

## 2 Timothy 3

Tonight, we're carrying on our look through the book of 2 Timothy.

If you remember, this is a letter written by Paul to his young apprentice, Timothy. Timothy was a leader in the church but was going through some tough times. Paul has already encouraged him to fan into flames the gifts that God has given him and to be bold in his leadership.

Now, we have reached the most famous part of the letter. It's this verse, `all scripture is God breathed...` Paul, in this section reminds Timothy, and us, of the centrality of the Bible to the life of faith. So, we're going to unpack this section of our reading tonight.

`All scripture is God breathed and is useful` It can be difficult sometimes looking at parts of the Bible and we can wonder whether they truly belong in a Holy book. There are parts of the Old Testament that I can only describe as morally dubious. I know other people have a real problem with the words of Paul. What Paul is talking about here is the Old Testament - possibly the most difficult part to comprehend. But for Paul, all scripture comes from God. It's a recurring theme, God speaks and breathes things into existence. To quote Genesis, "Let there be... and there was". Paul, as an upright and serious Jewish man, would have taken Scripture seriously. As Rabbi Jonathon Sacks has written, "Judaism is less a religion of holy people and holy places than it is a religion of holy words... God reveals himself in words, He spoke to the patriarchs and the prophets and, at Mount Sinai, to the whole nation."

I think the problem isn't about what Scripture contains but about how we view it. If we look at everything as literal, we miss the nuances of what it is saying to us. Equally when we dismiss the extraordinary, we play down the supernatural side of God. No one in their right mind would view Shakespeare's writings as accurate fact, nor does the reality that they are plays to be performed in any way diminish their importance. Scripture contains history, prophecy, poetry, proverbs, good examples to follow and bad examples to warn us.

Once we get to grips with what we are looking at, we find that it is useful - but maybe not in the way we first thought it would be. And Paul says it does 4 things to us - teach, rebuke, correct and train:

It teaches us - naturally, we need to learn about God and what he is like. The Bible shows us God's plan to save people and the lengths he would go to to complete his plan.

It rebukes us - there are times when we need a sharp reminder that something is not right in our thinking and belief. Christianity isn't a pick and mix religion where we can choose what to believe and what not to - God isn't our puppet. Sometimes we need putting back in our place!

It corrects - Just as sometimes our thinking is off, so sometimes too is our action. God's word is there to show us a better way of living, one set out by God. Not because he's some all-powerful dictator but because he loves us and wants the best for us.

It trains us - faith isn't a passive thing but one that encourages us to walk in Jesus' footsteps. But just as you wouldn't run a marathon without training, so the life and journey of faith requires us to be trained as well. Looking at the struggles, failures and successes that people of faith have gone through before us trains us to recognise what the journey ahead of us is going to be like.

But where does this all lead us to? For Timothy, this preparation under the word of God was leading him to be ready, as verse 2 says, to preach the word, in season and out. That was Timothy's mission.

By placing himself under the authority of Scripture, he would be ready to correct, rebuke and encourage others – a task that would take great patience and careful instruction.

And what about us? We're not all called to be preachers and teachers but we are all called to be disciples to follow Christ. How is it we will know this Christ in order to follow him? Just as the Jews are, so we as Christians are people of the word as well. God reveals himself through Scripture and we read the stories of Jesus by looking at the gospels. Holy words designed to encourage and challenge us.

But maybe we need to think about the elephant in the room. If the Old Testament is God-breathed and the gospels teach us about Jesus what about Paul's writings, are they from God?

This is what St. Peter wrote, "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."

Paul's letters are hard at times, even Peter seemed to struggle with them – again we have to remember how to view them culturally and contextually – but Peter is certain that they contain the wisdom of God and so aren't just to be dismissed.

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 we be people who are ready to be equipped by God for whatever he asks us to do.