

2 Timothy 3:10-17
Thoroughly Equipped
Sunday November 19th, 2017

Today is Bible Sunday in the Christian Calendar for the UMC. It is also the Sunday before Thanksgiving; so the Hymns and Anthems are for Thanksgiving but the message is for Bible Sunday.

The Bible contains 66 books. The Old Testament has 39 and the New Testament 27. The Bible is written in 3 languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The Aramaic part of the Old Testament is found in the Book of Daniel, which I began reading through this week as part of my Daily Devotion. And no, the Bible wasn't written in King James English.

The Old Testament was written over a 1000 year period if you include the books of the Apocrypha, which appear in Catholic Bibles, but not generally Protestant Bibles after the early 1800's. The organization of the books is puzzling to us. In the NT, after the 4 Gospels, Paul's letters appear in order of length, not chronology of writing. It is the same with the OT prophets.

The Bible is made up of prose writing, poetry, prophecy, proverbs, parables, psalms, songs and more. In fact, in the Bible there is more to study than you can learn in a lifetime. Recently, I was looking at my library and the sets of Bible commentaries that I own. I realized, if I had another 36 years of ministry, I probably would never read through all of them, and in 36 years of preaching and teaching I have only scratched the surface of the wisdom and knowledge that is in there. This book contains the wisdom of the ages, which is to say there is much more about the Bible than can be covered in one sermon.

One of the biggest problems with the Bible, though, is not what we haven't read and understood; but with what we have understood and refused to follow. The most disturbing passages in the Bible are the ones we clearly understand, and they clearly challenge our self-centeredness and sin. That is why I usually ask those 2 questions after preaching, "What is God saying to you and what are you going to do?"

Are you going to turn towards God, i.e. **Repent**, and are you going to follow i.e., **Believe**.

Many in this world today and down through the ages have tried to discount the Bible as a book of fables and myths, when what they are truly afraid of is that it is a book of searing truth, that cuts to the heart of the human condition. It exposes the sin that breaks, and manipulates our human relationships, and our relationship with God.

As Hebrew 4:12 says, **“Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”**

Now here is the situation behind this letter. Paul is in prison facing his death. He wants to encourage Timothy in loyalty to Paul’s way of life, and Christian purpose. Paul lifts up the Christian virtues of **“faith, patience, love, and endurance,”** in order to encourage Timothy to hold on. Timothy is about to face a great trial in his faith. Paul his mentor, friend and father figure is about to be killed for his faith, and Paul is encouraging Timothy to continue in the faith. Paul states a hard truth, **“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,”**

And the suffering will come not only from without the church but from within. In Paul’s case he was addressing the Gnostic heretics, false teachers who were tearing down the moral fabric of the church by saying the body and what you did with your body doesn’t matter for it is evil, so do whatever you want with it. The first part of this chapter addresses that, but he is saying don’t let that tear you down. Hang onto what you have seen in my life and hang onto what you have learned from the scriptures since you were a baby.

Paul was addressing the situation of **“while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”** Timothy is being encouraged to “continue on” by holding on to what he has learned and from whom he has learned it, Paul, his mom and grandmother and most importantly the Scriptures.

Now the purpose of Scripture is laid out in verse 15, “and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

The purpose of the Scripture, its fulfilment was and is salvation in Jesus Christ. As our Discipline article IV says, “We believe the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, reveals the Word of God so far as it is necessary for our salvation.” That is the purpose of Scripture. It points us too and brings us into a relationship with Jesus Christ that grants us salvation.

Scripture in Jesus’ and Paul’s day was what we call the Old Testament. The Canon or list of books that were considered Scripture were brought together in a book called the Septuagint. Septuagint means 70. This translation of the OT was made around the year 256 BC by 72 Jewish Scholars in Alexandria Egypt for use by Jews throughout the ancient world. It was a translation of the Hebrew to Greek. It is the version of the Bible that Jesus most probably used and heard.

Jesus in John 5:39 says, “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me,” and again in Luke 24:27 in Emmaus after his resurrection, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

The purpose of the Scriptures is to call us into a relationship with God in Christ and then to live out that relationship with the people in our lives, and in this world. They are to teach us how to live righteously in this world equipped for every good work, which is the same thing. It brings us into a relationship with Jesus Christ that grants salvation.

Now a story is told of a little boy who went up for children’s moments. The Pastor said, “What is gray has four legs, and a long bushy tail?” The little boy raised his hand and said, “I know, I know!” And then he dropped his hand and said, “I know it sounds like a squirrel, but this is children’s moments; so the answer must be Jesus.”

The reason I told this joke is to point out not to come to the Bible with questions it isn't written to answer. As one scholar wrote, "Too much time is misspent asking of Scripture what it was not designed to answer. Better that Scripture itself should instruct us as to what its purpose is." Which is what it is doing today. The Bible was not designed to tell us what the 4 laws of Thermodynamics are. But it was given to us by God to tell us how to relate to God and to fellow human beings.

The Bible speaks to salvation, ethics, theology and God. It speaks to relationships. You know the "Big 10" i.e. the 10 Commandments? The first 4 speak of how best to relate to God and the other 6 on how best to relate to each other. The Big 10 are the clauses of the Old Testament, the Old Covenant with God. We have an Old Covenant and a New Covenant. And the word covenant speaks to the terms of the relationship we have with God. God in a covenant invites us into relationship with him and the 10 are our responsibilities to the covenant.

Anyway, I was told recently by a researcher on faith in America that the biggest turnoff the unchurched or non-believers have with our faith is they see it as being "unscientific". Usually the argument centers around the 7 day creation story. One simple way to address that is to tell them that the 7 day creation story is one of 3 in the Bible. The Christian Creation story is in John 1, and it is very simple, "All things were created through him." That is all. That is the who, of who done it, but not the how and the timeline. Science can fill in the time line, and a lot of the how.

Much of who fueled the scientific approach to the world were Christians firmly convinced of who created it, and saw their task being discovering the how of creation. They saw the created order as a great big mystery, a present from God, that they were privileged to open and find out how things worked.

Now the purpose of Scripture is very much revealed in these verses today. Foremost, as I said, it is pointing us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

We believe it is “**God Breathed**” or God inspired. Through the centuries there has been much debate as to what that means. Did God whisper in the ear of the writer? Did God dictate every word? Is it inerrant as some say? Whole denominations have exhausted themselves fighting over these questions. So we come back to what we claim as Methodists, simply, “**It contains all things necessary for salvation.**” God breathed pointing to the presence of the Holy Spirit in its creation and its understanding as it is read.

Scholars don’t understand ever word in the original language. My favorite example is “Selah”. It appears repeatedly in the Psalms. Some think it means chorus, but no one knows for sure. But does it matter? No, for it doesn’t change a bit of the meaning of the book or even each psalms in which it appears. It is a mystery.



Here’s a picture of our dog Jax. He is actually my wife’s birthday present a few years back. Most expensive “free dog” I have ever received. He cost us \$900 the second week we had him, and don’t ask me about subsequent years. But he loves me and often curls up on my lap, and after licking me, he then just sits there looking at me until it’s unnerving at times.

He looks at me as if he is trying to figure me out, and can’t, and you know my friends, he never will. He’s a dog. It’s the same with us and God. We stare and stare and stare into the scriptures and often see a mystery, but what of God we do see, we love, and God speaks to us through the words.

The scriptures are “**useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**” And because of this we have Bible studies for children, youth and adults. I preach from the Bible and only the Bible.

We give out age appropriate Bibles to our children and youth, and I encourage all to read the Bible daily or as near daily as you can get. We need to miss a few days sometimes to be reminded we're not perfect and need a Savior and sometimes a sense of humor. The Bible does equip us for every good work from the most profound to the sublime.

A story is told about a pastor visiting his parishioners. At one house it seemed obvious that someone was at home, but no one answered his repeated knocks at the door.

So, he took out a business card and wrote 'Revelation 3:20 on the back of it and stuck it in the door.

When the offering was processed the following Sunday, he found that his card had been returned. Added to it was this Bible verse, Genesis 3:10.

Well he checked the citation. He had written Revelation 3:20 which begins, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.'

Genesis 3:10 reads, 'I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid for I was naked.'

Yes God has a sense of humor and God gave us one too. And we need to know the Bible and one of the best ways to know it is to simply read it. That is why I encourage everyone to use a daily devotional based on the scriptures like the **Upper Room**, like the **Moravian Texts**. A very popular one right now is called, **"Jesus Calling"**. My wife and I read the Upper Room together before we go to sleep, and we each read a separate devotional in the morning. I use the Moravian text which takes you through the Bible in 2 years.

Now I admit the biggest fight in denominations in America today is over morality as different groups read into, and out of the Scriptures their personal desires. And if you know the history of the Bible you will know that it has been used to justify all sorts of things that it does not support. Not all that is claimed to be "biblical" is biblical. And as much

as people down through the ages have used and abused the Bible its' wisdom and truth still stand. As Isaiah 40:8 says, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

In the end the Bible calls us to live lives like Jesus, to live in righteousness. And in the case of our scripture today the call was for steadfast loyalty and endurance in the face of tests, trials and persecution. And when we know the Bible we are thoroughly equipped to do that, as it says, "so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Works of righteousness and good works are the same thing. And sometimes the best work we can do for God and ourselves is to simply hold onto our faith when everything says to let go and despair.

And again it's not the parts of the Bible or the Bible itself that we don't understand that is the problem. The problem is the clearly written and understood parts of the Bible that we sometimes ignore: the strangers in our midst, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked and those in prison. When we see a human need God most often calls us to fill it.

Know the Bible, though, and the strength and comfort it gives and you indeed will be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

What is God saying to you and what are you going to do?

My encouraging word to you today is to read the Bible, hear the voice of God and follow it.

Amen.