

Word-Centred Church

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[0 : 00] Well, turn back with me to 2 Timothy chapter 3. Tonight I want us to think especially of these last few verses, from verse 14 to verse 17.

Perhaps confession is good for the soul, they say you have to confess this sermon was preached not six hours ago. So apologies if you were in Helmsborough, this is where I'm not sure there's anyone who was.

But we've been thinking about the sort of values we want to embody as a church plant in Helmsborough. And we've seen things like how we want to be Christ-centred, how we want to be tonight word-centred.

And in one way it sounds very basic, I suppose, but these are the things we need to keep coming back to, to keep holding on to as a church wherever we are, whether we've been a church for six months or for 60, 100 years.

We need to remember these things, to come back to them, to always be centering our lives on them. And one of the most important is that we are a word-centred church, that the Bible, that the Scriptures, the Old and New Testament, is at the centre of everything that we do.

[1 : 25] You know, Scotland used to be known as the land of the book. And of course, as I mentioned in the prayer, Glasgow especially, let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the words.

That generations and generations have known how important the Bible is to not just Christians, but the life of the whole world. That God's word is important.

And we know in general that words are important, don't we? You know that saying, the pen is mightier than the sword. It seems to stand true. People can be built up by words. People can be brought low, destroyed by what people say to them or what people write about them, can't they? And we probably all know that feeling where someone said something. And even if it was years ago, it kind of sticks with us and it's right in our psyche. But we can inspire with words.

We can show our love to people with our words. We can give people teaching by our words. And the written word, we can't really escape from it, can we?

[2 : 30] As popular as films and TV are always going to be, most of us still enjoy picking up a book, relaxing, getting lost in reading something. And the Bible is, well, it's like no other book, as I'm sure many of you know already.

But it has all these sorts of elements. It is something that builds us up. It's something that encourages us. It's something that sometimes tells us things that we don't want to hear and takes us down a peg or two.

And yet always brings us back to the encouragement of the gospel. It shows us the love of God. And many, of course, have been inspired to follow its teaching.

It is timeless. Nothing can ever replace it. No media, no book, whatever else. And, of course, the church that abandons the Bible, that thinks it can move on from the Bible, that it can take some new teaching, doesn't deserve to be called the church at all.

We lose something intrinsic to our existence without the Bible. We become adrift. We're shipwrecked in our faith and in our church. We place supreme value on the Bible, not because it's a book in itself, not because it's just words on a page, but, as we'll see, because it's God's word.

[3 : 44] Because, as we read, it is God breathed, and this word is alive. The book of Hebrews tells us that the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The word is something that really gets to us, that knows us. It's alive. It has power. It can change us. And it can change this world. This is the book that we need in our life.

This is the book that the world needs to hear more and more of. It is not these dusty old pages in that archaic language that no one understands. That's why we have modern translations, because we want people to hear this word.

We don't want to be stuck in the past. We know that this book is timeless, and people need to hear it. It shows us Christ. It shows us grace. It shows us mercy. It shows us God himself and amazes us with his power, his glory, his wonder.

And we could go on and on. But let's be clear from the start. If we jettison the Bible, or even if we minimize it and its place in our lives individually and as a church, then we will cease to be a church. [5 : 03] We will become, like I'm sure we've seen churches, sadly, that have moved away from the Bible, that have pushed it to the side, that have decided it's a bit too old-fashioned or a bit too supernatural.

And then they've slipped into social clubs at best. So let's be a word-centered church. And 2 Timothy 3 tells us about the Bible.

It tells us most famously about its place in our life and in the life of the church. And so there's just three things I want us to pull out of this that I hope will be helpful for each one of us and as a whole church.

First of all, the word-centered church points to Jesus. Second of all, the word-centered church knows where the Bible comes from, knows its author.

And third of all, the word-centered church knows the value of the word. So first of all, the word-centered church points to Jesus. And really, you could say it's obsessed with Jesus as it reads the Bible.

[6 : 05] You know, if you've watched a film or read a book or whatever else, and you know the sort of film where you're wondering what's going to happen. You feel like there's going to be some big twist. There's been hints at it, but you don't really know.

And you're trying to pull it all together in your mind. And you're waiting and waiting. And then the big reveal comes. And the penny drops. And it all kind of makes sense. You know something like the end of Planet of the Apes.

And they see the Statue of Liberty. That's what it is. And you kind of realize they're on earth. You know, it's a big shock. And yet, when you watch the film again, you're like, oh, that actually kind of makes sense.

It's there the whole time. You see things you didn't notice before. Well, in verse 15, Paul reminds Timothy how he's been acquainted with the scriptures since a young age. And that they are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

In other words, when you read the Bible, you might not always see Jesus or his name written down on the page. And yet he is there on every page. The Bible is pointing towards him.

[7 : 09] It is all about Jesus. And he's primarily who the Bible is about. And maybe you feel before you're a Christian, or if you're not a Christian, maybe you read it and you don't really see Jesus.

And yet, what Timothy could say, and what many of us can say is, when we read it now, we see Jesus. We see how it points to him. It's him that the Bible is about.

Every single page, from the start of the Old Testament to the end of the New Testament. And let me just give one example. When you go to the start of the Bible, when you go to Genesis, and Adam and Eve have sinned.

And that was bad news for all of us. The serpents tempted them. The devil's there. And so God speaks to the serpent and to Adam and Eve. And what he tells the serpent is that the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent, or crush the head of the serpent.

And what that's doing, as we know, is pointing us towards Jesus. And so you see, even at the very start of the Bible, it's about Jesus. And the plan's always been there. We are being made wise for salvation as we read the Bible.

[8 : 17] The whole Bible is revealing us Jesus. And Jesus himself tells us this in John's Gospel. In John 5.39, he says, You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.

And it is they that bear witness about me. You see, it's possible to read the Bible. It's possible to see all the rules and so on. It's possible to even enjoy the stories, perhaps.

And yet, completely miss the point of the Bible. The Pharisees at the time of Jesus did that. They would read the Bible. They knew it off by heart. They knew it probably better than any single one of us in this room.

And yet, they completely missed the point. They didn't really know it because they didn't see Jesus. The way that God brings faith to us, though, is through his words.

It's the word that makes us wise for salvation and through Christ Jesus is able to do that. And of course, salvation is by grace. We know that. And yet, the ordinary way, the normal way in which God communicates this grace to us, in which God shows these things to us, is guess what?

[9 : 25] It's through the Bible that he does this. He shows himself. He shows his grace. And we can learn about that. We need the Bible. It's not simply a list of rules. It's not just a collection of nice stories or exciting stories.

And it's not just the history of the nation of Israel. It contains these elements. But ultimately, the purpose of the Bible is to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus.

And we cannot forget that. We cannot move on from that. That is what the Bible is for. We need this word. And if we want others to know Jesus, if we want to share our faith, then at some point, at least, we need to have the Bible, God's word, the scriptures, as part of that equation.

You know, it's one thing to deal with people's objections, to do what we call apologetics and engage with these things. And it's a good thing. You know, objections based on science and so on. A very good thing.

And yet, that will only get someone so far. The word of God is what can make us wise for salvation through Jesus. What God has spoken is what we need, though.

[10 : 31] The word-centered church points to Jesus, uses the Bible, points to Jesus. And yet, it's not just for believers, for unbelievers.

It's not just for evangelism, although that is important. Paul is writing to Timothy. Paul's writing to a Christian, one very experienced, although he's young. He's a protege of Paul's, someone very important.

And yet, what he's doing is, he's encouraging them to stick to scripture, instead of going for other things, because it makes wise for salvation in Christ Jesus.

Timothy still needs this. Me and you still need this. We still need to see Jesus in the Bible. We still need to come back to the word time and time again, because that's what makes us wise for salvation.

We need to keep looking to the word, because salvation isn't just the moment we're forgiven. We are looking ahead as well. We are living in light of the fact that God has forgiven us, yes.

[11 : 32] And we are looking to be in glory with him forever. And we believe that we will be in heaven and that he will make a new heavens and a new earth. And we will be with him forever. And that is part of his salvation.

And these are the things that we learn about in his word. We need the Bible. And so, when we read the Bible, are we looking for Jesus? Are we wanting to see him?

Are we wanting to know him? Are we thinking about Jesus? Are we asking the question, what does this teach me about Jesus? How does this point to Jesus? I have to confess that sometimes I can be reading the Bible for however long.

And maybe sometimes I'm thinking, you know, oh, I know this about the Bible. I know this about the Bible. And there actually can be a pride there. There can actually be the spirit of a Pharisee.

What we need is to see Jesus and to be humbled by that. We need him. And the word-centered church, the word-centered Christian, is looking for Jesus and wanting to know him more.

[12 : 32] Because it's him who we need for salvation. And it's the sacred writings of the Bible which can make us wise for salvation through faith in him. And so, the Bible is necessary.

It's essential. We can't be a church without the word of God. We can't do evangelism without the word of God. We can't show people Jesus only by our way of life.

Yes, the way we live matters. But we need the Bible because it can make wise for salvation through faith in Jesus. It points to him. Word-centered church needs to point to Jesus and to keep to him.

But secondly, the word-centered church knows where the Bible comes from. And that's verse 16. All scripture is breathed out by God.

We know where the Bible comes from. In my Bible here, actually, the words of Jesus are red letters. And maybe it sounds a little pedantic.

[13 : 36] And maybe it is. But some say this implies that the words of Jesus are more important or carry more weight when we put them in red to make them stand out. And I hope it doesn't give that impression.

But I understand people might worry about these things. But what verse 16 reminds us of, this famous verse, at least in Christian circles, is that every page of this Bible, well, it's God's word. Because it's breathed out by him. It comes from within him to us. It's all got the same weight and authority as the words of Jesus. Because it's all the one living God's word.

It's all what he has spoken. It's the exhaled truth from the creator of all things. This is where the Bible comes from.

It comes from God himself. It comes from the one who has made everything, who knows everything, who sees everything, who is all wise, all powerful. That's where the Bible comes from.

[14 : 34] And the word-centered church remembers this and appreciates it and rejoices in knowing that we have the truth. This is God's word. And yes, of course, there were human authors.

You know, David wrote a lot of the Psalms. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, of course, wrote the Gospels. But behind them all, guiding them in it, even if they possibly didn't realize at the time the Holy Spirit was there, God was there guiding them.

And sometimes people say they were inspired to write. And I only say that because sometimes it confuses people into thinking that these men, they saw God and thought, oh, that's really nice. Or they saw his creation and thought, that's really nice.

I'll write a poem or I'll write about God in this way. But it's so much more than that. It's not just their own capacity. It's what they do.

It's what God does through them. And they write these words. And it's not that God's just dictating to them. And yet he's working in them. And they write these words.

[15 : 35] And it is God's word. So it may be different in different books. There may be stories. There may be poems. There may be letters. And yet God has written them all. God has spoken them all.

And they have been written down for us. This is God's word. This is what we can trust. That is perhaps most importantly what it means for us today. We can trust this word.

We can trust the Bible from start to finish. It's consistent. Yes, it's clear. And so on. And people may point out contradictions. But I'm yet to hear one that is actually a contradiction for the record.

But I think what we need to see how important it is to have something we can trust. Something that is true. Because one of the things today is social media, isn't it?

And how easy it is to spread misinformation. We've all seen people sharing things that we just know aren't true on Facebook, on Twitter, on whatever else.

[16 : 34] You know, something goes viral. It gets shared. It gets shared around. And people just accept it as fact. And actually, have you ever heard the claim that in a year you will swallow seven spiders?

I think probably most people have heard that claim. Or you've probably told it to someone who was scared of spiders. Because I'm the person that's scared of spiders. And people used to say that to me. And I can tell you now it is not true. Because why it actually became a fact was because in the early days of the internet, back in the 90s, so much disinformation was spreading through email. People were sending things in chain emails, if you remember them. And so much misinformation, disinformation was spreading. And so someone, as a kind of joke to prove a point, made up this fake claim about spiders.

And sent it out saying, look, people will believe anything. And of course, people do believe it.

People still believe it. But it's not true. Loads of people believe it, though. And so you see just how easy it is for things that are wrong to be spread.

We need something we can trust, especially in our world. Truth is something that is hard to come by. People are untrusting. People are untruthful. And the thing is, today, that people want to live out their own truth.

[17 : 50] People want to just live how they feel. People want to look into their heart and say, well, this is what I feel, so this must be right. And maybe you remember that certain royals were interviewed by Oprah.

And they were asked, you know, speak your truth. Don't worry about the truth of the other people. Speak your truth. And that's not truth, really, is it? You kind of know that's not truth. Not something you can trust.

It's a subjective, self-centered view of what is true. It is not fact, but opinion. It's just what I feel, what I think, without anything else.

But because God has breathed out the whole Bible from start to finish, we don't have a truth. We don't have my truth. We don't have something subjective.

We have the truth. Everything the Bible teaches us is true. And, of course, that's not to say there isn't truth outside the Bible. The Bible doesn't say every single thing that is true in the world.

[18 : 50] But when it comes to faith, when it comes to spiritual things, it is the Bible where truth is to be found. Everything it says is true.

It is God-breathed, and so it is true. And you might wonder why that matters for us as a church, why it matters for us as individuals, and why it matters for this world. Well, real truth means that there is actually a real foundation for morality, because God has communicated to us commandments.

He says what is good and what is right. And when we throw the Bible away, what we have for morality, for ethics, even for justice, which everyone agrees is important, what we have is what a certain group of people feel, what so-and-so feels, and it's so shaky, it's so nebulous, it doesn't really mean anything, and society isn't really held together how it could be.

But when we have the Bible, we have what God says. We have, again, what the creator of all things says, something we can trust in all parts of life.

We can trust this, and it is for our good, and it is for the good of the whole world, actually. It's the foundation that everybody needs, even if they don't know it.

[20 : 11] God's word, God's breathed out word, all scripture from him, and we can trust him. And this really is an encouragement to us, because when we think about our faith, well, it gives us confidence that Jesus did live, that Jesus did die for our sakes, that he did go to the cross, and that he did rise from the dead.

It tells us that the promises that were given, the promises of the Holy Spirit, the promise that he will be with us and will never leave us or forsake us, the promise that there is eternal life, that there is a new creation, that there is joy for us for all time, it's all true.

That's what he promises, and we can trust him, because God has spoken it. This is not the invention of men and women. This is what God has spoken.

This is not simply what I feel to be true. It is what is true. It is absolute truth. We can trust this. And so in every part of our Christian lives, we can have confidence as we go out with the gospel, knowing that we can give reason for the hope we have within us, that the Holy Spirit will give us the words, that we will see people saved.

As we seek to grow in our own Christian lives, and as a church, we will see growth because God's word promises it, because God's word is powerful. It's living and active, as we saw in Hebrews.

[21 : 38] We can trust the Bible. And it's especially important when we consider how often our feelings can change. When life is difficult, when God seems far away, we turn to the Bible, and what we find is truth and comfort.

And it's not to minimize how we feel, but it's to say that even when we don't feel like God is near, the truth is there for us, written down, recorded, and sometimes that's all we can hold on to.

But there it is for us. He has spoken it to us, and he has not left us. Even if sometimes it does just feel like it's the world's there, he is there.

The world will keep telling us that the Bible is dated, that it's bigoted, that it's backwards, that we would be better off adapting it, or just abandoning it completely, leaving it in the past.

But it is God-breathed. And maybe that's a challenge to some of us. You know, we don't want to listen to God's word. We feel, well, I don't really like that teaching.

[22 : 45] I would prefer the views of the world. It has strength in numbers, you know. But our scriptures are God-breathed. God has spoken, and that counts for a lot more.

That counts for eternity. We can trust in God's word. We can trust in the God who has breathed out his word, who has spoken to us and given us the Bible.

And a word-centered church will trust in God's word above people, above programs, above anything else. And we will live lives that show that trust in what he has spoken above anything. Anything else. God has spoken. God has breathed it out. And we as a church can always hold on to that and trust in that. And following on from that, third and finally, a word-centered church knows the value of the word, as if that wasn't valuable enough that we can trust the one who has spoken it completely, and so we can trust every word.

Well, verses 16 and 17 tell us just how valuable that word is. The Bible is enough for us as we live the Christian life. Of course, we have the spirit and we need the spirit, but what we don't need is

some new revelation or anything like that.

[23 : 58] We have all the resources that we need in God's word. It is our final authority. Yes, we can learn from others, we can learn from sermons, we can learn from books, and so on.

Don't misunderstand me. And yet, it's all under the authority of the word. It's all based on God's word, and we know the value of that word.

We get this list in verses 16 and 17, don't we all script? It's 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.

These things, well, there's positives there and there's challenges, isn't there? You know, we get taught, and yet at the same time we get reproofed and corrected, and yet we get trained in righteousness.

There's good things and there's hard things for us. You know, when you get a new job, maybe, and you love it, but maybe it means a step up in work, a new responsibility, a new type of work.

[25 : 02] Positive, yes, but then there's a new challenge that comes with it. And in a way, when we're word-centered, we'll find that the value of God's word, the profitableness, is both positive and challenging to us.

So we're told here that the word has value and that it's profitable for teaching. And of course, as we study the word together, together and by ourselves, we learn about God, we deepen in our relationship with him.

Sometimes we do feel like we're growing, sometimes we don't, but sometimes we do, and we see Jesus more and more, we know him more, and it's fantastic, and we love it, those of us who believe.

But sometimes we read the Bible, and as we mentioned before, there's some things that we don't necessarily warm to, and we find it hard. Maybe we find some teaching is too old-fashioned for our taste, and yet this is where the Bible offers us reproof.

It reminds us that we are the created and he is the creator, and that he knows better. And it can be hard for us, and yet it is a profitable thing. It is for our value, for our good, that we are challenged by these things because God is shaping us to be more as he intended, to be more like Jesus, to be actually more human, more how we were supposed to be before sin came into the world, before we sinned.

[26 : 24] We need that reproof. And the next two are kind of the same, the positive and the challenge. There's training in righteousness. There's that ethical, how we live. We need to live in such a way and discipline, and being trained in these things is not a bad thing.

It's not a works thing. It's living in light of what God has done. The Bible shows us the good way to live. But sometimes, or all the time, in my case anyway, we need correction.

We need to be told when we're doing wrong. We need to be shown a better way. And again, it's the same. We are being shown how to be more human, to be more how God intended us to live, how he wants us to live, to live in a way that is actually better for human flourishing, for us, as his people. And it's not for the sake of feeling good about ourselves or showing off. It's so that we can be complete, equipped for every good work. Now, Paul might be writing to Timothy.

That's why he says, the man of God, and yet Timothy is to pass this teaching on. Timothy is to teach others, and so we can learn from this ourselves, that we need that training in righteousness.

[27 : 38] We need that correction, that reproof. We need that teaching. And what we have for it is the word, the God-breathed word that points us to Jesus, yes, and also equips us and helps us become more how we're supposed to be as we listen to the Bible.

And this takes humility, doesn't it? It takes saying, well, I don't know everything about the world. What I feel and what I think isn't necessarily true. That's hard for us if we're honest.

But as we listen to God's word, as we let what God says shape us instead of what the world says or what our own hearts say, then we are being shaped to be more like Jesus.

We are being made into new creations. We are being made how we're supposed to be. We need God's word for this. It's that that equips us to do what God has called us to do in this world, whether it's the work that we've been called to do, the career, whatever else, whether it's raising a family, whether it's sharing our faith as we're all called to do, whatever it might be, as we listen to God's word, we are equipped to do these in a Christ-like way, in a way that is pleasing to God.

And so we need to submit to what God says. We need to stop being our own bosses, to be making an idol of ourselves, of our self-direction, of our self-determination, of society's idol, really, isn't it? [29 : 08] That I'm the most important person in the world and what I feel is truth, it's gospel. No. We need to be ready to listen to God's word, to what he says, to be ready to listen to when a friend comes to us, a Christian friend, and says, you're in the wrong, you need help, you need to change, you need correction.

This is what God's word says. We need that submission. We need this. We need God's word and a word-centered church lives this out. Every individual looking to God's word, not into our own hearts, seeing God's living and active word dividing marrow and joint and showing us who we are and yet building us up, teaching us, training us, correcting us, making us more how we're supposed to be. We could go on and on, but one thing I hope is clear, that for every day of our lives, our Christian lives, and even before they start, what we need is God himself and what God has done, he has spoken, he has breathed, he has given us his word and it is his word we need, this trustworthy word.

That is what we need. It's where we find Jesus. It's where we find salvation. It's where that's communicated to us. If you have doubts about your salvation, if you don't know where you stand, turn to God's word and you will see Jesus and you will see his love for you that sent his son to come and to die for you.

That is the story of the Bible from start to finish. God's great plan for redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. And as we live the Christian life, we have these words to teach us, to train us, to build us up.

[30 : 45] May God's words, may the God-breathed word that we have before us be central in all our lives and in whatever church that we belong to.

May he bless these thoughts to us. Let's pray to him. Heavenly Father, we thank you that in your mercy you have spoken to us, that you have given us your word, that your word is greater than anything else in this world, than any of the opinions that we have in our own hearts, than in any of the things that the world around us says.

Lord, we so often find it hard to trust you, to trust your word. We confess that. And yet, Lord, help us to trust in you alone, to trust in what you have said and to see that it is the truth, the truth that matters, the only truth, and that it cannot be changed and that it is good because you, the good God, the holy God, have spoken it.

Lord, help us to reflect on these things, help them to sink deep into our hearts and help us to carry them with us where we go, to carry your word with us wherever we go for our own good, for the good of those around us and the good of this whole world.

We pray it all in the precious name of Jesus and for his sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.