

The Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture
2 Timothy 3:14-17
Pastor Charles Price

The Word of God – outside of Christ Himself, it is the greatest gift that God has given to the human race. And I want to read you some verses this morning that talk about the place and role of the Scriptures.

It is in 2 Timothy Chapter 3, and if you have your Bible, I would love you to turn to that passage, 2 Timothy Chapter 3. And I am going to read from Verse 14 down to the end, which is Verse 17.

And I want to talk to you this morning about the authority and the sufficiency of Scripture.

Let me read it in Verse 14.

“As for you” (says Paul to Timothy), “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 ... Jesus Christ.”

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God” (or the woman of God) “may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Keep your Bible open there. When you come to a service such as this, this morning, we give the majority of our time to the reading of the Word of God and explaining the Word of God.

And this is right and proper that we do, because it is the Scripture that is the authority that teaches us and instructs us and guides us and is sufficient for us.

When I was a student in Glasgow in Scotland, I often attended a Presbyterian church right in the center of the city. It was called St. George’s-Tron. It’s been there for many centuries.

And there is a ground floor where all the people sit, and then there is a balcony that is sort of a horseshoe shape; it starts each side and goes right around the building.

And the pulpit is a tall, high, narrow pulpit with a staircase, probably 15-20 steps that begins at the front and winds its way around until coming up into the pulpit. Now this church was built when all you had in the pulpit was the preacher.

And the way the service began every Sunday morning was that a door down on the left, from the congregation's point of view, would open. It was a door that led into a vestry where the minister and the elders would be meeting to pray before the service. The door would open and elder would walk through that door into the church carrying a huge Bible like this little pocket Testament that I have.

He would climb the steps, come into the pulpit and he would place it down on the pulpit like this, open it at a page that had been pre-set by a little marker like this. And then he would walk back down the stairs of the pulpit and the minister would walk up the stairs. And when he got to the top, he would read from the page that had been opened for him.

And the reason why they did this was that they were demonstrating that the authority in this church is not the minister, it's not the agreed doctrines that together we have said are important, but the authority is the Word of God.

And so it is. And I want to talk to you about this, this morning. Normally I will speak in series of messages from a book of the Bible or a section of Scripture over six, eight, ten, twelve weeks, whatever, but I want to give several one-off individual messages this summer that address some of the key important issues as to why we do what we do.

We don't believe in bibliolatry, which is the worship of Scripture; we believe exclusively in the worship of God. But He has revealed His mind and His truth supremely in the Scriptures.

And from these verses I read this morning in 2 Timothy Chapter 3, I want to talk about three things that are all contained in these verses.

First of all, I want to talk about the source of Scripture.

Then we'll talk about the sufficiency of Scripture.

And then we'll talk about the success of Scripture – how do you measure what the Word of God is designed to do?

Let's talk first about the source of Scripture. Now Scripture has two sources – it has a human source and a divine source. But the divine source does not override the human source. It didn't drop out of the sky as a book. God, through people, gave to us the Scriptures.

So the opening verse of this letter I read from – 2 Timothy – begins,

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God...to Timothy, my dear son:”

So when Timothy was sitting at home one day and somebody came to him and said, “Timothy, there is a letter for you,” his first question would have been, “Who is it from?”

And the answer is: “From Paul.”

Paul wasn’t consciously writing Scripture, I would imagine (some people suggest that he was). But he was writing letter to Timothy from a particular place where he was to the particular place where Timothy was in Ephesus.

He is writing in a certain historical context with all the presuppositions of that context and all his understanding of Timothy and the place where he is, the task where he has. He doesn’t need to explain it all; this is just for Timothy to read and understand. That was the original intention.

And the personality of Paul comes through; the relationship of Paul with Timothy comes through this.

There are more than thirty authors who wrote the 66 books of the Bible over a period of 1500 years in three totally different languages – Hebrew, Greek (Old Testament primarily Hebrew, New Testament is in Greek); parts of the Old Testament in Aramaic.

And the personality of the human writer comes through. We recognize Paul’s style as distinct from Peter’s style and emphasis, as distinct again from John’s style and emphasis.

We all know we have four gospels. These are not four repetitions about the life of Jesus. Each writer had a particular purpose in writing.

Matthew wrote to Jewish people and he presents Christ as King. He takes the ancestry of Jesus back to David. He calls Him the Son of David, and then back through to Abraham as well.

And the theme that comes through Matthew is the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven, because the King is present - that’s his message – and therefore the kingdom is operating. That’s Matthew’s message.

Mark writes to Romans, and he presents Christ not as a king, but as a servant. There is very little teaching in the book of Mark. Who cares what a servant says? There is a lot of action in the book of Mark. There is no genealogy. Who cares where a servant came from? And the key is in Mark 10:45:

“The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.”

And there is a sense of busyness about the gospel of Mark because this is a servant operating.

Luke writes to Gentiles. He presents Christ as the Son of Man. He is available for all people. He takes the ancestry of Jesus right back to Adam. He is not just a Jew; He is for all people, going back to Adam. Luke himself, of course, was a Gentile and his picture is of Christ, the Son of Man.

John writes to Christians, particularly those who have been influenced by Judaism, and he presents Christ as the Son of God. He doesn't give an ancestry; he goes back before time, before space.

“In the beginning was the Word,” he opens his book, “and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him; without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and this life was the light of men,” and so on.

He is presenting Christ on the biggest canvas of all as the Son of God.

So they all had different perspectives. They all write for different purposes. They all have a different style, because human beings were writing in their own day, their own understanding as God had directed them.

However, if there is a human source, there is also a divine source, because, as Verse 16 says,

“All Scripture is God-breathed.”

Some translations like the King James Bible say,

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”

Now I am not sure inspiration is the best word here. God-breathed is a literal translation of what the Greek text says. That is, it comes out of God Himself, as breath comes out. It is the breathing of God.

The Greek word for breath and the Greek word for spirit are actually the same word, the word *pneuma*. This is the Spirit of God breathing. And the authority that we recognize in the Word of God is not because we agree with what it says or we like what it says or we approve what it says; the authority in the Word of God comes from who it is that is saying it. God is speaking through human agents.

In 2 Timothy 3:14, the verse that we began to read, Paul says to Timothy,

“As for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of because you know those from whom you have learned it.”

Now the translators of the NIV put that in the plural, “those from whom you have known it”. But actually, literally, it is in the singular, “because you know of whom you have learned it.”

And the singular, I suggest to you, of course, is the Spirit of God. “That is where you have learned this.”

Now Paul is also referring to Timothy’s mother and grandmother because we know they taught him the Scriptures. Verse 15 says,

“...how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures.”

And back in Chapter 1:5 he says,

“I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”

“Timothy, you have a great advantage. Your mother taught you the Word of God, your grandmother taught you the Word of God. It is likely Timothy’s father was not a Christian. It says he was a Greek, whereas his mother was a Jew. It is likely his father didn’t become a believer. Hence it is his mother and grandmother who have taught him the Word of God.

And it is important we have human teachers, but behind the human teacher is also the divine teacher, because the Holy Spirit who wrote it is the Holy Spirit who also needs to interpret it as we allow Him, in dependence on Him, to do so as we read it.

But notice he said there, “you know from whom you have learned it. Timothy, you have to learn it; it doesn’t just drop into your brain.”

You know, you don’t know the Scriptures by osmosis – that is by, you know, putting it under your pillow for instance and hoping that while you sleep somehow the contents will transmit themselves into your brain.

I talked to somebody a while ago who said they slept with a Bible under their pillow. Well I don’t know what that good does for anybody. All it would do for me is give me a stiff neck. It sounds a little bit like superstition.

No, you’ve actually got to not stick it under your pillow; you’ve got to open it and read it and learn from it. And let me be very frank – if your exposure to the Word of God is just on Sunday morning, you are not going to grow very much.

If all you know about the Word of God is what somebody else has taught you, but you've never come to it with the recognition that God Himself can be your teacher and will teach you, you are not going to grow.

We have to learn it. We have to open it. We have to read it. We have to think about it, meditate on it – that means, chew it over and appropriate it.

And if your Bible spends most of its time sitting on the shelf, it is not going to enable us to grow.

Now you and I have tremendous privileges. One of them is that we have the Word of God, different versions of it, and probably in every home represented here there are numerous copies of it.

Last Sunday morning in Angola I spoke at a church that is out in the bush and I could not say what I said to you this morning. What I said to you at the beginning this morning was, “Would you please open your Bible to 2 Timothy Chapter 3.”

I preached from Ephesians Chapter 2. I could not say, “Would you please open your Bibles to Ephesians Chapter 2” for two reasons: a lot of folks wouldn't be able to read.

But the more important reason is the Bible is not actually available in the language of the people I was speaking to, the Mungambwe of Southern Angola, of whom there are 1.5 million living over an area of 45,000 square kilometres, and the Bible has never been translated into their own language.

I spoke in English, was translated into Portuguese (the Portuguese is a national language of Angola) and then a Mungambwe speaker interpreted the Portuguese into Mungambwe.

I could say, “I am going to read from Ephesians Chapter 2.” The Portuguese translator could say, “I am reading in Ephesians Chapter 2”. The Mungambwe speaker could only say, “Well, I'll tell you what he is going to say,” but he couldn't read it because there is no Mungambwe Bible.

In the 50's there was an attempt to begin translating it and they translated the first three chapters of Mark's gospel, and through ill health the translator had to leave the field.

In the 60's a couple came to do the same thing and build on that but the pressures were such that their marriage broke down.

And they were telling me every attempt to translate the Bible into Mungambwe has been not only difficult and thwarted but they recognize it's come under satanic attack.

And interestingly 6 weeks ago, or 7 weeks ago now, a lady missionary arrived to begin the groundwork to prepare for some translators coming next year in order to translate the Bible into Mungambwe.

And then of course you have got to teach people to read as well. And this place where we were, Tchincombe Farm, they have started a school but they can only go to Grade 4. In fact, for the Mungambwe people, the only education that is available to them is only available up to Grade 4, which enables them to count and to read a little bit.

We don't realize, I think – I don't realize (I probably should correct myself and say) what an incredible privilege it is to have this book, to pick it up, to open it, to be able to read it and to know that it's the representation of what was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek for my own learning, my own understanding that through the written Word of God, I might know the living Word of God.

And not only that, we forget that we have this Bible in our own language because people not only paid the enormous price in terms of effort and discipline but also in blood.

The story of the English Bible is a story that has bloodshed all the way through the early days.

I grew up in England not very far from a village where William Tyndale was born in the late 15th Century. In the 16th Century William Tyndale was one of the first people to translate the Bible into the English language.

Now his mantra, if you like, was that every ploughboy should be able to pick up the Bible and read it, which meant you had to teach the ploughboys to read in the first instance - but also to translate the Bible in such a way that a boy working the plough behind the horses in the field can go home and read the Scriptures for himself.

And William Tyndale, against amazing opposition, culminating in him being burned at the stake and dying for his efforts, left behind the first attempt to translate the Bible into English.

There are many stories like that. Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, also in the 16th Century, were instrumental not only in working on Tyndale's Bible, but also in making it more easily available and also writing the major doctrines of Scripture, which were contrary to what was commonly held by people (because this was the time of the Reformation, and the Reformation involved a whole re-thinking of what actually does the Bible teach? There are so many things built around it from Scripture or from traditions that are no longer related to Scripture).

And so Ridley and Latimer began to teach the doctrines they saw to be true to Scripture. And they too were burned at the stake in the city of Oxford.

And when they were burned together, the last words of Latimer to Ridley were these: he shouted across – Latimer was here, Ridley was over there. They put gunpowder under Latimer so that he would explode and die quickly. They did not put gunpowder under Ridley. And Latimer did die quickly; Ridley died slowly. It was a long torturous death at the stake.

But Latimer said across to Ridley, “Be of good comfort, Master Ridley and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God’s grace, in England, as I trust will never be put out.”

Do you know why we are here this morning? One of the reasons is because in the English language that candle ignited and was never put out.

And we have the Word of God available to us. There are hundreds of Bibles in this building this morning, in our homes. There will be thousands of Bibles in total that are represented here.

And this is the authoritative Word of God because this book is God speaking, God-breathed. And if William Tyndale, Latimer, Ridley – if they could come back today and see the lack often of respect and responsiveness and reading of the Word of God, they might wonder if they had died in vain because this book has become a closed book so often for many of us who are Christians.

This is the authoritative Word of God and our task when we meet like this, this morning; our only task is to be faithful to Scripture and faithful to God, because everything else flows out of that.

That’s the first thing – the source of Scripture. All Scripture is God-breathed. Should I say that is the NIV rendering – all Scripture is God-breathed.

Let me talk secondly about the sufficiency of Scripture because Verse 16 gives a four-fold function of the Bible, or if you like, a four-fold progression. There is a progression here. Let me read it to you.

Verse 16:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching,” (number 1)
“rebuking” (number 2), “correcting” (number 3), “and training in righteousness” (number 4).

Let me ask you, what do you expect when the Word of God is opened, when you come here like this morning, what do you expect when the Word of God is opened?

Well the first thing it's for is for teaching, and that's probably what most of us expect. We would like to be instructed, we would like to be taught.

I love a verse in Isaiah 50 and Verse 9 [4], and I was reminded of it when Hilary spoke from this verse at one point this last week in Angola. It says this:

“The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary.”

And then listen to this:

“He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.”

You know, there is nothing more satisfying than listening to an instructed tongue. But instructed tongues don't just fall out of the sky. An instructed tongue is connected to an instructed ear.

“He wakens my ear morning by morning to listen like one being taught.”

That idea of listening and being and speaking with an instructed tongue that makes sense and that carries authority is spoken of a bit later as well in Isaiah 55, (just a couple of chapters later) and Verse 10 and 11, where it says,

“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out of my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

That is a great statement on the purpose of the Word of God. He says it's like two things: it's bread for the eater. So as we turn to the Word of God, we feed our own souls, we are nourished by it.

Now of course Christ Himself is the Bread of Life, but this takes us to Christ; the written Word takes us to the Living Word.

So it's bread for the eater but it's also, he says, seed for the sower. It equips you with seed to sow.

And so as we read the Word of God and as we think about it and as we allow its truths to sink into our minds, what we don't know is that in addition to feeding out own souls by eating it, we are also equipping ourselves with seed that you don't know where it is – you will be able to drop that seed into somebody else's heart; it is going to reap a harvest.

I remember reading about many years ago; there was a follow-up to a Billy Graham crusade in the days when Billy Graham had these crusades that went on for weeks sometimes.

Many people would come to Christ. And they had record of these people because they had been followed up and introduced to local churches etc.

And a number of months afterwards – I think it was 6, maybe 9 months later – they took a random selection of these new converts and they contacted them with a series of questions to find out how they were doing, what was the long-term results etc.

And one of the questions was: “What is it that Billy Graham said that really grabbed you?”

And they were intrigued to discover that most of the replies to that statement were statements of Scripture, whether they actually knew it or not. When they were done, they would say, “When Billy Graham said, ‘The gift of God is eternal life’ (I don’t know if that was an exact example) or “when Billy Graham said, ‘Be sure your sins will find you out.’” (These were all quotations.)

And they found the things that penetrated was the direction quotation of the Word of God, was one of the reasons why Billy Graham was so fruitful in his ministry because that recurring phrase you would hear him say was, “The Bible says, the Bible says, the Bible says, the Bible says...” because that is authoritative. It’s bread that nourishes our own soul. It is seed for the sower.

If - he talks about waking my ear to listen; it is interesting that God said to Joshua in Joshua 1:8:

“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth.”

Now there may be many of us who don’t allow it to depart from our ear – we listen to it, but we don’t talk about it.

Let the Word of God be in your mouth so that what you talk about may not be direct quotation from Scripture of course, but expresses the perspectives and the truths of Scripture.

“Don’t let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth”

Here’s what to do:

“Meditate on it day and night...be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

If you meditate on it, it will come out of your mouth.

That's the first function. That's Scripture:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching,”

Secondly he says,

“Rebuking.”

Now I mentioned most of us came here this morning expecting to be taught, wanting to be taught. I wonder how many of us came here this morning expecting to be rebuked.

And if we are to be rebuked by the Word of God, what kind of disposition we have towards that rebuke? Do we resist it? Do we justify what it being rebuked?

You see Scripture rebukes us by challenging our presuppositions, exposing our faulty living, revealing to us our sin.

The Bible is intended to not only address our minds (which is its role in teaching), but it is also intended to address our conscience (which is its role in rebuking).

It's a good question to ask – I don't ask it of every sermon I preach, but it's a good question to ask: where does this address people's conscience? Because that is part of the ministry of the Word of God.

If we want to be taught but we don't want to be changed, then we may listen to the teaching, we may dot our doctrinal “i's” and cross our doctrinal “t's” and become very content with our system of theology, but we're not going to grow, we're not going to be godly, we're not going to be fruitful unless we allow the Word of God to have its rebuking role. We'll just be a cerebral Christian. And I meet a lot of cerebral Christians who are very concerned about dotting your “i's” and dotting your “t's” but know very little of living under the authority of the Word of God and allowing their consciences to be addressed and rebuked, and as a result, changed.

Paul wrote in Acts 24:6[16]:

“I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”

That is, “I strive to respond to the convicting work of the Word of God.”

The third function is that

“All Scripture is God-breathed, is useful for teaching (number 1), rebuking (number 2), correcting.”

You see rebuking is not very helpful unless it leads to correction. How many of us come and listen to the Word of God and read the Word of God in order to be corrected? This takes a spirit of humility.

You see the Word of God doesn't rebuke us to embarrass us or to condemn us; it rebukes us in order to correct us, to bring about remedial action, that there is correction.

James says about this in James 1:23,

“Anyone who listens to the word” (of God), “but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and ...forgets what he looks like.

“But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do so, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – will be blessed in what he does.”

You look into the Word of God, you look into a mirror, he says, but you look into a mirror and you see something that is out of place and you don't correct it, he said, what is the use of looking in the mirror in the first place?

The room that Hilary and I had in Angola this last week had no mirror. And because of the hot African sun, I wore a hat when I was outside (my Tilley hat, we're not supposed to advertise I'm sure). It sits tightly on my head and I'd come in, take it off and I'd be sitting there doing some work or something and Hilary would walk in and say, “Have you seen your hair?” (Because my hair does funny things under a hat). “It's standing on end – looks like you have been through a bush, you know, backwards.”

“Well, I don't have a mirror.”

You see the mirror doesn't lie, does it? The mirror tells you the truth. A photograph can lie – you can touch them up now-a-days. That's why none of us like our photographs because they are not touched up, especially those you get for passports when you don't smile. “Man, do I look as glum as that? Goodness me! Do I look as old as that?”

“Yes, you do.”

I heard about a lady one day who went to a photographer to take her portrait. And she said to him as she sat in the chair in front of the camera, “You will do me justice, won't you?”

He said, “Madame, it’s not justice you need; it’s mercy.”

Well the camera can show you mercy, the artist can show you mercy when he paints your picture, but the mirror tells you the truth.

Do you know that expression, “warts and all”? Do you know where that comes from? Oliver Cromwell had his portrait painted. He had a big ugly wart. The artist kindly took the wart off and painted this lovely picture of Oliver Cromwell. He saw it and said, “Do it again, warts and all. This isn’t me; I’ve got a big ugly wart here.”

Why does the Scripture expose our warts like a mirror? Is it to mock us; is it to humiliate us? No. It’s that having rebuked us, it might correct us. There is a remedial process in the Word of God.

How does it correct us? I could give you a lot of things – I will give you two. One is it cleanses us. You say, “The Word of God cleanses us?” Yes it does.

In Ephesians 5:26 it speaks of the washing with water through the Word, that it’s like having a wash in water when you turn to the Word.

Jesus said to the disciples in John 15:3,

“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”

“You are clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” Now of course it is the blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sin. It was on the cross that Jesus Christ satisfied the justice of God as our substitute that we might be cleansed and made righteous. That is what happens the moment a person comes to Christ.

But then one of the effects of the Word of God in our lives is it goes on cleansing us. And you know, you may go away from here this morning or other mornings and you might say by Wednesday morning, “What in the world did I remember from what I heard on Sunday morning?”

And the answer may be, “Not a lot.” (Who said, “Amen”? Wake that man up, somebody!)

You know the worst form of communication – what I am doing this morning – monologue, standing up talking, but there is something unique about preaching, which is why we do it this way, because we are not just passing information.

Preaching involves a spiritual exercise where we meet with God and God does something in our hearts and our lives. And one of the things the Word of God does is it does wash, it does cleanse.

Let me give you an illustration. There was an African boy and his mother said, “I want you to go and get some water” and gave him a basket to go and get the water from the stream in.

And he went down to the stream, took his basket and put it into the water and picked it up. Of course all the water flowed out of it. And he thought, “How am I going to get this water?”

So he did it again, put the basket into the water, tried to put it on his head to take it back to his home. And all the water drained out of it very quickly.

He did it again; same thing happened. He did it again; the same thing happened.

He went back to his mother and he said, “I can’t do this. All the water comes out of the basket. I can’t bring you any water in the basket.”

She said, “No son, but now you have a clean basket.”

You know, there is something about the Word of God that is supernatural in what it does in our hearts and lives, and being here like this, this morning is allowing the Word of God to cleanse us and it does have that effect.

You know, David, in Psalm 119 asked a very good question:

“How can a young man keep his way pure?”

I wonder if his mind didn’t roll back to his time as a young man when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and created so much pain.

“How does a young man keep his way pure?”

His answer:

“By guarding it according to your word.”

And then he said in Verse 11 (Psalm 119),

“I have hidden your word in my heart”

Why?

“That I might not sin against you.”

“Because this word itself has a cleansing effect on me.”

It corrects us by cleansing us, it corrects us by directing us because Psalm 119:105 says,

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

If I want to know where I am going, the Word of God will be a lamp at my feet and a light for my path. The will of God always conforms to the Word of God and if you are looking for direction, just read the Bible.

Don't go looking for stuff at random, you know, and hoping that I'll find a verse here like “Judas went and hanged himself” and so you try it again and it says, “Go and do thou likewise”, so you try it again and it says, “Whatever you do, do it quickly.”

You know, you don't randomly just select verses for guidance, but as you read it – just pick it up and read it – maybe in the morning, maybe at night, maybe in the day when you have got time – and you don't know how God will suddenly, something will jump out and speak to you. “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a guide, a light for my path.”

The fourth – and there are many more things we could say about how the Word of God corrects us. In fact, I made a long list this week and I've pitched it because it would take me too long to talk about it. But how the Word of God teaches us, rebukes us, it corrects us and the fourth is,

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for...(number 4) “training in righteousness.”

That's the end purpose. Training in righteousness; don't be frightened of that word. It means being what you were created to be.

You see by nature we are not righteous. We don't function as we should function. But it's for training in righteousness, that we might live that quality of life that is deeply satisfying to us and pleasing to God.

Notice “for training in righteousness”. That's a process. We live in a very fast day. We want everything quick. We're used to everything being quick.

48 hours ago Hilary and I were in Africa. We're here in Toronto this morning. That's quick.

Out in the African bush, they brought out a satellite dish, connected it to a generator, aimed it at a satellite somewhere up there and pulled out of the sky the World Cup Finals in South Africa and projected them last Sunday onto a wall that's 16 feet high, larger than life. And we sat last Sunday and watched the World Cup Final in the middle of the bush. Instant access. We could connect

Internet through the satellite dish, beamed it up to a satellite, which beamed it down to Brussels in Belgium so everything on our computers, all our Googling became Belgian, and then transmitted across the world.

And I was sitting there doing about 10 minutes of e-mails and I sent an e-mail to somebody and two minutes later the reply came back because he was sitting at his computer and he got the message, replied straightaway and within two minutes we were flash, flashed across the world – instantly.

But it doesn't work like that in the Christian life. Sometimes we want just one prayer – that'll do it all. One experience – that'll do it all. One encounter with God – that'll do it all. No, there are those special moments of course but it's an ongoing process whereby we are being trained in righteousness. As Paul said elsewhere in 2 Corinthians Chapter 3,

“From one degree of glory to another we are being transformed into his likeness.”

That's a process. We don't get it all in one fell swoop, and we live off that. We get Christ in the moment where we repent and trust Him, but there is a growth that is an ongoing process, which is why we need to be very patient with ourselves and very patient with other people. There is a process going on.

Now let me ask you: if the Scriptures are given to us to teach, rebuke, correct and train in righteousness, those are very comprehensive statements and very inclusive statements – what is left out of that?

And I suggest to you nothing is left out, which is why we must not only believe in the inspiration and authority of Scripture; we must believe in the sufficiency of Scripture.

If we don't believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, we will run to other sources with decreasing confidence in the adequacy of the Word of God.

And so we will run to psychology as a means to sanctification and it becomes a do-it-yourself methodology rather than the work of the Spirit of God in our lives. We will run to Harvard Business School to learn how church growth works and how church leadership should operate, instead of to the Word of God.

We will run to Wall Street for financial wisdom about how the church should operate its finances instead of to the Word of God. We will even run to Broadway to learn how to be attractive to non-churched people instead of going to the Word of God to find out what is the power of God that brings people to Christ.

You see Scripture is sufficient in our counselling; Scripture is sufficient for our church growth and our church strategies and our church governance. Scripture is sufficient for church renewal. Scripture is sufficient for personal growth.

Now behind the written Word is the Living Word; it takes us to Christ Himself. But this is the access to Him in our understanding and our ability.

And so if the Word of God is to teach, rebuke, correct and train in righteousness, what is that all for?

My third point: the success of Scripture. The source is both human and divine. Men wrote, inspired by the Spirit of God. If the sufficiency of Scripture is that it covers all the fundamental needs of our lives, what is the success of Scripture? How do we measure the success of Scripture in our lives?

Well Verse 17 tells us:

“So that the man of God” (or the woman of God) “may be thoroughly equipped...”

For what?

“...for every good work.”

Thoroughly equipped is not partially equipped. Thoroughly equipped for what? That we feel good about ourselves? That we live in a safe environment? That we have a great marriage? That we live happily ever after?

No, it is to equip us for every good work. That is, by definition, good works is other people become the beneficiaries of this.

And here we are back to the missional role of the Christian church, which we have talked about and we will talk about a lot more.

This is the missional role of Scripture in our lives. It equips us to do other people good. If you want to know if you are growing in the Word of God, how many other people are benefitting from the life that is being produced in you?

It is to be thoroughly equipped for every good work. This is the missional role of the individual believer; this is the missional role of the church because this is the missional role of Scripture itself.

William Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army. When he was an old man the American Salvation Army were having their annual conference and he was coming to address them.

And as I understand the story, his ship was delayed and it looked unlikely that he would arrive in time. But as the opening meeting was about to begin, the leader of the Salvation Army in the United States was on the platform when he was brought a telegram that had been sent from the ship, from General Booth.

And he opened it and read it to the assembled group of people. This is General William Booth's word to his soldiers in the Salvation Army – it was one word only:

“Others.”

And William Booth had hit it right. What God does in you is to enable God to do things through you. The Word of God is not just a feed, it's not just bread for the eater; it is seed for the sower. Don't let the Word depart from your ear. “It wakens my ear to listen” but don't let the Word of God depart from your mouth and you will be equipped for every good work - thoroughly equipped.

Now one or two verses later in Chapter 4:2 Paul says to Timothy:

“Preach the Word;”

That is, teach it.

“Be prepared in season and out of season.”

That is, be prepared when it's popular and when it's unpopular, when people want to hear it and when they don't want to hear it. Preach the word in season and out of season.

Listen to this:

“Correct, rebuke, and encourage”

There's all those same things again – teaching, rebuking, correcting. He says encouraging, which is similar to training in righteousness. We need encouraging in that.

And then he says how to do it:

“With great patience and careful instruction”, he says.

“Timothy, when you handle the Word of God, you need to be patient. You see the Word of God is described as being like seed several times – seed for the sower. Jesus talked about sowing seed, a farmer sowing seed; it's the Word of God.

If you are going to sow seed, you have to be very patient. You can sow seed in your garden, come back next day and there's nothing to show for it. Come back next week; there's nothing to show for it. Come back next month; there may be a green shoot pointing through the ground but it's at this moment worthless. But come back in 6 months and then you get your harvest.

Now says Paul to Timothy, "You preach the Word, you correct, you rebuke, you encourage, but do it with great patience (the first thing). Patience – we need to be patient in our own lives and certainly patient in other people's lives.

And he says, "careful instruction." Those of us who in any context teach the Scriptures must do so with careful instruction. If you teach a Sunday school class, do it carefully. If you lead a small group and your responsibility includes leading discussion of the Bible, make sure you don't get all these weird and wonderful ideas that come floating in and giving them credibility. No, instruct carefully. Go back again; what does the Scripture say?

If you work with young people, do it carefully. In your own Bible study, read it carefully and study it carefully, because as it is carefully and accurately applied it will do its work.

We don't do what they did in Glasgow – produce this big Bible and everybody looks in silence as it was opened. Anything can become a routine; anything can become dead. I didn't especially get excited when I saw the Bible man walking out of that room, but I began to appreciate later what the symbolism of it all was.

We have a Word that is authoritative, that is sufficient, that is effective, that is living, that is powerful. But you have that at home, maybe tucked on a shelf somewhere, closed, and you are robbing your soul of its food and of its truth. You are robbing your mind of understanding. Without it you get blown this way and that way by every cranky television evangelist who will tell you all kinds of nonsense because you don't know the Word of God yourself.

All Scripture is God-breathed, all Scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man and woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every – every good work.

Let's pray together. Let's ask God to give us not only a respect for His Word, but a hunger, an appetite for it as well.

Father, we thank You from our hearts this morning, not only for the inspired God-breathed Scriptures we have in our hands, but we thank You we do have them in our hands.

We thank You that we live in a country where it is free to read it, to live by it, when so much of the world doesn't have that privilege. Some, like the

Mungambwe people in Angola don't even have it in their own language; they can't go home and read it. Some who have it are forbidden openly to read it.

Thank You for the great privilege we have that through the written Word we might know and understand and enjoy and experience the living Word of Christ Himself, living within our hearts. Give us an appetite for you that takes us back to this book, for we pray it in Jesus' name, Amen.