to be. The pollster George Gallup has written, "The church of America faces no greater challenge as we approach the 21<sup>st</sup> century (and here we are) than overcoming biblical illiteracy, and the prospects for doing so are formidable because the stark fact is, many Christians don't know what they believe and why. Our faith is not rooted in Scripture. We revere the Bible, but we don't read it." Here are some answers from tests from an a high school Bible as literature class: "Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers." "The four horsemen appeared on the Acropolis." "The New Testament gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luther, and John." Question: "What was Golgotha?" Answer: "Golgotha was the name of the giant who slew the apostle David."

There was a time when you could make allusion to David and Goliath, Jonah, etc. and people would have an immediate knowledge of these biblical figures. It was a generation ago that prophets like Elton Trueblood and Francis Schaeffer were predicting that we were one generation away from the loss of our cultural memory of Christianity and the Bible. We are that generation. One night Jay Leno did his man on the street interviews on biblical knowledge. He stuck a microphone in the face of two college students and asked, "Name one of the 10

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commandments." With a quizzical and blank look they said, "Freedom of speech?" To another young man he asked, "Who according to the Bible was eaten by a whale?" The student's face lit up with excitement, "I know, I know, Pinocchio!"

The Scripture is useful for teaching, and we need to rediscover it as our basic text. We need to cover it systematically and consecutively to rebuild the foundation of our knowledge.

2. The Scripture is useful for...*rebuking*. The primary focus here is to show someone their error or to correct false teaching. Is what is taught consistent with Scripture?

This is best illustrated with a true story. A couple had decided during the season of Advent to take their four sons to different churches so they could experience the varied denominational traditions. One Sunday the family of 6 settled into the last row of a beautiful stone church. They had observed the processions, anthems and liturgy in full regalia, and then it came time for the sermon. The preacher of the morning stated his belief that God had probably asked many different women to receive the Christ child into their womb but had been turned down. So when Gabriel found Mary and she said yes, he was quite pleased, the preacher said. The youngest of the four boys, who had very few unexpressed thoughts, blurted out so loudly that the last person in the distant choir could not have missed his declaration, "Where's he find *that* in the Bible?" That, my friends, is a rebuke.

Timothy is being asked to bring to light, expose, set forth, and convict of the error of false teaching. In writing to Titus Paul says that a teacher is one who not only "can encourage others by sound doctrine", but also "refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:9)

3. The Scripture is useful for...*correcting*. This work means restoration, reestablishment, or straightening up. If the first two characteristics relate to truth or creed, these next two are about conduct. Correcting has to do with being set on the right path. For example, the latter part of Ephesians 4 gives a whole series of course corrections around the image of what are to be put off and then put on in its place. In Ephesians 4:29, 30, Paul writes, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (Eph. 4:29, 30)

If these verses served as a basis for a personal moral inventory, what kind of correction would be brought to our tongues? I personally would have to ask myself the following questions: am I quick to criticize; do I sow discord; do I run others down in their absence; is it easy for me to pile on my complaints when

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others start down that path. What if I spoke only to build others up, would I be able to speak at all? The Scripture can be incisive in cutting us straight to the heart and setting us on the right path. Correcting.

4. The Scripture is useful for...*training in righteousness*. I have known many people who have great knowledge of the Bible, but that knowledge has not yielded a Christ-scented life. Note the goal here is not knowledge for knowledge sake. It isn't about the ability to argue doctrine or to impress others about Bible content. It is to live a life shaped by the word.

The goal of Scripture according to Paul is "so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Note Paul doesn't say that the purpose of Scripture is that when we get to heaven we can get 100 on the bible entrance exam. We are to be the kind of people transformed from the inside out so that goodness flows like an unceasing stream.

I could not help but think as I was putting together this message about the beginning of my journey with Scripture. I was not raised in a home where the Bible was central. I don't ever remember being encouraged to read it. I did not get involved in the church until my last year of high school at age 17. Off to college I went with limited biblical knowledge. I have embarrassing recollections of being in bible studies, but not being able to find the passage to which we were to turn. Turn to Nehemiah, someone would say, and I would catch a glance out of the corner of my eye to see if someone was turning to the first or the last half of the book. For years I thought I and II Hesitations were books in the Bible.

To overcome this embarrassment I decided I would commit myself to reading the Bible 20 minutes a day before my first class. I just needed to get familiar with the territory and the only way to do that was read it. I remember the first time I made a connection between themes in different parts of the Bible. I had read the book of Romans, and had moved on to the book of Galatians. As I read I noted that Romans talked about justification by faith in Jesus Christ, and there it was again in the book of Galatians. How exhilarating! I am starting to see how this is put together.

I don't care if you are 16 or 65 it is never too late to engage in the biblical adventure. Remember what the Bible is: **B**asic **I**nstruction **B**efore **L**eaving **E**arth. You are still here. Dig in.