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## The Third Sunday after the Epiphany

January 23, 2022

### Agenda Uncovered

Jesus says what must be said, not what some want to hear.

The Christian Church has always struggled to be clear about its agenda and its purpose. Many look to Christian churches for help with physical needs: care for the sick, food for the poor, housing for the homeless. Christians do not hesitate to provide help for those less fortunate; we do this to express our Christian love. Jesus didn't hesitate either as his healings in today's Gospel illustrate. But Jesus was clear to identify his primary mission: "proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God." This remains our agenda, too.

### Sermon

#### 2 Timothy 3:14—4:5

True Wisdom Comes from the Word.

**But as for you, 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 faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

**In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.**

Good-byes are always based on context. Some are short, some are long. When you leave a room, you aren't likely to have any sort of good-bye. Maybe, if you are leaving the house and won't be back for a while, you'll say a quick word. When you leave family and know you won't see them for a while, your good-bye might be longer. I'm sure you've experienced what we lovingly refer to as the "Midwest good-bye." This is where the guest says, "I really should be going" and so you stand up and move to a room that is closer to the exit, then you talk for 10 minutes longer. The host then says, "I should let you go," and then you move to the front door and talk for another 10 minutes or so." Finally, if the weather is nice enough, you step outside for another 10-15 minutes talking until eventually someone says, "We'll see you later" and has to physically walk away.

When the end of something big is near, whether it is a kid moving away or a loved one that you know will pass away soon, good-byes can take a lot longer. There is more to say. It is serious and you don't want to waste your time. You want to make sure that the wisdom that you have is passed on, or vice versa. St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy was the apostle's goodbye to Timothy. Paul knew the end was near for him and so he wrote this to Timothy, whom he

calls his “dear son.” Yet, while being a very personal letter, Paul remains the apostle sent by the will of God and he strongly desires to leave Timothy with this parting wisdom.

Paul knew by experience and by the mere state of human sinfulness that Timothy was going to have to face some big challenges, and he wouldn’t be there to give him advice and guide him. Paul wanted him to know that he already had the most effective tool that he would ever have: the Word of God.

Paul calls this word “*Holy Scripture*.” It is set apart. It is something more than any other written or spoken word could ever hope to be. How? This writing is “God-breathed.” God occasionally spoke directly to Paul in visions and dreams, but God spoke to Timothy, too, and that was through the Word. Paul didn’t want Timothy thinking that Paul was any more well-equipped for his own service than Paul was. Timothy had all he needed in God’s Word. It is through the same Word that God gives us wisdom, that God speaks to us. And not just some of the Bible, but “all Scripture” shares the character of being from the mouth of God. What a miracle! That God would give to us his very Word and reveal to us not just the origins of the earth, which is wonderful, and not just God’s will for human’s, which is perfect. Even greater, this Word of God carries with it the promise of salvation, the guarantee that all sins are forgiven. This is the wisdom which leads to salvation and there is one place to find it: the Word of God.

This would certainly be enough, for God to reveal Jesus to us, but Paul then expands and tells Timothy this holy scripture is useful for even more! He says, “from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Of key importance is that the scriptures make us “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” The Word of God creates the faith which then holds onto the promise of salvation in Christ.

Then Paul goes on and says that it is useful also for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Coming to faith is not the end of God’s plan for Christians, it is just the beginning. We have much to learn, to be corrected on, and to train in. And this all starts with our new status before God: saved by faith.

Again, in Chapter 4 Paul says, “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.” Proclamation of the Word, its study and its use are what Christians do in response to the salvation that faith brings! Whether we see that the time is now or that the time is coming, now is the time to preach the word, to correct, rebuke, and encourage.

It is more than easy to say, “Amen” to being in God’s Word, especially when we are sitting in church on a Sunday morning. We are doing precisely what Paul is recommending: gathering around the proclamation of Christ’s saving work. And to God be the glory for it. But what about when we step outside of these doors and go back to the “real” world? We don’t always like what God’s Word has to tell us for our lives, so maybe we shut God’s Word out, maybe we surround ourselves with people who will tell us what we want to hear. We listen to news stations that we already agree with. We read books that we already like. We watch TV and movies that appeal to our tastes. Is it any shock that we treat God’s Word the same way? That we like to think to ourselves, “Yes preacher, but this is not the real world. The real world doesn’t know God and so we can’t live according to *this* manner out there.” What does the world say? Rebuke? Correct? Only if you want to be shunned for intolerance. No, tolerance is key to being a good citizen. Loyalty to political parties. This is particularly important. Don’t worry about the offense you might cause because politics is more important than any other part of public or personal life and discourse. People often think that way.

The advice that the world gives is so shallow and fleeting. Why on earth is it so appealing to us, though? It’s the sin in us. It’s the voice that looks for anything that is not godly and calls it fun. It is the desire of our flesh that the sin in us wants to satisfy, nothing more and nothing less. It is good to be loved and to be popular. It is exciting when people agree with us. It is reassuring to hear what we want to hear. And if we surround ourselves with people who simply tell us that the problem is not with us, but is with someone else, we quickly forget the problem that we have within us. We forget that our sinful natures exist, that our sin-filled lives reek of horrid sin that is retched in God’s sight. We forget the

good that God has done for us and we focus on the good that we do for ourselves and for others. When we get into those states of selfishness, we need someone like Timothy to use God's Word to rebuke us and to correct us.

But the correction that God offers to us is different than any other correction that we are familiar with. Governments correct with prisons and fines. Parents correct and train with allowances and time outs. God? God's correction goes right to the heart of every problem, showing us our sinful, helpless state, then pointing us away from ourselves to Christ. We look at Christ, who always did what was right, and we see not a mere example of godly living, but the godly living that God demands and which Jesus completed perfectly. Jesus came to this earth to do his Father's will in spite of how unpopular or painful it was and by his death and resurrection, Jesus' perfect life becomes ours. In the most unexpected way, God punished Jesus for our sinfulness and for our failures, and he credited Christ's perfect life to us. This is the great exchange. This is the wisdom of God's Word—and it's for you. For your benefit. For your salvation. For you to be equipped for every good work.

This is what Christians do: They gather around God's Word, even if the world doesn't understand it or has "moved on" from religion. They correct each other, even when it is hard. They train each other by constantly being in God's Word with one another, not just on Sunday morning, but as often as they can. They come together to form churches, they call men to serve them as pastors, much in the same way that Timothy was pastor to the church in Ephesus. These pastors have the same tools that all Christians have, that Timothy had: God's Word.

What a blessing! That God has given us a church body to help train, equip, and find pastors for our churches. That he would move men to serve his church by being prepared in season and out of season, all for the glory of God. That he would bless us enough to be able to give pastors a wage so that they can make the public ministry their focus. What a blessing that he has given us each his Word, which makes us wise for salvation, and makes us ready to serve God and equipped for every good work that God has set up in advance for us to do.

To God be the Glory for these tremendous blessings! Amen.