

Proclaiming the Truth of God's Word: 2 Timothy 3:15-17
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We're at the beginning of new year, and I'm very excited about what God has in store for us in 2012. It's wonderful to see what God is doing among us—the new folks who are getting involved, and the involvement in small groups and various ministries, and the way that we are living life together and encouraging each other and spurring one another on. This is not to overlook sin and hardships and broken relationships that are also present among us. There are marriages that are struggling, and individuals who are straying and rebelling. But even where there are these struggles, I see a body of believers here who really care. We're not content to let things go and turn a blind eye to sin. And I believe God is working powerfully through this church as we seek to be faithful to His Word.

If you were at the church meeting in December, we talked about a lot of different things going on in the church. We talked about the marriages that are failing and how to be praying for those families. But Tom Dyba was good to remind us at the end of the meeting that God is doing so many good things among us. Even as some marriages are hurting, there are many other marriages that are growing and flourishing. Even as some are straying, many others are showing much spiritual growth. This is church life. This is what it means to be a family of believers. We encourage one another and pray for each other. We rebuke one another when needed, in love and with much grace. We grieve with those who are grieving. We rejoice with those who are rejoicing. We're there for each other. We listen. We care.

At the beginning of a new year, as we reflect on the things God has taught us in 2011 and as we anticipate what He will be teaching us in 2012, I want to talk some this morning about who we are as a church and why we exist. I want to examine our mission statement, specifically the second part of it which speaks of proclaiming the truth of God's Word. And we'll look at 2 Timothy 3:15-17 which is the explanation for why we desire to be a church that proclaims the truth of God's Word. My hope is that this will be a reminder to us and an encouragement to us at the start of a new year that Three Rivers Grace is a church that takes the Bible seriously and strives to do everything we do according to Scripture and with the Scriptures as the focus and source and strength of what we do. This is our authority. This is our map and guide to what it means to be a church. And this is the source of what we teach, for it proclaims to us the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the weeks and months to come, we're going to launch into a few sermon series that I've been very much looking forward to. Next Sunday I'm going to begin a 6-week series through the Old Testament book, Song of Solomon. Maybe you've never heard a sermon on Song of Solomon. But it's part of Scripture, and it's for our edification, and it will be an adventure for us to study what God's Word has to say about marriage and romance and intimacy.

After that I'm planning to preach a short series on cheerful giving from 2 Corinthians 8-9. Then we'll come back to the Old Testament again and go through Hosea. That, too, will be a relatively short series. But then we'll launch into a longer series through Paul's letter to the Romans. This is something I've been anticipating for years. Always in the back of my mind has been the question, When to preach Romans? And I always thought, I'm just not ready yet. But then about a year ago it started to dawn on me that I'll never feel ready. And in addition to that, I might die, or Jesus might come back, and I don't want to miss my chance to preach through the amazing letter of Romans. So for the last year I've been preparing my heart for that adventure. I've been memorizing some of Romans. So far I've memorized chapters 1-2, and I hope to memorize more this coming year. And I pray that our time in the letter of Romans will be a time of tremendous growth for us spiritually, that it will be a time of revival, and that our church will be strengthened as we meditate together on the deep truths that are revealed there.

Well, all of this, I hope you can see, rests on some very firm convictions about the Word of God. After all, why would we be so excited about studying books of the Bible if we didn't think very highly of Scripture?

Let's look briefly at our mission statement as a whole, and then we'll focus on the second line about God's Word. You can read this on the front of your worship folder.

"We exist to delight in the beauty of God's greatness, to proclaim the truth of God's Word, and to ignite a joyful passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ among all the peoples of Pittsburgh and the world."

In 2007 the elders presented this mission statement for our church, and I preached a sermon series on it in January of that year. I'll summarize for you a few of the things we looked at in those sermons.

First of all, "we exist to delight in the beauty of God's greatness." There are many places in the Bible that show God's desire to glorify His own Name. God is God-centered. He does everything He does for His own glory. He created us for His glory. He delivered His people, the Israelites, from Egypt for His

own glory. He sent His Son into the world in order that we might glorify Him for His mercy. And Christ is coming back to receive glory. God is on a mission to make His greatness known. And therefore the purpose of your life and mine, and the purpose of this church, is to glorify God. We want to delight in the beauty of God's greatness, which is how we glorify God. By God's grace, we recognize how awesome He is, and we acknowledge that there is nothing better than God. There is nothing more satisfying than God. There is no one more worthy of our devotion than God. And when we love Him like this, when we are amazed and awed by Him, then our lives will be like a spotlight shining on His greatness.

The doxology at the end of Romans 11 highlights the wonder of God's plans, God's independence, and God's glory. And in that passage Paul is rejoicing over these truths about God. This is GOOD news! God is awesome. His riches and wisdom and knowledge are deep, and his judgments are unsearchable and His ways are inscrutable. None of us can counsel Him or give to Him that we might be repaid. Everything, EVERYTHING, is from Him and through Him and to Him. And therefore He gets all the glory. He gets all the credit, and the honor, and the praise. And we want to be a church that delights in these truths.

We don't want to waste our time being man-centered. We don't want to give our attention to human accomplishments or worldly prestige. We don't want to be focused on our own rights or our own wants or our own comforts. Our hope is to be God-centered, that we will see the beauty of God's greatness, and that we can view all of life through the lens of God's sovereignty over all things, and His goodness, and justice, and mercy.

David Wells, in his book *God in the Wasteland*, says, "In too many quarters today, evangelicals are inadvertently advertising the fact that God rests only lightly upon the church" (*God in the Wasteland*, 224). In other words there is a lack of God-centeredness or at least a minimizing of that truth. There is a rejection of the truth that God is completely sovereign. There is an absence of talk about sin and judgment and God's righteous wrath against sin. Jesus Christ is not lifted up as the only way for hell-deserving sinners to be reconciled to a holy God. These are weighty realities, and not to be taken lightly. As Wells writes, there is commonly found among evangelicals "a spirituality that is light, bouncy, simple, fun, engaging, and uplifting." And in contrast to that I'm not saying we should be depressed, mean, and condemning. But there should be a weightiness to what we do here. There should be a gravity to the happiness we have in God. We should recognize that our pursuit of joy in the beauty of God's greatness is the most important and significant pursuit of our lives.

To know God and love Him is ultimate. We want to be God-centered in our personal lives and in the life of our church.

This God-centered purpose must necessarily include a focus on God's Word, the Bible. Because it's in the Bible that God has revealed to us these weighty realities of His sovereignty and holiness, and our depravity (our sinfulness). It's in the Bible that we read about Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life in this world and then died a sacrificial death in order to forgive sinners, and then He rose again on the third day.

That's why in this church our desire to increasingly delight in the beauty of God's greatness goes hand-in-hand with our practice of focusing on the truth of God's Word. God-centered. Bible-focused. If we are to know God, if we are to be a God-centered church and fulfill the purposes God has for us, we **MUST** be dedicated to God's Word as our ultimate authority and guide.

We must not put our hope or trust in the world's marketing schemes or silly gimmicks. Man-centered thinking will pursue man-centered success by man-centered means. If we were to think that spiritual "success" is measured by how large our congregation is, or how nice our building is, or how big our budget is, then we would be tempted to buy into the marketing mentality of the world. We would cater to the felt needs of our clientele, and would seek to make everyone comfortable. We would try to be entertaining and funny. We would avoid talking about sin, so as not to offend anyone. We would not teach about God's sovereignty, lest we attack anyone's sense of their own free will. But to minimize the truth of God's Word and to neglect preaching the whole counsel of God would be unfaithfulness. It is God's absolute truth, revealed in His Word, that is our rudder and our anchor and our rock. We must let God's Word lead us.

As we delight in God's beauty and proclaim His Word, the inevitable overflow will be a joyful passion for the Gospel and a desire to draw others into that joy. That's the remainder of the mission statement—"to ignite a joyful passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ among all the peoples of Pittsburgh and the world." You could summarize it in three words—worship, Word, witness. Delighting in the beauty of God's greatness is worship. Our worship is based on the truth of God's Word. And then our Word-centered worship, if it is real worship, will spill over in witness to the world. This is what we're about as a church—worship, Word, witness.

For this morning, let's take that middle piece—proclaiming the truth of God's Word. Let's now look to God's Word to see what God says about His Word.

Read 2 Timothy 3:10 – 4:5. (pg 996 in pew Bibles)

"ALL Scripture is . . ."

I'm going to put that statement to the test starting next week with the Song of Solomon. Some people might question Paul here and say, Really, even the Song of Solomon? Is that book really profitable? How could a collection of sensual love poems be edifying for us? Well, I believe it is, and we'll see that starting next Sunday.

2 Timothy is the last letter the Apostle Paul wrote before his death. He was imprisoned in Rome a second time (in the mid-60s A.D.), and his execution was close at hand. And Paul wrote a second letter to his child in the faith, Timothy. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to lead the church there, and this letter is meant to encourage Timothy and spur him on in his ministry. Here in chapter 3 Paul is lamenting the fact that in these last days there will be all kinds of godlessness. In verses 13-14 he contrasts the "evil people and imposters" with Timothy, whom he charges to "continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed." Paul wants to give Timothy a great foundation for his faith, and he reminds Timothy "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."

I want to look at three truths about Scripture that we see in verses 15-17, and this is the first one.

Scripture is able to make you wise for salvation

What's interesting about this statement in verse 15 is that Paul is referring to the Old Testament here. When he reminds Timothy of the "sacred writings" that he was taught even from childhood, he's talking about the Old Testament Scriptures. The New Testament had not yet been completed or compiled by this point in time. So when Paul mentions the sacred writings, Timothy would have immediately thought of the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul says the Old Testament writings "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." We may be prone to thinking that it's only the New Testament that really teaches about salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. But the whole Bible is about Jesus, and therefore the whole Bible is beneficial for our faith.

As we look at the promises in the Old Testament that point to Christ, and the figures and events that foreshadow Christ, we will gain a better understanding of God's plans in salvation history. We understand that the New Testament is certainly part of the sacred writings as well, and so this verse applies to the Bible as a whole.

The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, (the Scriptures, as a whole) are able to teach us about salvation through

faith in Christ Jesus. The Scriptures tell us what it is that has caused us to be separated from God, and also how God has made a way through His Son Jesus Christ to erase that separation and bring us into a peaceful and joyous relationship with Him.

Isn't this a remarkable thought, that the God of the universe wrote a book for us, in order that we might know who He is and how to be reconciled to Him. God has revealed Himself to us so that we don't have to be ignorant concerning sin and righteousness and faith and salvation.

There is an ancient prayer that illustrates the hopelessness of those who do not have access to God's revelation. This is called the "Prayer to Every God" and it's from the 7th century B.C., preserved in the library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh. "May the fury of my lord's heart be quieted toward me. May the god who is not known be quieted toward me; May the goddess who is not known be quieted toward me. May the god whom I know or do not know be quieted toward me; May the goddess whom I know or do not know be quieted toward me. . . . In ignorance I have eaten that forbidden of my god; In ignorance I have set foot on that prohibited by my goddess. O Lord, my transgressions are many; great are my sins. O my god, my transgressions are many; great are my sins. O my goddess, my transgressions are many; great are my sins. O god whom I know or do not know, my transgressions are many; great are my sins; O goddess whom I know or do not know, my transgressions are many; great are my sins."

And it goes on and on, trying to confess all possible sins to all possible gods, not knowing what the gods expect, or what has offended the gods, or how to appease the gods. We must not take it for granted that we have access to the Bible. This is God's revelation. He has spoken. He's not an anonymous deity who is hiding in the heavens. He is a personal God, and He has spoken. These writings are able to instruct us concerning the most important matters of our existence. If we understand the truth of this Book, and we put our trust in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of our sin, we will be saved. We will spend eternity in heaven. But for those who ignore this truth, and think they're good enough on their own (they don't need Jesus, they don't need forgiveness), those individuals will spend eternity in hell. That's why it's impossible to overstate the importance of this Book. This book is able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is breathed out by God

The second point I want us to notice is from verse 16. All Scripture is breathed out by God. We speak of this as divine inspiration. God inspired every word in the Scriptures. There

were men who put the words down on paper, and their personalities and circumstances are seen in what they wrote, but it's also the case that what they wrote is exactly what God wanted to be written. God inspired their writing. The words they recorded were breathed out by God. This is one of those beautiful mysteries of the Christian faith; that this Book, in one sense, was written by a wide variety of human authors. But at the same time, every word of it was written by God Himself. The words of this book are breathed out by God.

Based on this truth that all Scripture is inspired by God, it necessarily follows that all Scripture is infallible and inerrant. That is, there are no errors in the Bible. It is without mistakes, or lies. It is entirely true.

God is truth, and all Scripture is breathed out by God. Therefore, all Scripture is truth. And therefore we can rely on the words of Scripture as the bedrock for our lives. This is a wonderful comfort to us, and it ought to give us great hope. Because as we navigate our way through the complexities of this world, we can constantly look to the Bible as our compass. The Bible tells us the difference between right and wrong. The Bible teaches us about the purpose and design of marriage. The Bible tells us about the origin of the universe, and where all of history is leading. The Bible tells us about the devastating effects of sin, and also the glorious story of redemption.

This life can be confusing. And it can be depressing. But we have a guidebook that is written by the creator of the universe, and it is entirely true. Are you feeling hopeless this morning? This Book offers amazing hope. Are you struggling with a family conflict? This Book offers wisdom. Are you facing a moral dilemma at work? This Book instructs us clearly how we should conduct ourselves. Are you longing to know God better and to delight in the beauty of His greatness? This Book reveals the awesome plans of God, from creation to Christ's second coming, and the eternal realities of heaven and hell; this Book shows us the character of God, and the actions of God throughout history. And day after day we can read of His great power and goodness and mercy.

I want to ask another question, because I assume that most of us here affirm that the Bible is inspired by God and entirely true. But I wonder if everyone who affirms that really lives like that. What I mean is: we say that the Bible is from God and completely true, but do we cherish the Bible and rely on the Bible in a way that would be appropriate if we really believe that?

We were talking about this some yesterday morning at men's breakfast. John Gratner spoke some about the doctrine of Sola Scriptura. And he said that it's an important doctrine to

affirm, but what's more important is that we live it! It may be one thing to make a doctrinal affirmation about the authority and truthfulness of the Bible. It's another thing to live in day-to-day dependence upon the Bible, looking to the Bible as our guide and our authority in life.

How often do we say that the Bible is from God and entirely true, and yet we treat it like it's dispensable. We treat it like we don't need it. We act like we can get along fine without reading it or studying it or memorizing it. We act like we can figure out the difficult questions of this world on our own. We act like we can find our way through the maze of life without the map book of life. We say the Bible is true. Let's live like it. And let's experience the joy of following the good instructions that God gives us.

Scripture leads to Christian maturity

And this leads to the last point in our text: Scripture leads to Christian maturity. Verses 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 competent, equipped for every good work."

The Bible is not an easy book to read, for various reasons. But one reason why the Bible is not easy to read is because it forces us to look at our own sinfulness. The Bible teaches us and reproves us and corrects us, as verse 16 says. The Bible exposes our sin by showing us the difference between the wrong path and the right path. Maybe you're flirting with some kind of sexual immorality, and you come across Ephesians 5:3-4, which says, "But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving." Or maybe you have problems with anger in your heart, and you read James 1:19-20, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires."

You tell me that this Book is not living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword? You tell me this is a dead book. I don't believe that for a minute. This is a powerful and living document. If you open this up and read it, if you let down your defenses and listen to what God has to say to you in His Word, then the words of these pages are going to jump out and pierce your soul and tell you what's wrong with you. This Book is the best counselor ever. You will be convicted of sin, and then you will also be comforted with the best news in the universe—that everything wrong with you has been taken care of by Jesus Christ.

The Bible doesn't always tell us what we want to hear. It tells us what we need to hear, and what will make us competent and equip us for every good work.

Scripture will lead us to Christian maturity. As we heed these warnings and corrections and rebukes, God's Word will shape us and mold us. It won't be comfortable, because we have to stare into the face of our sinfulness. But it's better to know you have a deadly disease and know how to fight it, than to go on blissfully to destruction. It's a good thing that the Bible rebukes us and corrects us, because that is how God changes us. God saves us through the truth of His Word, and then He sanctifies us (He makes us righteous, He equips us for every good work) through the truth of His Word.

In closing, I want to discuss how this applies to our church as a whole, and then give an application for our personal lives. In chapter 4:2 Paul instructs Timothy to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." And in verses 3-4 he says, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."

We are obligated to proclaim the truth of God's Word. God's Word is true, and it is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. And we must proclaim its truth by reproofing and rebuking and exhorting and teaching. We must not be people-pleasers who are more interested in making people feel good than proclaiming the truth. God's truth must be central, even though it will offend us, and it will make us uncomfortable.

It's out of these convictions that I've been convinced of the value of expository preaching. Expository preaching is simply the style of preaching that seeks to explain and apply a particular passage of Scripture. And as we've done with many books already, and will continue this year with Song of Solomon and 2 Corinthians 8-9 and Hosea and then Romans, my desire is to preach through biblical texts. I think this is the best way to preach the whole counsel of God. And it keeps me from just skipping around and choosing easy passages or inoffensive passages. "ALL Scripture is breathed out by God" and is profitable, and therefore I want to preach on as much of it as I can in my lifetime (Lord-willing, the whole thing!).

And finally, as we all think about the truth of God's Word and the power of God's Word, let's each have a plan for how to make God's Word a priority in our lives. This is the time of year when everyone is making New Year's resolutions. A new diet, a

new workout plan. Stacy was at the grocery store yesterday and there was a home gym on sale. They know that this is the time of year when people will snatch up something like that. Stacy overheard a couple—the guy was really interested in this thing and commented on how inexpensive it was. And then his wife said, “And where are you going to put it?” And she was probably thinking of the 15 other contraptions he’s accumulated over the years through impulsive purchases. It’s good to want to eat right and exercise, and it may be good for you to have some goals in those areas.

But where does the Word of God fit in on your priority list? Do you read and meditate on the Bible daily? You need to, and you need to have a plan for how to do it. It’s not just going to happen randomly, without a plan. There’s a Bible reading plan on the homepage of our website. There are other reading plans you can find online. You can develop a reading plan of your own. But whatever plan you decide on, what matters most is that you recognize the importance of the Bible in your life. These are the words of life. This is God’s revelation of Himself to us, and therefore it should be so precious to us. God has spoken, and we are fools not to listen.