

Manuscript — The Power of God's Word
2 Tim 3:12-17

Intro

Scripture Reading — 2 Tim 3:12-17

“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Opening prayer

Opening illustration — Millennium Tower

There's a skyscraper in downtown San Francisco known as the Millennium Tower that's been in the news the past few years. The reason is, the foundation of this building has been slowly sinking into the earth below it. As of now the building has sunk around 17 inches down into the earth at its lowest point and is tilted about 14 inches to the Northwest. This tower is full of multi-million dollar condos and, safe to say, people are pretty upset. There's a video out there of one homeowner putting a golf ball in her living room only to have the ball veer to the left and end up in one corner of the room. The HOA & city have sued the developer now, the developer is trying to figure out how to fix it...it's a big mess.

This unfortunate turn of events really serves to highlight something we all know...the importance of foundations. If the foundation of whatever you're building, home, office, toolshed, billion dollar skyscraper, is off at all, it leads to huge problems for the overall structure.

And the reason I bring this story up right now about foundations is really two-fold. The first is that, as we begin the new year and new decade, we're doing something we try to do each year together — return to our foundations. As we begin the new year we want to spend some time lingering over some of those things that are foundational to us here at City Life. So these next few weeks we're going to be thinking through some issues that are at the core of who we are and what we do, a time of reflection to send us out into 2020 on the proper footing together as a body. So that's the first reason, we're thinking about foundations for the next 4 weeks or so.

And the second reason this story seems apropos to me is what we're going to be talking about today in particular. What better way to begin the new year then to pause and collectively consider the document we're commended to build our entire lives around — God's holy word. The Bible. We're thinking about this book today. What it means. Why it's important. And why it's one of the most precious gifts you have in your life.

State thesis/main points

And so we begin by jumping headlong into God's words to us here in 2 Timothy 3 that we just heard read. And in them, we'll see that since God has saved us by his True Word, we ought to center our lives around its incredible authority and power.

Specifically, we'll see three things this morning:

Scripture is supreme
Scripture is sufficient
Scripture is saving

Scripture is supreme
Scripture is sufficient
Scripture is saving

Transition: let's begin by looking to our first point: Scripture is supreme.

Scripture is Supreme
Context
Encouragement at the end of Paul's life

As we're kind of parachuting into the book of 2 Timothy right now, it's important to take just a moment and situate ourselves to what's going on in this letter. The apostle Paul is writing now to one of his disciples, Timothy, who's pastoring the church in Ephesus. Paul himself is actually very near to the end of his life and is passing along his final exhortations, as it were, or final encouragements, to young Timothy before he dies.

And so Paul is encouraging Timothy here to persevere and remain steadfast, even in the midst of persecution which will come to all those who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus. And the primary way Paul encourages Timothy throughout the letter is by reminding of the important things. Don't forget what's most important. Don't forget what's true; that is, don't forget the powerful gospel of grace which you heard from me. Remember God's Word.

Coach/mentor illustration (short)

If you've ever coached a sport or been coached by someone, and it's just about time to go play the game, or go compete in the meet, or go give the presentation, the mentor or coach is looking to give their mentee a reminder of what's most important, parting instruction. This is what's happening here. And Paul is telling Timothy, remember the Word.

Authority
Two reasons for Timothy to remember the Word

So that's our context, final encouragements from Paul to his child in the faith as he prepares to depart — and he tells Timothy to remember the Word. And it's interesting that there are two reasons Paul gives as to why Timothy should remember the Word, and they're related.

Look at vv. 14-15 again with me:

2 Tim 3:14-15, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

The first reason that Timothy should remember the word is the lives of those who spoke/taught it to him. The evidence of the Word's importance is seen in the godly character of those who brought it to him, that's in v. 14.

Authority because they're God's words

And in v. 15, the second reason given is the great power/authority of God's word. It's able to make you wise unto salvation...why? Because, v. 16:

2 Tim 3:16, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,"

Why is Scripture so important that it's Paul's parting emphasis to his beloved disciple Timothy? Because it's God's very words. All Scripture is God-breathed...expelled from the mouth of God. The Scriptures that we have here, that you hold in your hand (or on your phone maybe, I guess) are very words of the Creator of the universe given and preserved for you. And, as the very words of God, the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, stand as the supreme and ultimate authority in our lives. They tell us the standard, they stand as the rubric by which our lives, our feelings, our knowledge, is tested. As one 17th century statement of faith puts it,

"The authority of the Holy Scripture...dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God."

What's your authority?
Do you resist authority?

There are a couple questions for us to think about here before we move on. The first is, how do you feel about authority? Or rather, how do you feel about an authority that comes from outside of yourself? Do you chafe at the idea? Does it feel off to you? Does it feel wrong to be normed or countered by something outside of you? One woman, processing her own life, wrote the following:

It was startling to me when I was first presented with this concept, because up to that point it did seem like others had an authority or power over me or a part of me or my life. It felt certain that they were right that they had a say in my life, my choices. Of course. Duh. Parents, teachers, coaches, bosses, pastors...the list goes on. And then that moment of really thinking about what it means. Wait. What??? No! You're not the boss of me! So, what? That means... what? I am? Yeah! I am! I'm the creator of my life. I am sovereign. I am not a victim. I say. I choose. I create. I reap what I sow. Rewards and lessons. I AM THAT I AM!

What a clear distillation of how some of us so often feel. But this is not the way (to reverse the Mandalorian mantra). You'll never understand Christianity, and never flourish as a person, unless you can come to grips with an authority that lies outside you. To resist and run from this idea will inevitably lead to driving the car of your life into the ground...to destruction. We were made to live under the loving rule of God — to hear from him how we've been made to live and flourish.

Do you see the Bible as having authority?

The second question to ask yourself is, even if you're mentally ok with the idea of God having authority over you, do you see the Bible as one way God exercises that authority? In other words, do you see the Bible — its contents and promises and commands — as being the very words of a sovereign king coming to you? Or do you functionally behave as if you can pick and choose which parts to listen to or not? To conform to or not? To sit under or not? We'll come back to these in a few minutes.

Transition: that's the first thing that's clear from our text this morning: Scripture is supreme. It is the very breathed-out Word of God to us and, as such, stands as the unquestioned rubric for truth. The next thing we want to look at is that Scripture is sufficient.

Scripture is Sufficient
Profitable — vv. 16-17

Look again at vv. 16-17 with me:

2 Tim 3:16-17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

All Scripture — God-breathed-out words — is profitable. For what?
Sufficient for thought and deed

Four things. For teaching, a word that here has conceptions of belief or thinking — teaching you what to think; for reproof, correction of errant thinking or belief. For correction -- a word referring to errant actions or behaviors. And finally for training in righteousness — that is, right conduct. Did you notice that? The first two words highlight Scripture’s usefulness with respect to our thoughts — training us in what’s right and reproving us with respect to what’s wrong — and the second two words have to do with our behavior or our outward actions — correcting what’s wrong and training us in what’s right. The result is that we have everything we need to be complete and equipped for a life following after Christ, in thought and deed. In other words, we could say that Scripture is sufficient, God has graciously given us everything we need.

Complete — nothing left out
Nothing left out

There are 2 major implications of this, the truth that God’s Word has provided everything we need to be complete. The first is that nothing has been left out of God’s Word that is necessary with respect to our belief in God and what he requires of us. We shouldn’t be seeking another word from the Lord, we shouldn’t be on the lookout for another holy book, we shouldn’t be wishing we had a “better” or “more complete” revelation. God has so intentionally crafted, produced, and preserved his Word so as to give us everything we need in terms of Divine revelation here.

Your situation isn’t a surprise to God

I remember in High School I was in church one Sunday and, I don’t remember what text the pastor was preaching from, but I remember he was talking about marriage and how he was counseling a couple who was going through a really tough time and the husband wanted a divorce. And there were no biblical grounds for divorce, but the husband, in his own selfishness and sinfulness, was saying something to the effect of “I just can’t believe God would want me to stay in this marriage.” And the pastor’s response to him that he shared in his sermon struck me and always stayed with me. He looked at this man and said, “At what point did you start to believe that God was unaware of your particular situation and marriage when he was inspiring Scripture?” That is, do you really think that, as God was producing his holy, inspired, inerrant Word to his people — once for all delivering the faith to his church, as the book of Jude puts it — do you really think that God was unaware of what you would go through in the future when he laid out the biblical instruction as to what marriage is, how it’s to function, and the qualifications for permitted divorce?

And that always struck me, because I think we all feel the way this husband in a difficult marriage felt — even if not specifically with respect to our marriage, but whatever struggles we face. When everything within us feels like something is right or ok or permitted to do...but then the Bible speaks to the contrary. We can implicitly, without realizing it, begin to think that God’s

Word is not sufficient, in some way God didn't really foresee the situation I'd be going through right now when he inspired his Word and gave it to his people. But we all do it and this, in effect, puts ourselves as the ultimate authority in our lives. It's not God's Word to us that has the final say, but what I feel is important. That's the first major implication, everything we need to be complete with respect to the Christian faith and practice is found in God's Word.

Complete — everything important

The second major implication of Scripture's sufficiency all that God has put in his Word is important. How much of Scripture is the breathed-out Word of God? All of it according to v. 16. The sufficiency of Scripture keeps us from looking at this book — written thousands of years ago, in cultures and societies very different from ours — it keeps us from biting on the temptation that says "It's not relevant." Or at least "this part isn't relevant anymore." To say this is to blatantly go against what the Bible itself says, to say that some of the words of God are important, but some aren't so much is a dangerous and ultimately wicked road to take.

Transition: So Scripture is supreme, as God's Word it's our ultimate authority, and Scripture is sufficient, nothing is left out that we need and nothing in here that's not important. Let's turn now to our third and final point, Scripture is saving.

Scripture is Saving

In light of solas, what does this mean?

What do I mean by this, Scripture is saving? Here at City Life we are a protestant church, meaning we're children of the protestant reformation of the 16th & 17th centuries. And central to that movement was the recovery of certain doctrines known as the solas. Sola meaning "alone" in Latin. And some of those solas are salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That's what we believe to be the faithful teaching of what the Bible says about how we are saved. So if that's true, if we're really saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone...then what do I mean by saying Scripture is saving?

Access to salvation through God's Word

Look at v. 14 again with me:

2 Tim 3:14-15, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

We are, in fact, saved, gloriously, completely, and finally, by grace alone (not because of our intrinsic worth), through faith alone (apart from any good works on our part), in Christ alone (not by or through any other person), to the glory of God alone (as he displays his beauty in the salvation of undeserving sinners). This is a shorthand distillation of the truths of the reformation that people literally died for. And what's important to note here is that the way that we have access to them, the way that this great salvation is brought to us, that we know who God is, what he requires of us, and what he's done for us, is through the living and abiding and active Word of God that you and I hold in our hands right now. This is why I say Scripture is saving, because it's here that we see God — which is to say it's here that we see his face in Jesus Christ.

As Jesus says in Luke 24:

Luk 24:44-47, "Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the

Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations...”

Or later in the opening to the book of Hebrews, which we looked at with Jonathan a couple weeks ago,

Heb 1:1-3, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,”

God has given final, full, and firm revelation through his Son. You see Scripture is the supreme authority for our lives, it is sufficient for everything we need for life and godliness, and it is saving because the point of this book is to display God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ. It’s not a book simply about guidelines for how to live your life wisely. It’s not a manual for what you need to do and not do to make yourself acceptable to God. It’s a book that shouts and brings salvation...it enlivens faith by the proclamation of Christ Jesus.

Implication # 1 — this book is how you get God

There are two implications to this we need to think about. The first is that this book is how you get God. This is how God set it up. This is how he’s decided to communicate himself to his people. There’s no looking for God apart from this word. Not that we can’t see and experience God in ways that aren’t directly just us reading the Bible — not at all! We can see God’s glory and beauty in a sunset or a good film or towering mountain or the joy of a true and pure friendship. These all testify to the Creator...but they’re not the same as his word. They don’t communicate something apart from his word. The feeling you get after an awesome time of prayer or reflection or after a good meal can never counter this word or run contrary to it. The main way you and I get God is through his word.

Implication # 2 — This word is powerful...it’s how others get God too

The second implication of the supreme, sufficient, and saving power of God’s word, is with respect to mission. As we reach out to others, as we seek to meet others doubts or our own doubts about the Christian faith, we may begin to think that what we truly need are a set of answers. A set of arguments. How can you say that Jesus is the only way to fullness? Here, let me give you my argument. Here’s why Christianity isn’t a bane to one’s gender and sexuality, but rather the key to true beauty. These arguments are good and necessary and absolutely important — in fact, in the coming weeks we’ll be devoting an entire sermon series to addressing such questions and issues that we and others deal with as we question the Christian faith.

But we can’t forget the mind-boggling power of the word of God. Arguments don’t change hearts, God does by his Spirit. And his Spirit is communicated, received, apprehended, given to us in the living and active word of God.

As God says in Isa 55:

Isa 55:11, “so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

The Word of God changes what it touches by the power of the Spirit. It shows us Jesus and it powerfully works to melt hearts of stone, to bring flowers from barren land. The Bible is powerful in our lives and it's powerful in the lives of others.

Conclusion
Concluding plea

And so let's prize this book. Let's be grateful for it. Let's pour over it and treasure its contents in our hearts and look to it for answers and let it shape our questions be the rubric of our behavior. Not because we worship a book...but because we have a great and mighty King who speaks to us clearly and powerfully and particularly and finally in a book — this book.

Since God has saved us by his True Word, let's center our lives around its incredible authority and power..

For it is supreme, sufficient, and saving through faith in Christ.

Closing prayer

Let's pray.

Resources to Go Deeper

"Why I Trust the Bible," Nicholas Davis
God's Word Alone, Matthew Barrett