

"Never Doubt the Power of God's Word"

Text: 2 Timothy 3:12-17

In the Name of Jesus Christ, our Gate to Life Eternal and our Friend as we travel along the path, dear Fellow Christians:

A young boy awakens in the night and listens to a clear and direct voice revealing what will soon happen to his master. The message is from God himself, yet delivered in so normal a voice that the boy three times thought it the voice of his master, Eli. So God spoke to Samuel.

An old man, who at 75 was just beginning the greatest part of his life, hears the voice of his God and leaves his extended family and the land of his ancestors and settles in Canaan. Later he heard the voice of this same God – now promising to give him descendants as numerous as the stars, and now warning him of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and again announcing that the Savior of the world would come from his line. So the Lord spoke to Abraham.

Another old man hears the voice of the Lord who, speaking from a burning bush, tells him to lead his people from captivity. Much later the Lord speaks to a young Hebrew man, telling him to lead his people against the Midianites. And much later still he speaks to a prince of Israel as he ascends to the throne of his father, David. So the Lord spoke to Moses, Gideon, and Solomon.

Back then, clearly, God spoke. But what about today? Does the Lord speak to us today? How can we hear him? How can we know his voice? What will he sound like and how will he communicate with us? Even if he were to speak, is this same God still as powerful, still as relevant and effective as he once was? Do his words still matter? It is to such questions that we turn our attention this morning – timely questions for those who can at times feel forsaken, frustrated, or powerless. The text that will form the basis of this our study this morning is found in Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, the 3rd Chapter:

2 Timothy 3:12-17 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

These are the words of our God. In humble acceptance of the fact that these words are altogether true and right in all ways and at all times, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

If I were to ask you *"Is the Lord still speaking to his people today?"* I'm guessing you might well imagine that you could already in your mind trace the path where the answer will lead, even before I take you down it. *"Is the Lord still speaking to his people? Yes, God speaks to us even today from the pages of the Holy Bible."* Hopefully your thought process from that point wouldn't be: *"I already know and believe that the Bible is God's Word. Every Christian knows that. So, I guess that having been reminded of that fact (which of course is a good thing) I will now try to occupy my mind while the pastor talks about what I already know."* The goal in studying God's Word is more than just to be reminded of what we already know; it is also to apply what you know in such a way that you come away enlightened as well as reminded, educated as well as strengthened, better prepared for the future by being reminded of what is past. The goal is not just to state the obvious, but to use God's Word as God himself intended and as he reminded us in our text: **"for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."**

So, *is the Lord still speaking to his people today?* Let me ask in a little different way: *Who here, as a follower of Jesus Christ, has not wished that God would give you some kind of a sign or special guidance, especially when faced with an important decision in your life?* This is obviously not a rare desire, since I've heard these words from others and I've thought them myself. Wouldn't it just be great if God would just tell us – out loud – what he wants us to do?

Obviously there is nothing necessarily wrong with that. It's a noble, God-pleasing desire to be led by God in all of our thoughts, words, and actions. The problem is when we hear the answer and don't necessarily like it. Christians generally know the right answer to most questions. We know that he has given us answers and guidance *in his Word*, but we tend to lack conviction that our specific question or problem could actually have been answered several thousand years ago. The reasoning goes something like: *"I know, for example, that Baal is an idol and that murder is a sin, but what I want to know is whether or not I should marry this person... or go to that school... or take that job... or move to that city."* God's people tend to trust the Bible for doctrinal truth and for general guidance, but many wonder if the Bible can really be trusted to answer today's specific questions. Can the Bible, in other words, really be God speaking to us today?

This question needs to be answered, and we will, but first we have to take a step back and to acknowledge that an even *more* disturbing question

has arisen of late – one that actually threatens to make obsolete or moot our first question. It doesn't really matter if God is speaking to us if we've lost confidence in that God. Our society has adopted the notion that even if God is still speaking today, his word, his message – even God himself – is no longer relevant *because he no longer has the power to actually accomplish what he desires*. The even deeper problem is society's view that the God of our forefathers has lost his power to control, which means that even if he does communicate in some way with human beings today, that communication has no inherent value.

This denigration in man's natural understanding of God is actually fairly predictable – *if they lower God to human standards*. Has the thought ever occurred to you: *Hey, I wonder whatever happened to _____?* As human beings age, their mental and physical capabilities naturally and universally begin to slow down or deteriorate. When an individual ceases to be the best at what he or she does, that individual naturally begins to seem less and less relevant, and naturally tends to fade into obscurity as human beings redirect their attention to that which emerges as the next best new thing. Maybe that's one reason professional athletes are so reluctant to leave their sport. They know instinctively that in doing so they will almost certainly pass into the obscurity of the masses.

When the "slippage" becomes obvious and profound, most folks tend to forget altogether; they come to imagine that the world has pretty much gotten all they can from this individual and that it's time to move on. Nursing homes are filled with those who, in society's mind, have nothing more to offer.

Society seems to have placed God – together with also his Word - into that category. The trend-setters have even now determined that we are living in the "post-Christian era." The clear indication is that they believe that Christianity has run its course, offered all it could, and should now be relegated to a sort of spiritual nursing home – never to be heard from again. It is time for humankind to find a new source of truth, a new and better source of reality, fulfillment, and wisdom. The Old Way was fine for Grandma and Grandpa, maybe even for our parents, but the time has come for something new, better, different, because even if the God of our Lutheran forefathers does speak today, clearly in the minds of modern man he no longer has the power he may have once had. Nor, therefore, does his Word carry the power that it once did.

Obviously this is blasphemy of the highest order, and God does not treat such sins lightly. Our New Testament lesson reminded us, for example, of the sorting process that will take place on Judgment Day. Is the trend irreversible? Not necessarily. History tells us that mankind does not always and only slide further and further from the one true God. The pattern of history is not an ever downward curve but a rollercoaster or pendulum. Look at the history of Israel and you will see the pattern. The Jews were forever swinging from "on fire for

God" to any old god will do. For the sake of his promise and covenant (which is the message we heard in our Old Testament lesson from Deuteronomy 7) God always not only preserved a remnant of true believers, he also brought about revival and rededication. So Israel rose under Moses and Joshua, and fell during the time of their successors. There was revival under David and Solomon, and the return to apostasy under Solomon's son Rehoboam and those who followed. Again there was a rededication under Hezekiah and Josiah, and the inevitable fall under their successors.

The root cause was almost always the same: man returned to the same pagan thoughts and desires of their decadent ancestors. We see the same things happening today, and the results are both predictable and inevitable. When man seeks from God what God has never promised, man is not only invariably disappointed, he is disillusioned. He begins to doubt the effectiveness of the God he once worshipped, or the God that was once worshipped by his forefathers. So again in our day crowds are thronging to those who promise the desires of their human hearts. Thousands turn out every week to hear that they can be rich, fit, powerful, and happy. They gather to hear that the sin that naturally troubles their collective conscience is no longer sinful but it is now progressive and fashionable. The old God couldn't or wouldn't provide the desires of man's heart, so man just made another.

It is striking how so little has changed in the thousands of years since the events of our text. As then, so also today, we live in a world where God made himself known, only to be abandoned. This very thing was foretold in our text for this morning. It was happening in Paul's day, it is happening today. Our text put it this way: ***"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."***

Though God in his Word repeatedly warned that Christians would typically be the poor, persecuted nothings in the eyes of the world, others today are telling us that Christians can and should have and live exactly like the unbelieving world around them. Though Jesus himself warned of ongoing hardship for those that are his - those who would one day inherit eternal life - today we are told that everything has changed. We have, in other words, new gods that will give us exactly what we want. The only rule is that nothing that was once considered evil can ever be condemned. Focus on your own worldly desires, let others focus on theirs, and all will be well.

But then is or is not the Lord speaking to his people today? Of course he is, and in much the same way as he did in former times. This does not mean that he speaks audibly in the ears of a select few, or that he

continues to reveal new facts or prophecies. But it *does* mean that he still actively and specifically addresses our concerns when we turn to the pages of Holy Scripture. Understand this well. The Bible does not just give us vague parallels to today's problems and a "best of luck" when we try to find our way. Both the Holy Spirit and the Word itself are **"living and active."** There is a divine power at work in God's Word that is every bit as powerful today as it ever was. Our Triune God is every bit as powerful and effective as he ever was. That means that God himself works in us and for us whenever we are exposed to Holy Scripture. Note that while Scripture rules out new and continuing revelation (which actually ought to be a great comfort to us) it does in no way indicate that His Spirit will ever stop working in and for us, or that His Word would no longer be effective, powerful, applicable, and decisive in our lives. Far from it.

The godless of this age have downgraded God, so it is only natural that they have downgraded his Word as well. Since God himself is impotent, so is his Word. The new thing they have adopted is anything but new, which is that man will be rewarded if he simply does the best that he can and is who he is. Modern thought is actually just the ancient lie that if there is a God he will certainly accept you into his heaven just as you are.

Our text says just the opposite: **"From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."** Still today the one, the only path to heaven is through faith alone in Jesus Christ. The only good that God sees in us is the good that he has credited to us based on what Jesus has done for us, as our substitute. It is anything but an outdated truth that the only way anyone can live forever in heaven is by God's undeserved love through faith in Jesus Christ. Sin is real, but so is the forgiveness that is ours through faith alone in God's Son.

Our God will indeed speak to you concerning other questions or problems in your life. He has promised to be with you always, and to give you all things, but you must go to the place where he promised to speak to you: His Holy Scriptures. There he will not simply give you vague and often conflicting notions about what you ought to do or what course of action you ought to take. There, when you are exposed to the power of his Word, he will visit you, guide you, convict and convince you. But, again, you must visit with him where he told you to go, and then you must be prepared to *listen to him* and to *submit to his guiding hand*. How foolish to blame God for any failure to guide and direct us when it is *we* who do not go where he promised to speak to us, and *we* who fail to follow where he leads.

Is God, and therefore also his Word, now outdated and impotent? Hardly. Our text offers this timeless reminder: ***As for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred***

writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ ***All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*** ¹⁷ ***that the man of God may be competent (complete) equipped for every good work.*** Trust your God, trust his Word, and know with unshakable confidence that you will lack for nothing – in this world or the next. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 7:6-9** "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations."

^{ESV} **Matthew 13:44-52** "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. ⁴⁷ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹ "Have you understood all these things?" They said to him, "Yes." ⁵² And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

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The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – July 30, 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 33 (Red Hymnal)

"The Lord Hath Helped Me"

The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 5.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Deuteronomy 7:6-9) It is both easy and common for a people who have been blessed by God to begin to imagine that they themselves are the cause of God's goodness, rather than the humble recipients of undeserved gifts. We are reminded in our first lesson that we are unworthy of the least of God's blessings. This is indeed a great comfort, for God's goodness depends on his promise, not on our worthiness, and God always keeps his promises.

The New Testament Lesson: (Matthew 13:44-52) Our second reading is a continuation of Jesus' parables about Judgment Day, the reality of both heaven and hell, and how good and evil (faith and unbelief) will be separated on the Last Day. This is not a New Testament only doctrine. The Resurrection is the focus of all of God's Word. So also both Old and New Testament believers will be gathered together at the Judgment. How great will be that day!

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn - 338 (Red Hymnal)

"Thine Forever, God of Love"

The Sermon - Text: 2 Timothy 3:12-17 (Printed on the back page)

"Never Doubt the Power of God's Word"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 346 (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus! And Shall It Ever Be"

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Closing Hymn – 48 (Red Hymnal)

"How Blest Are They Who Hear God's Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with congregations throughout the United States, as well as mission affiliates around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance - Sunday (38) Average (45)

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Richard Kanzenbach is considering the call to St. Luke's of Lemmon. Pastor Mark Tiefel has returned the call to Immanuel of Mankato. Redeemer of Cheyenne has postponed the opening of their new school for one year due to the unavailability of a teacher. Teacher Matthew Thurow is considering the call to Faith of Markesan.

Mission Helper Trip – 17 Mission Helpers continue their mission work in Nepal. You can follow along with the Mission Helpers through the trip blog at: <http://2017clcmhtnepal.blogspot.com/> Your continued prayers would certainly be appropriate.

Mortgage Reduction Drive – A mortgage elimination drive was enacted at our recent Quarterly Voters' meeting. The goal is for the congregation to be debt-free by year's end. Contributions for this effort should be marked "Mortgage Reduction."

Christian Parenting Program – A Christian series on child rearing has been added to the church library in both DVD and CD format. It is entitled "Growing Kids God's Way for No Excuse Parenting" and is highly recommended. See the Pastor for more details.

Vacation Bible School – Our VBS is scheduled for August 17-18 (a Friday and Saturday). We are making a concerted effort this year to invite un-churched children from the community. The outreach plan includes a flyer distribution effort, but personal invitations are always best. Please let the Pastor know of any non-members who plan to attend so that we can plan accordingly.