

Why Study The Bible?

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[0 : 0 0] So, this morning is a one-off sermon. We're going to look at 2 Timothy chapter 3, particularly very well-known words at the end of that chapter, verse 16, where we have all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training and righteousness that the man of God may be completely equipped for every good work.

So one-off just because I'm thinking of, and I'll mention more of this at the end of the service, thinking, or the end of the sermon, more about preparing us for our city group, studies our small church, big church, small church, and looking together around God's Word. I'll mention a little bit more about that at the end and what we're hoping to do, which is not rocket science, not that different from what we normally do, but there's just one or two little tweaks that we're going to make on that.

But because of that, I think before moving back into Romans where we're going to start again next Lord's Day morning, God willing, this isn't going to be a typical sermon at that level. It's more of a shepherding call, talk, a rallying call. I want to point to scripture truths. I want to think about this particular passage and the principles that lie behind it for our congregational life as we start this new session, new chapter, new time in our lives as a church. So for me it's a little bit like, for me it's a little bit like when Captain Miller, who is Tom Hanks, rather Tom Hanks who's Captain Miller in the film Saving Private Ryan, he opens up to his troops at a very critical moment. Up to that point they don't know who he is. Now there's only so far this analogy goes, okay. But they don't know who he is and they don't know what his background is and that's a very significant tense time in the life of the troops as they are seeking to find Private Ryan. He tells them who he is, he tells them what he does and tells them why he's doing what he's doing in order to get home out of the war context in order to make it back to his wife and family.

So at that point in the warfare he makes it very real and personal for them. And I do think that that's important for us in an ongoing way but also maybe today in a church context that we don't come under the sound of the word and come to worship and the sermon in particularly and expect a mechanical unpacking of a text that will fail to provoke and will fail to encourage and challenge us into the reality of God's word and God's warfare in which we'd engage spiritually and personally sometimes for us it's much harder than it is at other times. And we look for the living word of God to encourage and challenge us.

And so we don't want this short time together just to be a mechanical outwork. I know we do it every week, I mentioned this last week, I know we do this every week but we don't want it to be simply a mechanical outworking, an educational moment together around the word.

[3 : 26] We seek for it to be more than that and deeper than that and I certainly do that in my own life. We focus at St. Columbus, everything really we do, we focus it around the words of this book, this book the Bible, this book that we have in our lives on our phones at the door of the church on a table and that we have I hope by our bedsides or somewhere in our homes and our task is sharing this unique book, this unique good news and then living it, going from here and living this good news. And one of the things we're stressing this year is the habit of reading God's, Thomas mentioned the Bible in a year, we're looking to highlight and encourage us in the spiritual disciplines, the personal, regular, daily interactions with the living God. That's our job as spiritual leaders as a church. It's a job that together we share as leaders and people together to help us, to encourage us, to example it as we do it together. Therefore at St. C's you'll always find the pulpit here, the lectern in the middle of the church because that is symbolic, it's symbolic of the centrality of the word to what we do. That was why this monstrosity was built because it spoke of the centrality of the word even though it looks like a kind of gothic piece of torture for someone who didn't preach the truth, they might have just been swallowed up and never been seen again. But the centrality of the word, the preaching of the gospel, the Bible in a year, our discipleship, encouraging us to become comfortable around God's word.

One to one in families are counseling with a professional or pastoral using God's word to deal with our needs, city groups. It can't just be, it mustn't just be a Bible study, it has to be more. We know that studying the Bible is at the core of it, but more than that it's sharing God's truth together and into our lives. Kids' church is focused around teaching them the Bible. I'm going to put out on one of these notice boards a big color image of the four-year program that the children do. It's fantastic, four-year schedule where they get the whole of the Bible. And I'm going to put that on the notice board for you to look at and it's lovely, it's full of colors and it's so encouraging. And they're teenagers were looking to develop work of Bible handling and everything that we do, giving them good times together as well as teaching them the Bible identity, truth of God's word for our students and young people into their new and exciting lives that they have begun in the city. Why? Why do we focus so much on this dusty old dry book? Because it's not that, is it? We're reminded here, to very important truths, it's God-breathed. That's why everything we do is focused around this word and that makes this book absolutely unique. It's God-breathed.

All Scripture is breathed out by God, a hugely significant theological reality and term that is weighed into this passage, into this verse. So it's not really, and I think one of the dangers is we just think about it as a book because it's bound and because it's got pages and a beginning and an end. We just think it's like a book. We think it's one of many books that are in a library or in a bookshop, one of many, but it is not simply a book.

It is as much a message as a book. It is not simply history as much as his story. It is not just a guide to us as a living compass. It is as if his hand stretches out from the pages to lead us. And it's not so much just about God telling us about God as it is the voice of God Himself as He speaks through it. We found everything we do on the Bible because we are introducing ourselves and one another to the living God. That's why we regard it as so important. The living God, the God of the universe, the God who has created us, the God who knows how our lives will pan out, the God to whom we are accountable and will stand before. This is who the Bible is introducing us to. It's His Word that He has breathed out as something that He has breathed out. Therefore, it becomes self-authenticating.

He has expired the words. He has done it through different authors over hundreds of years, but He has been the sovereign editor and overseer of what has gone out. His Spirit has breathed life into the words that we have. God brings it into being. He brings it to life using human authors uniquely saying, uniquely saying what God wanted them to say. That's a remarkable truth for us. It is, and each section, each part of it, and then it has lots of different sections and parts and lots of different genres, but in each of these situations we recognize God's voice. It's given into specific situations, specific historical situations we know, but we can't simply limit God's Word to these situations. It's not, when we read God's Word we're not saying, this is what God said to the church in Thessalonica. I wonder what maybe if anything there's relevance for us. He did speak to the church in Thessalonica, but as we read the book of the letter to the Thessalonians, we're saying, what is God saying to me? What is God speaking into my life? Because if we're just looking at it second hand as it were, as a possibility of something significant happening or something significant being understood from what was given to the original authors, we lose sight of it having a living relevance to ourselves. It is not simply a book inscribed and inspired by God to the original writers. It is given for us today. It is God breathed. That means it's a living Word because we believe and we worship today a living Savior. So the core of our understanding of the Bible should be relational rather than academic. It should be relational. It should be communicating the living God to us. Therefore, we believe the Bible has a purpose in provoking a lost, a relationship lost. It provokes a relationship that has been lost because of sin. And it stirs people to think about the living God with whom they may have lost and we may have lost contact. But as believers who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, it is there to develop a relationship found. So it's there to expose a relationship lost, but also then to develop a relationship found. Firstly, as we recognize

[11 : 03] Him as our Creator and as our King and our Lord, then as our Savior, our great Redeemer, and we see Him in all the pages of Scripture and recognize that. Therefore, our relationship to the Bible is never one of equals or is never one of authority over the Word. It's very easy for us all the time in our lives in my life to be authoritative over the Word.

But it is not that kind of relationship, not is it one of equality. We come in the language of Scripture of our relationship with God as one of students to a teacher as disciples, coach, parent, shepherd, gardener, mother, older brother, husband, king, architect, builder.

You see the pictures that are being built up in Scripture. It's not a relationship of equals that we have. We come to the living God and we recognize that this is the living God who is speaking into our lives in any one of these contexts. So, sometimes we will come to God's living Word and it will give us a royal kick up the backside, because maybe that's what we need. It will convict us of sin. Other times it will come round us with warm embracing arms and it will comfort and encourage us. When we're lost it will guide us. And I shouldn't say it really, should I? As the Word of God I say He will through these means guide us and He will encourage us. And therefore as we come to God's Word we recognize it's the place that we come to know God. Otherwise we will never entrust ourselves to it. You don't trust someone and I don't trust someone I don't know. We're crazy to do that. We trust people that we have come to believe in and come to recognize and value. And so as we come to know the God of Scripture we therefore come under that place where we trust Him as our shepherd, our gardener, our older brother, our husband, our king, our teacher, our friend, our father. So as a living Word that I joined Kids Church today, that's what I'm just learning about the Israelites and defeating someone at the battle of Ai. But it's also therefore because it's living and we have this here, it is both practical and purposeful. It's all Scripture is God breathed, is breathed out by God and profitable, useful, practical for teaching, reproof, correction and training and righteousness.

So we have here the language of functionality, that the Bible has a function. It is a practical function for us as believers, a teaching, rebuking, correcting and training. So it's channeled, isn't it? God is in the self-authenticating verses, channeling what the purpose of Scripture is. It has this direct purpose for us to mold and guide and transform who we are and what we do in terms of the shepherding, leading, gardening, king, lordship over our lives.

So we have this great practical reality of coming to a Word as disciples and as students learning from our great Master. But the setting is always grace. Setting is always grace in the context of the deadly virus of sin and death. The plot always revolves around the cross of Jesus Christ. He is the central character who lives beyond its pages, who literally rises from its pages into our lives and demands lordship in our hearts. He rises from the page because it's the Word of His grace and of His salvation, and He embraces us in His love as we come to Him by faith in His finished work, that we must know of, that we must unpack and understand as we look at ourselves seeing Scripture as a mirror into our own hearts and as we therefore see the answer that is provided in Jesus Christ.

[15 : 42] So all of the practicalities, the teaching, the rebuking, the correcting and the training, they do presuppose our eyes having been opened to the beauty, the beauty of Jesus Christ and the glory of God the Father by coming to faith in Him in the gospel that's revealed.

You see, because it's a training and a correction and a teaching and a reproof in righteousness. Just recognizing that we are covered in our right, we are covered, we are clothed in His righteousness gifted to us. We are made absolutely innocent and right before God because of Jesus.

And as those who are clothed in that righteousness, we seek then to live that righteousness, and that's where the teaching and the correction and the rebuking and the training comes in, because we are covered in clothed in His righteousness, that sanctification gifted, but we then live out that particular Christ likeness by understanding God who reveals Himself.

So the end game can never, the end game of this Bible, this book that we have here, can never just be knowledge. It can never just be, oh, I know, I know 2 Timothy 3.16, I know what it says, I know 1 Corinthians 8, verse 1, in a kind of knowledge, simply knowledgeable way. It's not simply the gaining of knowledge, not is it moralistic teaching that we go to God in Jesus Christ as some would understand that you would go to Confucius or you would go to Plato or you would go to someone else, great, to learn how to live. It's more than that as we understand it. It is the language and the culture of the new heavens and the new earth that we are moving towards as Christians. It is the righteousness that we will live in glory. That's why it matters now that the Word of God is teaching us the way we will live when we are with Jesus face to face. So, and the more we live like that now, the more we'll kind of experience that heavenly culture that He wants us to live as we look forward and the more attractive it will be and helpful and encouraging and uplifting for us. So, it's practical and it's also purposeful. Now, I don't know if there's any difference between these two words. That is because I think the verse breaks it, but it's practical and it is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training. And this may just be a defining of the same truth just in different ways so that the person, the individual, the man, the woman of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. So, there's a purpose behind us as Christians, making use of the practicality of God's Word is to equip us in our lives to be complete, to be ready to live out our lives on a daily basis. So, it's something that comes into our mind and also into our conscience. I would love, and I'm thinking of it, but I'm just not clever enough at the moment, I would love to preach a series of sermons on the conscience. I think the conscience is a really underplayed aspect of our Christian lives and our thinking and it should be something we consider far more because it's our guide in so much of what we do and it is taken and led and molded and directed either by Christ in Scripture or by or not. And that makes a huge difference.

And conscience is a hugely significant tool that God uses to draw us constantly to Himself. So the Word of God equips us, our mind and our conscience, enabling us to be like Jesus in our day-to-day living. It's that spiritual handbook that breathes out. It's kind of like a three-dimensional living tutorial with God as our tutor. And we interact with it and seek to interact with it mentally, yes, intellectually, verbally as we pray over it and as we communicate with God through it and spiritually with trust and submission, sort of trust and submission that comes in that makes it different from simply an intellectual pursuit. And the purpose then, the purpose is to make us ready. It speaks here about being complete or being mature. Some of the versions of it as being perfect. Now, the danger with thinking that is or misunderstanding what the Word actually means here is that we think always of the future. I'm not ready yet. I'm imperfect at the moment. One day I'll be complete. One day I'll understand the Bible, but the moment I'm not, and we just leave it there. But what it really means, it means making ready for the stage that you're at at the moment that you can go out every day with the level of maturity, the level of knowledge, the level of understanding you have, and you can go out equipped by God and His Word to live your life and to do every good work. You know, it's like parents. We know as parents, with our children, don't we? We can equip them to go to primary one, but we don't expect them to take a higher mass book with them. You know, that's not equipping them. They're not perfect and they're not able to do university exams, but we can equip them to be exactly right for primary one and to know what that level is. And so, as we take God's Word, whatever stage you're at, whatever stage I'm at in my Christian life, it's uniquely suited to equip us for going out into our lives and our environment perfectly mature for the stage we're at and able to live for the glory of God, equipped for every good work. So really, what God is saying here is that we want to take Him as the motivation, the preparation and the reason behind every single thing we do. We want to tell our primary one children that, as well as our university graduates, as well as those who work in an office or those who work in manual labor or those who are at home. Whatever it is that we do, we take all of our lives and we make it under Christ, guided by Christ, obedient to Christ, for the glory of Christ, so that all our good works are His. So nobody is exempt from that and nobody is unimportant or insignificant or nobody need be ill-prepared. God's Word is marvelous and is able to equip us as we take it where we are, whether we are young in the faith or mature and we apply it and live it and come under its truth. So God's

[22 : 58] Word is, it's God-breathed. And it's, secondly, it's all God-breathed, okay? All Scripture we're told is God-breathed. So it is one message and I hope that you'll remember, sometimes in our teaching last year, myself and Corey, when we were going through the whole theme of the great thread of the Bible teaching, that we could see a unity, uniformity of a message from beginning to end. This is what God has chosen for us to know. We wouldn't have chosen that. I constantly go to God and pray and say, why did He give us that? Why, why, I would want something much more tangible and black and white and A and B, but He tests us, He draws out wisdom from us. He asks us to think about our lives. He wants to point out things that we don't think are important, but He thinks are important. You go through numbers and think about what God wants us to know. All of it is this God-breathed Scripture

He chose for us and the context is a broken relationship and a covenant promise to bring us back. A people before and a people after the coming of Jesus Christ, our great Savior, incredible, unexpected God. The unexpected God on a cross. Nobody expected that. Nobody was looking for that. And yet this is what is promised and this is what is prepared for and this is what we look back to as He promises His return, the resurrected Savior.

Therefore this all of Scripture, it needs to be learned and convinced of and trusted in. Verses 14 to 16 says a little bit about that, but as for you, continue what you have learned and have firmly believed or convinced of and knowing from whom you've learned it. In other words, you trusted someone and you learned from this God and you've been acquainted with these sacred writings, wise unto salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

So this truth needs to be learned. That takes time, doesn't it? It takes time to learn Scripture.

I don't mean learn by rote, I just mean learning about God. Now we will always find time for the things that are important in our lives, the things that we love. We will prioritise these things and rightly so. And to know God is a priority we must have and must make and recognise that it will take time. It's His living Word and we seek not to come under it critically or dismissively, but we seek to make it part of our life routine, our use of time. We're not here long. We could work out mathematically roughly if we live an average life, how long we've got, it will not be that long, and then we can work out how long we sleep and then we can work out how long we spend in work. And then we can work out what's left for us. Bring time and learning into our relationship with God through

[26 : 21] His Word and use technology. Technology is great. Use your phone, use the apps that are available, use all kinds of things to learn and listen to God's Word, verbally, maybe, whatever works. And therefore be convinced, He says, it's important that we recognise that we continue to firmly believe that. Now that to me suggests that we need convinced, we need to be convinced. And that's certainly my experience because there's lots of really difficult bits. And it's an honour to God to wrestle with that, to ask questions, to realise that the Bible itself does interpret the Bible, that it's progressively revelatory, that it's not everything was revealed in the beginning and we know more and more as we go on and we allow the later Scripture to inform us and teach us and interpret the earlier Scripture. Not all of Scripture is equally important, but it's all there for a reason and we need to be convinced by that. And therefore then we come to trust in the

God of the Word. Not so much the guide book as a guide and I recognise, a recognition that it is the divine wisdom spoken and crucified and resurrected. So very briefly as I close, just a couple of things practically. In our worship, in our worship, the Word of God will always we will seek to make it central. And to our gathered, and I'm speaking primarily about our gathered life in worship, I know our life is worship and we are living sacrifices, but I'm speaking about on a Sunday when we come together that the Word of God and the living reality of that Word will be something that marks our public worship together so that you will come and I will come and together we will be under the living Word of God and respond accordingly and prepare accordingly. And so that people who might come in and we long, really long for people to come in here who don't know Jesus, who will say, this is real. Their Christ is here and this people are hungry to learn and the guy at the front as believes what he is saying and it matters and that should be what marks our worship.

I think also in our discipleship as a church, let's take discipleship around God's Word seriously, whether it's one to one, whether it's in city groups or I'm going to say a little bit more about that. We open to the Bible and open to what the Bible says to one another to each other. The men's curry night that we're plugging, the fellowship that we're having, hoping to have together as men. It's not just have a curry together, great though that is, tremendous. It is to see beyond it as an activity and recognize it as an opportunity for us as men because as men we struggle sometimes and we struggle to share our faith and we struggle to share our faith with one another, let alone with others, to be encouraged and disciplined informally under the Word, living it out. And in that context our city groups need always to be more than a half out answering questions in an interpretative way in a biblical passage. That can be as dull as dishwater if it's an academic exercise. If we're just looking for the right answers each time we get together, no wonder people don't come because that's dull. It is listening and learning from God's Word together in a humble and united way, encouraging each other then to go and live it out. So what I'm hoping in this study, this year Romans, we're doing the next section in 5 to 11 and we're going to buy the Lifebuilder Bible study booklet which you'll all have. But it's too long for each Wednesday night, there's eight or nine questions and it's just too long and we're trying to do too much and we're not together for that long, we've only got an hour or so.

So the idea is to take the studies that we do on a Wednesday evening twice a month and maybe prepare them in your own personal devotions. So you've got some kind of background to what we're going to look at. And then spend the time when we're together, maybe answering one or two of the difficulties but speaking about the implication section. What does this mean for us in our lives? So that I hope we're benefiting from that, we're learning ourselves and then we're coming together to share that. And it will roughly link with, it will roughly link with our Sunday sermon series. So that's what we're hoping to do and I hope you see that as a great encouragement, a small church coming together living out the Word which God is sovereign over. And city groups for us are core to our growth and the working of the Word and community. They remain core for that and it since says it's tough, it's tough for us to do that because we have such a turnover. We have so many people come and go, building relationships is vital to this but building relationships is hard because so much changes this summer. I think I've said it in the update that was with your boat and I've said at least 42 people that have left the congregation. That's a decent sized church in a lot of places. That's a lot of people that's a quarter or so, people that were core, people that were always part of the congregation and that's hard and you need to recognize that's hard for us as leaders. That's hard for us as a people to lose so many and we welcome and we rejoice that people come but we need to be passionate about building these relationships again and seeing people converted, we long for that, we long for 2018, 19 to be a year of conversions, people coming to meet with this living Savior from His book, from His Word. So I would really encourage you to sign up for city groups to be part of that if you haven't done so before, a challenge you to be. I know it's hard work, I know the turnover is so great but it's also a great way I think of assimilating new people into the congregation. I think I mentioned this last week but it's kind of struck me strongly that the original word for hospitality is philoxenos, love of strangers, xenophobia, that's where we get that word from and it's the love of people who are new to us and that that's what you're great at doing here in St. Columbus is welcoming people who are new and please keep doing that so that they become no longer strangers but become friends in the city groups and a great way to help us with that. So in worship and discipleship and last line very, very briefly in evangelism, take the word of God and make it central in our evangelism. We really struggle what to say, I struggle what to say sometimes and how to say it to people. Just tell people about Jesus. Tell them about His word, let the word speak itself, have confidence in it, maybe do one to one through one of the gospels in Mark's gospel and just invite a friend to, well you read a couple of chapters and then we'll come together and you share with me your questions, what did you find easy, what did you find difficult, what do you believe, what do you think is ridiculous?

Just let God's word speak. We don't need to open people's hearts, that's God's work but we do have a privilege of sharing that and culturally I think we find it incredibly difficult some of us to do that. I'll finish with this, I got an email this week from someone who shall remain anonymous, many of you will know her but she will remain anonymous but she's not with us at the moment but she emailed a long email about where she is and about the work she's doing, she's just working in a different part of the world and she just wrote a paragraph about eight or ten of the friends that she's made since she's been there. Ordinary people in all kinds of different contexts and in every single situation she was saying how they had responded to her faith and to what she'd been able to share and some were very blank, some were very inquisitive and it was just a huge encouragement in an ordinary person's life that they were doing, the ordinary things that we've preached about the last four weeks just in a very simple way telling them about Jesus. It isn't rocket science for us sometimes and I think the evil one likes to make us think it is. We just need the confidence in this word because it's living and it's changed our lives and it continues to change our lives and maybe sometimes the reality is that we're not letting it which is why we find that we lack confidence in sharing it with others. So may it be that we recognize this living relationship we have through this word in all its battles and struggles, the beautiful bits and may we submit as disciples to our great teacher. Amen. Let's pray briefly together. Father God help us to recognize who you are. We rejoice at this time of year that we look forward to welcoming new people. It's such a thrill, it's such a blessing, it's such an encouragement when our hearts are sore having lost so many friends over this last two or three months as people have moved on, families have moved on, individuals have finished studies and got jobs elsewhere and Lord we rejoice that they belong to your kingdom and we rejoice that the time they have had here is something that we hope and pray will have been encouraging and uplifting for them and will have pointed them further to Jesus. And we pray and ask that new friends who come and worship with us will settle quickly, will understand what we strive to do here as we are a city center church but want to plant churches in throughout the city that we love and we pray that we would live out our gospel lives and remember the people we're praying for who are not saved that we will be the answer to our own prayers in many ways by being the ones who share

[37 : 23] Jesus courageously with them, unhumly with them and sometimes stumblingly with them but may we do it in the name of our great God and prayerfully dependent on allowing him to do his work as we share Jesus to a people who need Jesus. Lord help us to overcome the feeling of unbelief or lacking in the power of the word and may we be transformed by it we ask and pray in Jesus name. Amen.