

2 Timothy 3:10-17 - God Speaks

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[0 : 00] Our reading is from 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 10 to 17.! A final charge to Timothy.

! You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, my purpose, my patience, Faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings.

What kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra? The persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. While evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of. Because you know those from whom you learned it.

[1 : 10] And how, from infancy, you have known the holy scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith. In Christ Jesus.

All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. So that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

May the Lord speak to us through his word. Great. Thanks, Lucia, for reading for us. Just before we begin, I want to suggest to you perhaps that some of these verses are amongst the most important verses for us in the New Testament.

In terms of how we understand the Christian life. It doesn't matter who you are this morning. It doesn't matter whether you're a mature Christian who's been a Christian for a long time.

Or whether you're a new Christian, a baby Christian. Whether you're not even a Christian at all. You're just inquiring. I think these verses have something revolutionary to say to all of us. And so because that's true, I am going to work you quite hard this morning.

[2 : 21] So I hope you've got your kind of wits with you this morning. And your Bible's open. And I'm going to pray and ask for the Lord's help. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we are very conscious that what we are undertaking together today in looking at your word is a spiritual activity, not a merely human one.

And so we ask for your help and for your blessing, for the work of your spirit in our hearts. We pray that you might help me to speak faithfully and clearly. And all of us to listen and sit under your word. May we, as we prayed before, encounter Jesus in his word this morning. In his name we pray. Amen. Now, for the sake of time and clarity, I'm going to really zoom in on verses 14 to 17.

I dealt with verses 10 to 13 in most part last week. And I've got four headings for us just to take us through those few verses from verses 14 to 17.

And the first one is this. They'll come up on the slides behind me. They're on the inside of your notice sheet. The first one is this. God speaks the Bible. God speaks the Bible. This is Paul's point when he says all scripture is God breathed in verse 16.

[3 : 37] Scripture there is the written word of God, the Bible. And his point is that the written word is carried by the breath of God. Theoponitis is carried along on the breath, the wind, the air of God.

So that the Bible is God's words. Not simply just what God has said in the past. It's not just that God has breathed out these words at some point in history when he inspired the Bible writers to write poems and record history and count people and write down revelations.

No, the point is that these words continue to be carried on the breath of God. This is what God is still saying. And Paul says that this is true of all scripture, all of the Bible.

Now, when Paul wrote this, all scripture included all of the Old Testament. It included some of his writings, the writings of the other apostles and the gospels that were beginning to circulate. And now for us, now we've got a completed Bible.

All scripture is the 66 books of the Bible, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New. All of these words speak God's voice. They are God's instruments.

[4 : 50] It's what God says. Now, I hope you understand it and you will perhaps know because of who God is. You know, don't you, that God doesn't speak idly.

I speak idly. You do, don't you? We use words. We make promises. We say things we don't really mean. And we say things and nothing happens. But God is not like that, right?

What he says is what he does. And so that the Bible, because it is God speaking, really, the Bible is like the workshop of a master craftsman. And they're hanging on the walls are all the specially shaped tools.

You know, Genesis, the Psalms, Matthew, Mark and Luke, all speaking with God's voice and accomplishing his purpose. As all of God's word speaks with his voice.

Now, maybe you're thinking, well, wait a minute. This is interesting. Do you mean that God speaks English? You know, does he speak ESV English? You know, like Yoda.

[5 : 52] Or does he speak NIV English? Like the rest of us speak. Or does he speak good news English? English, maybe. Or perhaps really God speaks Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic.

Now, let me suggest, if that's the question on your mind, and I don't think probably it was until I mentioned it, but if it was, let me tell you that misses the point, really. God is, of course, capable of speaking all the languages of the world.

He ultimately is the source of all of that variety. He understands the prayers of his people in whatever language they pray. But notice that Paul here doesn't feel the need to clarify or qualify whether the scripture he was talking about was the Hebrew or the Greek Septuagint or the odd bits that are in Aramaic.

Now, Paul's point is God speaks human. That God, in his infinite kindness, has accommodated himself to human language in order to be able to speak to us, reveal himself to us, and accomplish his purposes.

And that's exactly what he's doing in the Bible, even in translations. Now, I think it's worth just sort of resting on this for a moment and thinking about some of the implications, particularly because of where we live.

[7 : 00] What Paul is saying here about the Bible is very different to what a Muslim would say about the Quran. The Islamic belief is that Allah spoke one language, and that language is Arabic.

And the very text of the Quran was given directly from Allah to one man via an angel. So the words of the Quran are themselves sacred. And in a sense, reciting them and memorizing them is almost as important as understanding them.

Because Allah speaks Arabic. It's why, really, the Quran is, in one sense, considered untranslatable. Because it's divine itself. You can't put it on the floor.

You can't bash it around. You have to revere it. And that means, doesn't it, to hear Allah, you need to learn his language. You need to adopt his culture. And everything that comes with that.

Now, and Paul is not saying that about God. His God is not like that God. He speaks all the languages of the world. And the Bible is not given at one point in history by a divine dictation, but rather over thousands of years in many different ways.

[8 : 06] God is not a one-time speaker. God is a perpetual communicator of his word. As people in hugely different situations from one another, massively different cultures, living in different parts of the world, all write one story.

Gloriously inspired by the Spirit. A story centered on the person of Jesus Christ, pointing forward to him in promises and pictures, in historical events, in personal experiences, in buildings and architecture even.

And then the story is completed in the New Testament as God, the Son, Jesus Christ, arrives in person and is fully revealed because he's fully there. That means that the Bible works and can be translated and still be effective.

Maybe I can illustrate. Maybe I can illustrate. Maybe this will help. Right? The Islamic claim essentially is that Allah is the creator of a beautiful instrument or a beautiful object called the Quran. And our job is to look at it and admire it in its beauty and its perfection. You sort of like put it in a glass box, look at it, not ask too many questions about it. If you find a flaw in it, which isn't actually that difficult, or a question about how it's handed down, then the whole thing no longer is beautiful and the whole system falls apart.

[9 : 24] The God of the Bible is very different to that, isn't he? He is not only the maker of a beautiful instrument, he is the player of a beautiful instrument called the Bible. And yes, you are to admire the scriptures, yes, but we don't worship this book.

No, we want to listen to it. We want to hear what God says. That's what it's about. And it's played in our language and we can understand it.

And the tune rings clearly, even in translations. So you can have great confidence that the text of your Bible is a faithful translation of what was actually written.

And scholarship and archaeology is working hard to make sure that we're hearing the tune clearly. But our confidence is that God is such a good communicator. It doesn't matter the language. It doesn't matter the context. It doesn't matter the culture.

He is still able to speak. So whoever you are this morning, whatever your heart language, I want to say to you, God speaks it. And he wants to tell you of his grace and his mercy and his love in a language that you can understand.

[10 : 30] Because he wants you to know him. And to hear him. Perhaps, though, as well as being in this part of the world, we also are in a Christian subculture where we perhaps need to distinguish between the Bible and the ideas in our head.

Right? You know what I'm talking about. You know what I'm talking about. That idea that you have in your head. That impression that you have. That sense that God might have told you something. Well, I want you to notice.

And I'm not saying that God is incapable of doing that. Of course, that would be wrong to say that. But what I want you to notice here is that's not what Paul is talking about. There is a big theological difference between what is revelation and what is illumination.

Right? Illumination is what happens as we get a sort of light bulb moment as we realize the implication of truth for our lives. It's the moment when the penny drops about what something means or what living for Jesus might mean in the particular situation that God has put me in. Now, of course, God does stand behind and we rely on him for illumination. We ask, don't we, for his spirit to illuminate God's word to us that we might understand it and that we might apply it to our lives.

[11 : 41] But let me tell you, 2 Timothy 3 is not talking about illumination. It's talking about revelation. Timothy is being told by Paul that the scripture says, thus says the Lord.

This is his word. You know, Psalm 23 doesn't say, do you know what, I kind of feel like I get the impression that, you know, the Lord might be like a shepherd perhaps. No. The psalmist writes, the Lord is my shepherd.

John 3, 16 doesn't say, do you know, I felt like God kind of gave me the impression that Jesus wants us to know that God loves the world and wants to save his people. No, it doesn't say that, does it? For God so loved the world.

And that means, doesn't it, that when you open the Bible, every time you open the Bible and you have listening ears to what it says, you are engaging with revelation.

You are having an encounter with the divine word. The one who speaks, he's revealing himself to you. The God who dwells in unapproachable light, who no one has ever seen nor can see, says Paul in 1 Timothy.

[12 : 45] That God is speaking to you through his words. The master communicator. And he does it through the, you know, the book on your lap or on your phone or on your tablet, whatever it is.

He speaks to you whether you've got a whole day to read the Bible or just five minutes on the bus. In the midst of the chaos. We talked in sermon read-through on Friday about the, what is essentially the application of this little passage to us.

And somebody in that group, and it wasn't me, suggested that basically the application is turn up the volume of the Bible in your life. That's the application. Amidst all the noise in our lives, turn up the volume of the Bible because this is God speaking.

This is his word. You know, perhaps you're anxious and afraid. We have voices, don't we, of worry that are loud in our brains. Perhaps in the middle of the night when you wake up and you're troubled.

Well, drown them out with the psalms. You know, perhaps the demands of your boss or the financial demands of living in London or the ambitions that you have for your career are very loud in your head. Well, can I suggest you drown them out with words of future glory in God's word?

[13 : 59] Because God speaks the Bible and is speaking to you every time you open it. Okay, secondly, God speaks salvation. God speaks salvation. Look back at verse 14.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it. And how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Now, here's Paul's point that the Bible in your hand, the Bible that Timothy actually only had parts of or had to go to and listen to at the local synagogue, the Scriptures that he had locked in his memory from being taught as a child, that Bible, says Paul, is given for a purpose, and the purpose is to make wise for salvation.

Now, we need to think about that, don't we? What is salvation in the Bible, and why do we need it? Well, really, the Bible tells us, doesn't it, right from the beginning, that all of humanity is in need of salvation, because all of us, without any exception, have sinned.

We've all taken the lives that God has given us, and we've lived them for our glory and not for his. We've become rebels in the world that God has made. We've broken his law, we've damaged one another.

[15 : 12] And the Bible not only expressly tells you that, that we need that kind of salvation, but it also says that you know that you need that. It says that you can sense that you need that, that you will feel in this life, in this world, a lack of purpose, an emptiness, an estrangement from God.

And it will say to you that you will try all that you can to kind of placate that feeling, maybe with false religion, or maybe with material wealth, or maybe with pleasure, maybe with relationships, maybe with family.

In other words, the Bible says, not only do you live in a world that is broken, you live a life that is broken. We are broken. And while we might not be able to articulate it, we can't deny it.

And so salvation in the Bible is not self-help. Yeah? Because self is the problem. Salvation is in the arrival of God the Son in human flesh.

The unbroken Savior, who then goes to the cross and is broken for us. He saves, keeping the promise of God that runs from the beginning to the end of the Bible, providing a sacrifice for sin and a promise to restore the world, that in his death he would satisfy moral justice and give us hope of eternal glory.

[16 : 32] And it's all by his grace, it's not by our works. And says Paul, the whole Bible is given for the purpose of making that salvation known. Making you, making me, making Timothy wise to salvation.

Making others wise for salvation. Now let me tell you, I think that means there are at least three implications. There are probably more, but I'm going to trouble you with three implications of that. The first one is this. It means that on your own, you're ignorant of salvation. In other words, without the Bible, there is no salvation. Not because the Bible saves you, but because without the Bible, you would be ignorant of salvation.

There are a whole load of things, aren't there, in the world that we can discover. Remarkable things, right? But salvation is not one of them. Humanity was able to work out how to make fire.

We're able to establish the arrangement of the planets. We're able to land on the moon, right? But salvation is inaccessible and mysterious to us unless God tells us. Second, it means that all of the Bible is about Jesus.

[17 : 35] Because he is the one who saves. You see this, don't you? Paul knows that Jesus is the one who saves. He's covered that already in 2 Timothy 1. He says that scripture is able to make us wise for salvation.

He is implying scripture is the story of Jesus. You want to meet Jesus, open a Bible. This is where you meet him. This is where you encounter him, he says. And it means if you're reading the Bible and not seeing Jesus, then you're not understanding it.

Or if someone is preaching to you and they're not preaching Jesus, they're not preaching the Bible. And the third implication is that in the reading of the scripture, something more profound is happening than just the passing on of information.

We're coming up to the time of year, aren't we, where people go away on holiday. And maybe people recommend to you, oh, you've got to take this book. Read this book. It's a great book. You'll love it. The story's fantastic.

It will kind of swallow you up. It's a real page turner. And maybe it will affect you emotionally. Maybe you'll be entertained by it. But let me tell you, you won't be changed by it in the way that you'll be changed by God's word.

[18 : 39] Because in the Bible, God speaks and is able to transform you. He's able, through the words of this book, he's able to make you and me new people.

He's able to bring us from condemnation into life, from darkness to light, from hell to heaven, from judgment to glory. You know, reading the Bible is not simply learning.

It's encountering the living God who is able to take the message of this book, even in a translation of it, even in the weak preaching of it by a sinful person like me.

He's able to take that word and reach into your heart and your life and give you new Holy Spirit life. Save you.

James says in his book that we are given birth through the word of truth. The message of the scriptures opens our eyes and brings us to Christ. We've got in the foyer about 700 of these copies of Mark's gospel left to be handed out to people in London.

[19 : 49] Good news for London. Let me ask you, why would you bother doing that, right? Well, let me tell you that each one of these is a potential heart transplant for every individual who would read it and take it.

It's a life giver. Now, if you went to London and you went down to the river and you saw a thousand people drowning in the River Thames and you had next to you a pile of life boys, what would you do?

Well, you would throw them into the river, wouldn't you? And if you had a big pile of life boys, you wouldn't mind if one or two of them missed because you would just be desperate that someone might grab hold of one and be saved.

That's what you'd want, isn't it? Now, each one of these is a life boy for people in our city, that they might encounter Jesus and it might make them wise for salvation. So let me suggest that we throw as many of them out as we can, right?

Not into the river, but into people's hands. So take a watch, give them out, stand at a tube station and be that weird person who gives them out. Yeah? Take some into work and give them to everybody.

[20 : 58] Take some to your street and give them to the people on your street. Because this book is able to make people wise for salvation. God uses this to reach into people's lives and give them new life.

So there you go. Throw the books out. Not as in a way, but, you know, out to others. Next heading. God speaks personal change.

Come to verse 16. All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Notice just a list of what God's word does in the life of the Christian. Not only is it able to make the unbeliever wise for salvation, it is also able to teach, rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness. In the Greek, there's a kind of rhythm to the sentence because it repeats the word towards in between each. So literally, it's all scripture is God-breathed and is useful towards teaching, towards rebuking, towards correcting, towards training in righteousness.

[22 : 03] And the sense here is that these are four discrete things. The scriptures, as you read them, will teach you. That is, they will impart information to you. This book will give you knowledge that you did not have before.

In other words, the Bible is a book that you need to learn. It's no good sitting by your bedside unopened. It contains truths that you would not dream up, that you could not fathom on your own, that you wouldn't discover in any other way.

You need to be a student of God's words. But then, as a student of God's words, you will find also that the Bible will rebuke you. That is, you'll find, if you're reading it carefully and honestly, and this is groundbreaking, you will find that God doesn't always agree with you.

You know that? God doesn't always like the good ideas in your head. In fact, I would suggest, from my own personal experience, and just really from the logic of it, that if you have never had this experience of reading the Bible, that you read the Bible and it says something that you don't like, that you didn't believe before, and you find difficult.

If you've never experienced that, let me suggest you've never read the Bible properly. Because it will rebuke you. It doesn't think the way we think, or speak the way that we would speak.

[23 : 14] The Bible is not a book of positive affirmations. It has the word no in it. And you'll be rebuked when you transgress. It will also correct you. In a sense, a rebuke without a correction that tells you positively what to do is not really any value.

But the scripture will correct you too. Steer you in the right direction. Tell you what life is for. Where you should be going. What should be important to you. Here you will find, you know, what your relationships are for.

What kind of person you should marry. What kind of person you should not marry. What purpose you should have in life. It will pull you away from the flames of self-destruction.

Bring you into the light of living for God. And it will train you in righteousness. Here the language really is the sense of a parent teaching a child. Sort of a guardian or a leader in the direction of righteousness.

And in that sense then, as readers of the Bible, what we're accepting is that we are infants. We come to God's word as infants. We come to God's word as people who have lots to learn. By definition, people who are slow to learn.

[24 : 22] This is a mercy to parents in some ways. But, you know, you don't put your child to bed as a three-year-old and wake them up in the morning as a 40-year-old. Right? It takes time. There is a lot to learn.

And so the effectiveness of God's word in this image is not seen so much in immediate dramatic effects. That might happen. But actually the results seem to come slowly over time.

The growth of a child into maturity. Walking in the way of righteousness. And that's the exciting dynamic then, isn't it? Of listening to God's word. Of being taught regularly. And listening to it read. Yet, where you commit yourself to private study and discipleship, the joy is that it will change you. God will change you through it. Can I say to you, you won't be the same person if you commit yourself to reading God's word.

In 10 years' time, you'll be a very different person. In 20 years, you'll be almost unrecognizable. In 30 years of studying the scriptures, you will find yourself completely different. It will not leave you ineffective. You will be taught, rebuked, corrected, and trained.

[25 : 24] Likewise, if you're a Christian this morning and you're finding that you're ignorant, heading in the wrong direction, and still a baby in the faith. Well, then you need the solid food of God's word.

Of course, there's an implication, isn't there, as well here. That like we saw, if the scriptures were the way that the non-Christian encounters Jesus and are saved. Then it's the ongoing study, reading, and preaching of the scriptures.

That's how we encounter Jesus. That we are with Jesus in his word. That we're being transformed by him. That we're learning to think like him, respond like him, feel like him.

And that doesn't happen outside of a regular encounter with Jesus in the scriptures. You can't hope that if you have a sort of devotional time at home that involves just kind of switching your brain off and putting Christian music on in the background, that somehow transformation will come.

No, the means that God has given us is his word to change us and has promised to meet us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit through his words. I don't know about you, but I kind of, I do wish it would all be a bit faster and a bit more automatic.

[26 : 36] Seth and I went to a conference one day this last week and we got to listen to a couple of older guys teach the Bible. Both of them were into retirement age. Both of them were geniuses with years and years of study behind them.

One of them, I mean, you could tell it was, you know, they were intelligent guys. The guy started his first talk and said, I've got two headings. And they proceeded to both be in Greek. Right?

So, okay, we're the nerds conference. Right? And it, but it, it wasn't really listening to them. It wasn't really the academic skill that you were left with the impression of.

It was, you know, I listened and thought, I just want to know Jesus like you know him. I want to have been with him like you've been with him. I want to love him like you love him.

I want to live for him like you do. Please, Lord, will you do that? And I wish that that was like that.

But it turns out there's no shortcut to it.

[27 : 37] The slow, consecutive, regular, thoughtful exposure to God's word, that's where it happens. So do it. Finally, then, God speaks all that is necessary.

Just as we finish, I want to point out what I think is a significant theological implication of these verses. And I know I've probably worn you out already. But let me ask you to look down at the verses at verse 17 and read it backwards and read it in the negative with me.

Okay? So notice at the end of verse 17, there is no good work that the servant of God needs to be equipped to do that the scriptures won't equip them for.

Do you notice that? If the Bible can equip you for every good work, that means that the negative that there is is that there is nothing required of you as a Christian that the Bible won't train you to do. In other words, Paul's point here to Timothy is that the Bible is enough. It's enough. This is the doctrine of the sufficiency of scripture.

[28 : 46] I don't think it's always very well understood. It doesn't mean that the Bible is everything that you want to know, right? The sufficiency of the scriptures is not saying that the Bible is everything you want to know.

You know, if you come to the Bible looking for a biography of Jesus that tells you everything you would like to know about Jesus and what he did when he walked this earth, then you will be disappointed.

Or if you come to the scriptures looking for everything you want to know about how God made the world or what happened to the dinosaurs or how many Israelites left Egypt, then you will not find everything you want to know in answer to those questions either.

Not because the Bible doesn't have something to say about them. It does. But rather because the sufficiency of scriptures is tied to the purpose of scripture, right? The sufficiency of scripture is tied to the purpose of scripture.

The Bible is sufficient for the ends to which God has sent it. And that is that we might be saved and sanctified. In other words, the Bible is sufficient to make wise for salvation and is sufficient to teach, repute, correct and equip you for every good work.

[29 : 51] In other words, for you to live the Christian life, you don't need to have a little bit of extra information whispered in your ear every morning. You don't need a particular church tradition to mediate fresh words from God to you.

You don't need a pope. You don't need a priest. You don't need an apostle. You don't need a prophet to give you snippets of new information. What you need is a Bible because it's sufficient. But the sufficiency of the scriptures does not also mean that you don't need someone to teach it to you, right? That is a misunderstanding of the sufficiency of scripture. You know, if you have a baby, right?

You don't lock that baby away in a room and give them, you know, a bag of nappies and a load of formula and say, that's everything you need. You're good.

You're golden. Go for it. No, that would be terrible and abusive and it would lead to a disaster. And likewise, you don't lock a new Christian in a room with a Bible and say, there you go.

[30 : 51] That's everything that you need. Chapter 3, verse 14 and verse 15. Chapter 4, verse 2 all talk about the Bible being taught. Our exposure to the scriptures is not just me on my own with a Bible, but it's being taught the scriptures, sitting under the teaching of the scriptures.

Preaching the truth is the noble task of the Lord's servant in chapter 2, verse 24. It's the approved work of chapter 2, verse 15. The Bible is sufficient, but we need to listen to it taught and preached to us.

The church needs to use it. God's word needs to be opened and explained and exposed by those who are qualified to teach. That's the task of the church, isn't it?

Both for evangelism and for discipleship. So let me try and end with an encouragement to you this morning. The Christian life is hard, isn't it? And we all find it wearying and difficult.

But let me tell you, don't despair because God has given you everything you need. Everything you need. Praise God. So read the Bible. Get familiar with it, all of it.

[31 : 56] Not just some of it, all of it. Commit as much of it as you can to memory. Learn to meditate on small parts of the scriptures. Learn to chew on it and grapple with its truth. Learn to put it together so you can understand its grand doctrines.

Learn to pray the Bible back to God. Learn to sit under the preaching of God's words as God himself addresses all of us. Even the preacher through the preaching of his words.

Because the Bible is sufficient to make us wise for salvation and give us all that we need to live for him. Let me pray as you're close. We'll just leave a few moments of quiet for you.

Maybe there's one or two things you just want to pray for and ask the Lord to apply to your life. And I'll pray in a moment. Heavenly Father, don't let this word be snatched away from us.

Please, we pray, might we be a church that has great confidence in your word to make people wise for salvation so that we give out your word. May we, as we struggle on in our Christian lives, find ourselves often in your word and sitting under the preaching of your word that you might change and transform us.

[33 : 39] May we find personally and corporately that we encounter Jesus over and over again in his word. That we're transformed. That we fall in love with him over and over again.

That our priorities and our dreams and our aspirations are shaped more and more around your values and your priorities in your words.

Do this work. We can't do it on our own. Lord, we need you. And we ask for the help of your spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.