

Scripture Alone

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[0:00] Amen. Amen.

So, there is power in the Word of God. Am I right? The Word of God is powerful. Now, you might have guessed from our readings and our music that I was going to say a little bit about that this morning.

And so I am. I think about the Word of God and I realize that it is not just some abstract thing for me. And one of the reasons that it's not is that the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, converted me to Christ just a little over 13 years ago.

I was a kid who was going through an agnostic phase who basically decided to try to read the New Testament with fresh eyes. And what happens? I get a few chapters into Matthew's Gospel and bam!

Converted to Christ by the Word of God. I acknowledge that this Jesus that I encountered there was my Lord and my God. It was through the Word that God worked to bring me to salvation.

[1:40] So you can probably understand, and I'm sure plenty of you can relate, why Scripture is a topic that's so near and dear to my heart. Now, back to our Reformation themes.

It was a topic near and dear to Martin Luther's heart, too. You guys remember Luther, right? He's the guy who turned the world upside down by taking that radical position that you can't purchase the remission of sins with money.

It also took the radical position that we are saved as a free gift through faith in Jesus. Now, we talked about that last week when we covered two slogans of the Reformation, grace alone and faith alone.

Now, this week we're on to a third slogan, Scripture alone. Scripture alone was a foundational doctrine for the Reformers. Well, what exactly did they mean by that, by Scripture alone?

Basically, they meant that in all matters of doctrine and practice, the Bible is our final authority. Period. Scripture trumps my opinions.

[2:43] Scripture trumps tradition. Now, that's not to say that, for example, tradition is inherently bad. I'm standing here in a medieval robe as I speak.

Or even that our opinions are always bad. It simply means that we measure all things in light of what God has revealed in His Word. That's what it means.

And this isn't some academic exercise. We are called to submit our lives to the truth that we find in Holy Scripture. The wonderful thing is that we find Jesus in Scripture.

We find the gospel message of salvation by grace through faith in Scripture. And that's why the Reformers were so committed to making sure that the message of Scripture would be taught and heard clearly.

Now, in light of this doctrine of Scripture alone, I really want us to focus in this morning on a few consequences of what that means for us as Anglicans.

[3:50] So I want us to talk about the authority of Scripture this morning. I want us to talk about the sufficiency of Scripture this morning. And I want us to talk about the power of Scripture this morning.

Scripture is authoritative. We read in 2 Timothy 3.16, All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

Now, if it is breathed out by God, I think that means we should pay attention to it, shouldn't we? If it is God breathed, if it is God revealed, it carries authority and we need to listen.

Now, Luther reasserted this because he lived at a time when many in the church regarded tradition as being on equal footing with Scripture.

Tradition, they would argue, is equally authoritative. And that's how, over time, you could have this idea developed that there's such a thing as purgatory and that giving money to the church is going to get you out of it.

[5:01] Now, we have a similar problem in our own day, though. We live in a culture where Christians and where churches are substituting other things for the authority of the Word of God.

It's a danger of our present age. Even Christians are tempted to submit to the values of our present culture instead of submitting to the witness of Scripture. And that is why we have to return to Scripture again and again and again and sit under the authority of Scripture and have our minds renewed and transformed.

Really, what does this authority of Scripture really boil down to? Well, I once heard one of our Nigerian bishops in a sermon put it this way, and I can't mimic the fire of our Nigerian preachers, so I'm not going to try.

But he said, If it disagrees with the Scriptures, throw it out. That's true in the church. It's true of us corporately.

It's also true in our lives. The authority of Scripture reminds us that if we're believing something or doing something that is at odds with what the Bible teaches, it is time to take out the trash.

[6:21] The Scriptures are authoritative and they're also sufficient. What does that mean? Well, Luther taught, and as Anglicans, we believe, something that seems radical to some people.

Everything that you need to know to be saved can be found in this book, can be found in the Bible. Everything you need to know to be saved is there.

Looking back for 2 Timothy 3, we read, 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.

Scripture is able to make us complete and equipped for every good work. What do we need beyond that? I think that's pretty sufficient, don't you?

But there is this constant temptation to treat God's Word as somehow insufficient. The Pharisees made that mistake. They added to the Word of God with their tradition, teaching things that aren't in Scripture as necessary.

[7:38] They added to what God commanded in His Word. So Jesus let them have it, saying, For the sake of your tradition you have made void the Word of God, you hypocrites.

Well did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

Now Luther believed that the church in his day was doing the very same thing. Treating the commandments of men as necessary to salvation.

And the question arises, of course, Why do we need the commandments of men to be saved? We have the Scriptures which point us to the crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ. The Scriptures which point us to the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life in His name.

What do we need to add to that? Is there anything lacking in the Gospel, which we find in the Scriptures? Is there anything missing? Absolutely not.

[8:47] And what happens when we try to add to it? It just obscures the Gospel, doesn't it? The Gospel gets downplayed. The commandments of men get elevated. And people end up in despair because the focus shifts from what Jesus has done for me.

Shifts from that to me having to keep all of these extra regulations to be right with God. But, if we treat Scripture as sufficient, it will keep pointing us back to Christ.

And Christ is all we need. We have sufficient Scripture pointing us to a sufficient Savior. Praise God. So, Scripture is authoritative.

Scripture is sufficient. Scripture is also powerful. We read in Hebrews 4, For 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 living. The Word is active. The Bible isn't some dry, dead, dusty tome. It's not some relic from the ancient past.

[10:06] This isn't some quaint mythology that has nothing to do with the real world today. No. God saved souls through His Word. He saved mine through His Word.

The Word can penetrate the heart, can bring conviction of sin, can call those who hear and who read it to faith in Christ. It is sharp. It pierces heart and pierces soul.

And it is wonderfully dangerous, because if it pierces you, you will never be the same again. Your life will be changed forever. Praise God.

Luther had this to say about the power of God's Word. He said, I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word. Otherwise, I did nothing.

I did nothing. The Word did it all. Luther was used to kick off one of the greatest reformations and revivals the church has ever seen.

[11:07] And that's what he had to say. He did nothing. It was all the Word of God. Now, as a pastor, that brings me great comfort.

Because I'm not a super pastor. I will never reach millions of people through my personal magnetism and undeniable charisma. I'm much more likely to injure myself getting off the couch than I am to be the next big televangelist.

And it's okay to laugh. But here's what I can do. I can teach and preach God's Word. I can get into the Scriptures with you and show you Jesus.

And that's what I strive to do. And that's all that needs to be done. I don't do the work. None of us do the work. The Word does the work. God works through it and changes hearts, changes lives, and Jesus comes to be known and glorified.

Thank you, Lord. God converts and sanctifies people through the Word. That's why Anglicans, that's why we call it a means of grace.

[12:18] God uses the Word, the preaching of it, the reading of it, for our salvation and for our growth in Christ. We have the very promise of God that when the Word is preached, God will be at work.

That is amazing. And we have to remember that because there's this constant temptation to replace the Word with things that aren't a means of grace. It certainly happened in Luther's day, but it still happens now.

In our time, the Church has battled and continues to battle with the temptation to favor entertainment over biblical preaching and worship.

As the great Welsh preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones put it, he said, while men believed in the Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God and spoke on the basis of that authority, you had great preaching.

But as belief in the great doctrines of the Bible began to go out, sermons were replaced by ethical addresses and homilies and moral uplift and socio-political talk, it is not surprising that preaching declined.

[13:31] I still remember the very worst sermon I've ever heard. What made it the worst sermon I've ever heard? It wasn't that the speaker was bad.

He was a very polished public speaker, very poised, very eloquent. But here's the problem. His text said that you cannot serve God and mammon, but his sermon was about how, in his opinion, the most important thing in life is to have friends.

Nothing about the Gospel. Just that it's important to have friends in this life. God doesn't promise to act through that kind of talk.

But does God meet us in the Scriptures when we read the Scriptures, when we hear the Scriptures rightly taught? Absolutely. And the Word of God points us to Jesus.

The Word of God calls us to trust in Christ and Him crucified. The Word of God is for our training in godliness. The Word of God is authoritative, sufficient, and powerful.

[14:42] But here's the catch. For any of that to do us any good, we actually have to read it. For the preaching of the Word is a means of grace to do us any good, we have to be a church to hear the Word preached.

So let's ask ourselves, am I taking advantage of the gift that is mine, the Word of God, this treasure that has been given to me? Do I take the opportunity every week to hear the Word preached?

Do I take the opportunity in my daily life to read the Word? Because, just be honest, if we are not spending time with the Scriptures, we can be sure that we're not going to grow in our faith.

On the other hand, since the Word is a means of grace, we can be sure that we will grow in our faith if we're spending time in the Scriptures because we meet Jesus there.

And not just us. Do you have people in your life who don't know Jesus? I'm sure all of us do. I want you to know the Word of God is able to convert them. It converted me.

[15:56] Do everything you can to take them to hear the Word preached. Do everything you can to encourage them to find an opportunity to read the Bible with believers.

Maybe with you. I saw a survey recently that suggested that a pretty large percentage of unchurched people responded that they would be interested in studying the Bible with a Christian. You probably know someone like that. Ask. And then what about our children? Here's something I have come to understand as a parent.

Children can profit and benefit from the Word of God. So we have to ask, are they being exposed to the Word of God?

Are they hearing the Gospel preached regularly? Are they being taught about their faith? Are we reading the Bible with our kids at home? If we want them to follow Jesus as adults, we have to take these questions seriously now.

[17:04] In Luther's day, people generally didn't have a personal copy of the Bible in their own language. But we do. We have more opportunities to grow, more opportunities to share, and let's not neglect that, my brothers and my sisters.

And let's give thanks to God this morning. I mean, really, thank Him, praise Him. The Reformation slogan, Scripture alone, really boils down to the awesome fact that God has given us in Scripture everything we need to know for salvation and for growth in Christ.

Because Scripture is all about Christ and Him crucified. And that means that we need not be worried or distracted by the mere thoughts or commandments of men.

because the Scriptures continually point us to Jesus and Christ is all that we need. God has spoken to us in His written Word, has told us everything we need to know to know Him and to find salvation in His Son.

Thanks be to God for the gift of His Word. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.