

The Purpose of God's Word

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[0:00] Open up to Timothy chapter 3. Now if you'd like a piece of paper for the kids to work on during this, down the back on the table there you'll find some colouring in sheets and start reading the Bible.

Okay, well why don't we pray and spend some time now thinking about these things and some more. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you that you've given us your word and we pray this morning as we spend time in it that you'd encourage us and spur us on to live lives which please you and we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

Well I wonder what you'd say if someone asked you what's going on for you when you read the Bible, that's assuming that we are actually reading the Bible. So over the next four weeks we're going to be considering the topic of hearing God's word.

It's not our usual practice to speak topically, to preach topically, but we do occasionally from time to time. And so this week we're going to be particularly looking at hearing from God's word, what is the purpose of God's word this morning.

And looking at 2 Timothy chapter 3 this morning and other places. And next week we'll pick up on Jonah, picking up on the things of the Holiday Kids Club and thinking about trembling at God's word.

[1:28] So let me read to you 2 Timothy chapter 3. 2 Timothy chapter 3, we'll pick it up at verse 10. And then we'll press into more further things. You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings.

What happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra? Which persecutions I endured? Yet from them all the Lord had rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you've learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you've learned it, and how from childhood you've been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

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 complete, equipped for every good work. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. All right, well, we've got a unique book in our hands. Queen Elizabeth II said, and what did she say? Well, she said, to what greater inspiration and counsel can we turn than to the imperishable truth to be found in this treasure house, the Bible?

[2:59] Queen Elizabeth II was a reader of God's word. John Calvin, the great reformer of the 16th century, said this. We summarize it succinctly when he says, when the Bible speaks, God speaks.

So actually, what we have in the Bible is a library of 66 books. There's 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament, spanning a time from around about 1800 BC through to around about 200, or the earliest first century.

So roughly, almost 2,000 years of human history has been covered in the Bible. And it speaks about things that were even written before recorded history began.

There's no other book like it, no other complete document like it. It really is an amazing book. 66 books, but with one overarching theme, the kingdom of God.

And as we read in 2 Timothy chapter 3, did you notice how the scriptures are described? See there in verse 15? Sacred writings. The scriptures are sacred writings.

[4:07] Literally, the sacred letters of the alphabet, aligned together as they are in words, become the scriptures that God has given to us. That is, they are holy, they are special, they are unique,

they're separate from any other form of literature.

So when someone sets out to write a book, I don't know if you've written a book or not, but when someone sets to write out a book or an essay or something like that, they'll usually have some reason to write it. And sometimes, when we read some of the books of the Bible, the author tells us clearly why they wrote this particular book.

So John tells us that he wrote his gospel, John's gospel, so that we would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life in his name.

That was his purpose of writing John, the gospel. And the writer of the Hebrews says he's written a word of exhortation, to exhort us how to live for God. And generally, you can identify a purpose for the scriptures that when you read them, one of the books.

And yet the Bible has one big overarching purpose. And that is to reveal God himself.

[5:20] But before we get there, let's consider the nature of scripture itself, because the scriptures, we have both the work of God and the work of man bringing us the Bible.

And so we're talking about here the dual authorship of scripture. All right. So when we read the Bible, we're listening to the very word of God. That's where we go to listen to God speak.

This is where we can, we shouldn't expect to hear God speak in an audible voice, and we should not expect God to speak in dreams and visions, but he can. Right? He can.

But the normal way that God would speak is in his word. Now, why do I say that? Well, because everything that God has needed to say, he has said in his word.

There's nothing more he needs to say. Everything he wanted to say, he has said. Have a look at Hebrews chapter one, verses one to two. I think it's on the screen behind me. So Hebrews chapter one, verses one and two says, Long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

[6:23] But in these last days, he's spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world. So in the past, God spoke in lots of ways.

In the prophets, he spoke to the people audibly in words, in dreams, in visions, through angels, and even through animals.

Balaam's ass. That was the mode in the past. Right? But now in these last days, while we're waiting for Jesus to return, he has spoken, he has finished speaking, he's literally said everything he wanted to say, and he's spoken to us literally by son.

Right? We're not looking for a new word from God, any so-called present day apostles or prophets. Jesus brings and has brought us the final revelation of God to the world, who himself is the very word of God.

And we'll get there in our last talk on the series. All that God wants us to know, he's given us to know in his word. Now, 2 Timothy chapter three, verse 16, begins by saying, All scripture is breathed out by God.

[7:31] Right? Breathed out by God. What's that mean? To breathe out God's word. Well, when I speak, my word is carried on the breath from me, comes out from me.

In the same kind of way, the word of God, the scriptures come from the very mouth of God, as he breathes them out into the world.

And the question is, how much of scripture is all scripture? I want to ponder that for a moment with you. How much scripture is all scripture? How much of the Bible is scripture?

I mean, it seems pretty clear that we, Paul would be talking about all that comes before he wrote.

That makes sense. So all the Old Testament, which is before the New Testament.

So at least Genesis to Malachi would be all of God's word. God inspired it, brought it to life. In much the same way that God is the author of life, created everything by his word.

[8:32] So he's completely in charge of his scriptures. So his scriptures give life. So his word is alive. It's not passive set of words on the page. But what about the New Testament?

Is the New Testament God's word? Do we include the New Testament as scripture? And there's good reason to say absolutely, certainly, yes. Because Paul speaks about the gospel accounts being God's word.

Consider 1 Timothy, I'm going to jot this down. 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 17 to 19. Have a look at this with me. 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 17. Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching.

For the scripture says, you shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain, and the labourer deserves his wages. Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

Okay, so I put it to you. What scripture says, you shall not muzzle the ox? Do you know which scripture says that?

[9 : 43] Those who do the Deuteronomy studies will get there eventually. What scripture says that? Well, Deuteronomy chapter 25, verse 4 says that.

So the Old Testament scripture says, do not muzzle the ox. But what scripture says, the labourer deserves his wages?

Well, it comes from Matthew chapter 10 and Luke chapter 10, which is what Jesus says and is written down in the Gospels as scripture.

Alright? So, Paul's saying at least the Gospels, right, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are considered scripture, holy, sacred writings.

Okay? Well, that's okay. What about the rest of the New Testament? We'll have about, see what Peter, the Apostle Peter says about the Apostle Paul.

[10 : 52] Have a look at this. 2 Peter chapter 3, verse 15 and 16. And count the patience of our Lord of salvation, just as our beloved Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them about these matters.

There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable people twist to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures.

So, Peter, the Apostle Peter, is saying that what Paul writes is sacred writings, is scripture.

And the Apostle Paul, as you know, wrote most of the New Testament. So, the scriptures are the sacred, holy, special words of God, God's special revelation of himself to us.

So, both the Old Testament and the New Testament are words of God. And we will hear God speak to us clearly in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

[12 : 05] Now, at the same time, the scriptures are written down for us by human authors, right? Written by human authors. So, God uses the personalities of the human authors to write down God's holy word.

So, the prophets weren't just typewriters, right? They weren't just typewriters. That would be some, how other religions might say the scriptures, they have come, right?

Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, David were all men in their own right, different characters, just like Paul and Peter and John were.

And we read their words and we get to know their character. However, the same way that God, we can get to know God, God oversees human authors in their writing of the scriptures.

God is revealed authoritatively through human authors in self-revelation. So, let me demonstrate to you from this, from David who wrote Psalm 95, right?

[13 : 15] So, Psalm 95 written by David, the great king of Israel. The writer of the Hebrews says that when he's calling the people not to hardening their hearts against God, he says this.

Have a look at this. Not failing to enter heaven. So, Hebrews chapter 3. So, Hebrews chapter 3, he says that God, the Holy Spirit says, Psalm 95, right?

So, Psalm 95. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, right? As the Holy Spirit says, right? Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to test and saw my works for 40 years.

Therefore, I was provoked with that generation and said, they shall always go astray in their hearts. They have not known my ways. As I swore my wrath, they will not enter my rest. That's Psalm 95, written by David.

But the writer of the Hebrews says, came by the Holy Spirit, right? And later, the writer also says that God says, in Hebrews chapter 4, therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, that is God's rest, right?

[14 : 27] Let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as them, but the message that they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

For we who believed have entered that rest as he, that is God, has said, as I swore on my wrath, they will not enter my rest.

And he also says, through David, who's speaking in Psalm 95, Hebrews chapter 4, verse 6. So long as afterward, in the words already quoted, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. So do you see that Psalm 95 is written by David, but it's also written by God's Holy Spirit. It's also written by God himself.

So you have the dual authorship of scripture. God writes his words through human authors. And we can do the same kind of stuff in other places, like Acts chapter 4, verse 25.

[15 : 46] You can look at it another time. Okay, so both the Old Testament and the New Testament are God's word. And we will hear our almighty God speak to us.

The almighty, all-powerful, all-knowing God speaks to us through his word in the Old Testament and the New Testament. And the word of God is from God and also through men.

Not made up by men, right? But God inspired and written down by human authors. And it's not that some parts are more important than other parts. I want to get this home straight as well.

Not that some parts are more authoritative than other parts. All scripture, right, we're saying is God breathed. It's all his authoritative word, where he exercises his rule through his word.

He speaks, right? And we can hear him speak to us. Nowhere else will we actually be able to hear God speak as clearly as he does, except in the words of God.

[16 : 48] And nowhere else can we expect God to speak so clearly. We don't need to speculate on what God's saying. We can actually know what he's saying. For he wants to tell us what he wants to tell us in his word.

So all scripture is God breathed. I just want to just point out something here, which is why that red letter Bibles aren't so crash hot. Right? Red letter Bibles aren't so that helpful.

You know the ones that have Jesus words in red. The words that are said by Jesus are no more inspired than the black words in the Bible.

So it's actually distracting to have the red letters in the Bible. I think that might be more authoritative or more important than the rest of the Bible.

So, first of all, we hear God speak to us in his word, which is where we have the treasured scriptures here for us to know God himself. All right, let's put on to the purpose of God's word then and get this straight.

[17 : 50] The ultimate purpose of God's word is for God to reveal himself to us fully, finally and clearly. And it's a great kindness to us.

We have no right to know God. We can't just expect God to tell us about himself. We have no right to know him, no ability to get to know him at all.

We can only know one another by what we disclose about ourselves to one another. We can know things about the other person, right, by observing them, right?

But we really can't know them unless they reveal themselves. We say, well, you know, Roy's a man, Roy's got a wife, Roy's got a daughter. But you can't really know much about me unless I tell you about me.

Can you? And so it is with God. There's a thing called general revelation. Revelation is available to all who look on the world around about us. The heavens above, you can know well that we can know that God's the creator.

[18 : 54] We can summarize that there's an order, that there's power. We can't get to know him much more than that though. And most people then reject what they know about God from general revelation.

Worshipping the creation rather than the creator. Have a listen to Romans chapter 1. Romans chapter 1 tells us quite clearly.

This is about general revelation, right? For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power, divine nature, have been clearly perceived, and ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him. They became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

[19 : 58] Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images, resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

So you've got general revelation and people can know about God, but most reject him, right? But what we have in the scriptures is special revelation, revelation of God himself.

Just like you can know me if I tell you about myself. We can know God as he chooses to reveal himself to us. And it takes time for God to reveal himself to us in his word.

He needs to give us the language, the categories, the capacities to understand him. Again, Calvin put it quite nicely.

God lisps to us like a mother to her child. All right. What does that mean? Well, it means that he sort of deliberately simplifies his language, right?

[21:02] The way he speaks to us is like a loving parent who uses baby talk, right? To talk to their child to start with, you know, goo goo ga ga, you know? Mum, mum, mum, bub, bub, bub, you know?

Build up the language of the categories to understand. So God progressively reveals himself in the scriptures. And what we see is that God is a sovereign ruler over everything.

And he's powerful. He's wise. He's a righteous king, Lord of lords and God of gods. He reveals himself to us in his word. Who he is, what he'd be like.

He is the great I am of Exodus chapter 3. And the big difference between the true and living God and the gods of the nations is that our God speaks. He's not deaf. He's not mute.

He's not silent. He's not impotent. He's not like the idols. Have a listen to Psalm 115 with me. Psalm 115 is one of many places that says the same kind of thing.

[22:03] Psalm 115 verse 1. Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

Why should the nations say, where is their God? Our God is in the heavens. He does all he pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.

Listen to this. They have mouths but do not speak. Eyes but do not see. They have ears but do not hear. Noses but do not smell.

They have hands but do not feel. Feet but do not walk. And they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them. So do all who trust in them.

The idols, the nations, gods, are powerless and useless. And those who worship the idols become like them. Dumb, stupid, ignorant, foolish.

[23:08] And you can't help but to sort of push into our world at the moment, can you? You reject God and you become fools. But God in his mercy reveals himself to us in his word clearly.

He upholds the universe by the word of his power. He is the almighty, powerful creator, sustainer of the universe. And he graciously chooses to reveal himself to us in his holy, sacred scriptures.

So back to 2 Timothy chapter 3, we read about the powerful, wonderful generosity of God. For in the scriptures he tells us the way of salvation.

So he reveals himself to us in his word and he reveals to us the way of salvation in his word. This is some of the key purposes of God's word. And once saved, he shows us how to live then as God's intended people should live.

The scriptures are profitable for useful, teaching, beneficial, for teaching, reproof, correcting and training in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

[24:23] So we come back to 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 15. The sacred writings are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. But before we go there, did you notice, did you aware that he was acquainted with them from infancy, from childhood?

What a great blessing that is, to be acquainted with the scriptures. Revelation from God from childhood.

If you haven't grown up with them, then can I encourage you to become more and more acquainted with them. Know your way around the Bible and get to know the Creator, the Saviour, who we're going to spend eternity with.

I encourage you to do that. And it's good for parents. It's actually the best thing really for parents and grandparents to be making their children and grandchildren acquainted with the scriptures. There's no greater gift, right, that we could give to our children and grandchildren than this. We could give to our children a knowledge of the sacred writings, a knowledge of God, the one who made them.

[25:37] So that we can know our Creator, who makes us, and then be made wise for salvation. That is, given wisdom, be taught, be instructed in the way of salvation.

The very thing that every person in the world desperately needs and cannot be found anywhere other than the scriptures.

You can't find salvation in any other source. You won't find it in the Koran. You won't find it in the Bhagavad Gita. You won't find a salvation in the dreamtime stories.

You won't find salvation in the sacred writings of any other world, religion or philosophy. Because they will not point you to faith in Christ Jesus.

Salvation is that rescue from God's wrath, forgiveness of sins, redemption from the power and the penalty of sin, can only be found through faith in Christ Jesus.

[26 : 41] Faith in King Jesus. For the Holy Scriptures reveal the kingdom of God. And the true and living God who made the world and rules the world. You won't learn about that anywhere else.

And the Holy Scriptures teach us who we are and what we're meant to be. You won't learn that anywhere else. The Holy Scriptures teach us about our sin and our rebellion against our Holy God. You won't hear about that anywhere else. The Holy Scriptures teach us about God's righteous wrath and the punishment that we deserve for our sins. For our rebellion against the true and living God.

You won't hear about that anywhere else. The Holy Scriptures teach us about sacrifice and rescue. The Holy Scriptures teach us about Christ, the anointed King, being the sacrificial lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

You won't hear about that anywhere else. We can only know Christ Jesus and what he would do through the Scriptures. The Holy Scriptures teach us that it is and has always been by faith in Christ Jesus that anyone can be saved.

[27 : 58] The Holy Scriptures teach us that Jesus is no one less than God, the Son who died as a sacrifice for our sins, for our rebellion, to bear the wrath of God, our Holy God himself.

You won't hear about that anywhere else than the Scriptures. We'll only know God who sent Jesus and raised him from the dead.

Who will return one day again to judge the living and the dead. You won't hear about that anywhere else except through the Holy Scriptures. So the purpose of God's word is to reveal God himself to us and to reveal the way of salvation to us.

And finally, how God intends his people to live as he saved people. You see that there, instructions for righteous living. 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16. 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 complete, equipped for every good work.

Colm Buchanan has a helpful way of summarising this. He's brilliant, right? Brilliant theologian. Using the idea of people going for a bush walk.

[29 : 12] And on a bush walk, as a way of thinking about living our lives as we go through this world. And he talks about teaching, right?

Teaching shows you the right track to go on. Teaching the right track. Reproof tells you when you are off track.

Right? You're off track here. Correction tells you how to get back on track. Right? That's correction, getting back on track. And training in righteousness, how to stay on track.

Right? So there you go. Colm Buchanan's exposition of 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16. Teaching shows you the right track. Reproof tells you when you're off track.

Correction tells you how to get back on track. And training in righteousness keeps you on track. And here's a great clue in how to read the Bible, God's Word better.

[30 : 12] How we can be better at hearing God's Word. Let me tell you. Finally, when you read any part of God's scripture, Old Testament or New Testament, we can ask the following three questions.

Right? One. What is God revealing about himself to me here in this part of God's Word? Because that's what his Word is primarily about. Revealing who he is.

How does this part of God's Word reveal himself to me? Two. How am I being made wise for salvation from this part of God's Word?

And three. How am I being taught, rebuked, correct or trained in righteousness from this part of God's Word here that I'm reading today? Which is something for us all to consider this morning after having sat under God's Word right now.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you that you're gracious and kind. That you revealed yourself to us who do not deserve to know you.

[31 : 18] Thank you you revealed the way of salvation for us through faith in Christ Jesus. And thank you that you show us how to live as your people in this world as we wait for his return.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen.