

The Book - Rev N Lachie Macdonald

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[0 : 00] Well, folks, turn back with me in your Bibles to 2 Timothy and chapter 3 this morning, and! for a short time, we're just going to look at the verses 14 down to the end of the chapter.

As we think about the Bible, the Bible, the Bible really is an amazing document. It's an amazing book, isn't it? Sixty-six separate books written by 40 authors, compiled over a 1600-year time period, people from different walks of life, from different experiences. These authors came, they wrote under the instruction of God, and they've given us this wonderful message, this consistent message, this message that is harmonious, where the different writers are in synergy together, though they were writing at different times and in different ways, with different themes and with different emphasis. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the Bible holds the record for the best-selling literature in the world ever. There have been more Bibles sold around the world than anything else. Over five billion copies that are known of have been distributed, sold around the world. It has been translated into at least 2,500 languages and dialects, and that work is ongoing.

You can appeal to the likes of the Scottish Bible Society, who are still involved in translation, Wycliffe Bible translators as well. The Bible is an incredible document, and as we're reading in the press just now, the quiet revival that is taking place in the culture of our day is appealing to the truth of the truth of the Bible. People are tired of the vacuous and trivial and empty promises of the things that our culture say will bring meaning and will bring hope into your life, and people are trying these things, and they're found wanting. These things that the world promotes are empty. They're not fulfilling the promises that they make, and so they're looking for something more. And we're very thankful that people can come to the Word of God, and they can find something more, something meaningful, something meaty, something that will satiate their appetite, something that will satisfy their thirst, something that will bring meaning and direction, focus, and motivation into their lives. All of these things can be found in Scripture, in God's Word. And yet the Bible is often looked at in different ways by different people. It's approached in different ways. I think if we were to take a number of approaches to the Bible, we would see at least three basic categories into which people's attitude towards the Bible falls.

Number one, people would say, well, it's just a book. It's just a book. It's just another book in the vast array of books that are already available to us. It has some interesting sayings. It has some fun, maybe even crazy stories within it. It's got a whole lot of names that are difficult to pronounce.

It's just a book. It's a historical book. It's antiquated. It's ancient. It's irrelevant, largely. There's another category of people, however, that would say it's an important book. It's not just a book in an array of others. It's an important book. These people would perhaps be folk who might have the Bible in their homes. They would see the value in the Bible, but actually it's little more than a shelf ornament for them. You want to hear some frightening statistics from a survey that was carried out in the UK?

[3 : 59] It said 9%, 9% of practicing Christians say they read the Bible every day. 9%. And 13% a few times a week.

13% said every week. And 17% said they read it a few times a year. Meaning that around 51% of those who would profess to be active practicing Christians in the United Kingdom read the Bible less than once a month. It's an important book. But it's not really that important. It's an important book.

Bible ownership may be strong. Bible engagement, on the other hand, maybe not quite so much. These could be people that maybe even attend church. The Bible is important on a Sunday and on a Wednesday, but really, that's about as far as it goes. It's compartmentalized into these things. I'm sure that's not the case for any of us here this morning. Because of course, there's a third category. It's not just a book.

It's not just an important book. But for those of us gathered in worship today, it is the book. It is the book. It is the only book. For the Christian believer, the Bible is not just a book. It's not just an important book. It's the book. It's the book that shapes our worldview. We don't just own Bibles, but we feed on our Bibles. The Word of God satisfies the deep yearning of our hearts and our souls and our minds. We come to it. And the Christian faith is not a blind faith. The Christian faith is not an illiterate faith. The Christian faith is led, it is bound by the Word of God contained within the pages of Scripture that will stand up to any critical analysis. It's a reasoned faith. It's a faith that comes about by critical thinking, engaging with the different matters that are contained within it. Walter Scott, the great novelist, on his deathbed, by all accounts said to his assistant, bring me the book. And she thought, well, author, look how many books you've got. Which book do you mean? You've got so many.

And he said, the only book for a dying man, the Bible, the book. But it's more than just a book for a dying man, isn't it? It's the only book for the living man or woman in Christ as well. It's not just an important book. It's a book that I use to feed my soul. It's, to coin the words of Jesus, we shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And where do we find that? We find that in Scripture. We find that in the Bible. George Mueller, who founded the Ashley Downe orphanage in England back in the day, said, the vigor of our spiritual life will be an exact proportion to the place held by the Bible in our life and our thoughts. The vigor of our spiritual life will be an exact proportion to the place held by the Bible in our life and in our thoughts. I solemnly state, he continues, from 54 years of experience, the first three years after conversion,

[7 : 33] I neglected the Word of God. But since I began to search diligently, the blessing has been wonderful. Great has been the blessing from consecutive, diligent, daily study. I look upon it as a lost day when I have not had a good time over the Word of God. I wonder how many of us could echo that sentiment.

I look upon it as a lost day when I have not had a good time over the Word of God. For the Christian believer, it is the life source for us. It is the Word of God living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword that pierces between joint and marrow. It's a Word that comes to us, and it cuts us to the quick at times, as does the surgeon's scalpel. It doesn't do so in order to hurt us for the sake of hurting us, but it cuts us, it convicts us, it arrests us, perhaps, of the ways in which we're going astray or we're walking away. But it doesn't do so just to hurt us. It does it to bring healing to our hearts and our lives, just as the surgeon's scalpel does. It exposes us. It exposes our hearts. It challenges the presuppositions of our minds, the misinterpretations, the justifications that so often we engage with.

And it does so not to humiliate us, but in order to clothe us with the righteousness of Jesus. Much more than just a book, much more than just an important book. The Bible is the book. It is the only book in which we find life, and the meaning of life, and the direction of life, and eternal life. And that's what brings us today to 2 Timothy and chapter 3, and from verses 14 there, where we read, "But 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. 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." Three brief things as we consider the Bible this morning. Number one, it's designation. It's designation. Notice the designation that this portion gives to the Bible. In verse 14, it talks, or in verse 15, it talks about sacred writings.

That's not the best translation of the word. The King James or the NIV have it better as Scripture. And in verse 16, all Scripture. So the word employed there is graphe. It's a word that's employed 51 times in the New Testament to describe Scripture. It's the Greek word that we get the word graph from. You think autograph. What is an autograph? That's somebody writing down their name. If you think of a photograph, you're taking a picture of something that you can interpret, that you can look at, that you can read in that sense. So it means writing. Now, why is that important? Why is that significant for us this morning? Because it shows us that God didn't just think his message. God didn't just read. He didn't just speak his message. He didn't just reveal his message in dreams and in visions. He did all of those things and does all of those things. But he also graphed it. He wrote it. He saw that it was recorded, that it was written down in legible language, that people, that generations might be able to access and read and comprehend and understand. It is written by God. It is the writing of God. Now, when Paul is writing here to Timothy and he speaks of the Scripture, he speaks of sacred writings that you're acquainted with, he's primarily thinking about Old Testament. He's primarily thinking about the things that they already had, that they already knew, the law of God that we've been singing about. You must continue in the things that you have learned and are assured of from the people that you learned it from. Now, if we had time and if it was a different day, we might go into the reasons for that for Timothy, how he had a mother, how he had a grandmother, how they led him and taught him.

Eunice and Lois, they're mentioned in the Bible. They lead him in that truth. So Paul is saying to him, look, you've already got knowledge. You've already gained understanding. You've been taught these things. You've been raised, how we might put it, in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord. And what was it that he was taught? It was the Scriptures of the Old Testament. We have the beauty of the full canon of Scripture. We've got the Old Testament and the New Testament. We can look on this with a much broader vision than they did at this time. But primarily, Paul is employing the Old Testament, the 39 books of the Old Testament. The Old Testament that claims 3,000 times to speak with authority. And the word of the Lord came saying, or thus saith the Lord. These are statements that are found again and again, up to 3,000 times in the Old Testament. And then we come to the New Testament, and there are over 300 quotations, direct quotations from the Old Testament as it is written, or referring back to the word of Scripture from the old times. It was authoritative to people. So Paul is directing Timothy to think about the authoritative word of God as he appeals to the Old Testament. Augustine, the saint, put it this way. He said, the New Testament is in the old contained, and the old is in the new explained. I think that's quite helpful for us. The New Testament is in the old contained, and the old is in the new explained. And the Old Testament is pointing forward, looking to what's to come, looking forward to Jesus. Jesus arrives, and Jesus lives, and Jesus fulfills the law of God. Don't think I have come to abolish the law and the prophets, Jesus said. I have come to fulfill them. And so the Old Testament is translated by the New Testament and vice versa. One predicts and anticipates the other. They go together like east and west, like thunder and lightning, the pen and paper.

[14:32] Some things just go together. The Old Testament and the New Testament in the canon of Scripture just fit together perfectly. But notice in verse 16, it says, all Scripture is breathed out by God. All Scripture is given. It is given to us by God. All Scripture. I notice that also in the New Testament, Paul is quoting Old Testament Scripture, but he also quotes New Testament writers as well. So even within this time, interestingly, Paul is beginning to appeal to those who are writing from a New Testament perspective as well. If we go back to 1 Timothy and chapter 5, and we read verse 17, he said, or verse 18, for the Scripture says, you shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain, and the laborer deserves his wages. What is he doing there? He's quoting Moses in the Old Testament. He's quoting Moses from the book of

Deuteronomy. But he's also quoting Dr. Luke from the New Testament, who in turn is quoting Jesus. So there is this synergy happening here. Paul is referring to the Old Testament, to the law. He's telling Timothy, think about what you already know and what you have learned and what you're grounded in, and live according to that. But he's also appealing to the New Testament writers as well. It's not the only place. There's other places that we could go. Peter thought what Paul had written was scriptural, didn't it? 2 Peter 3:15, bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

He writes in the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort as they do the other Scriptures to their own destruction. And so Peter is referring to Paul in the New Testament.

Paul is referring to Luke and to Jesus, but also all the way back to Moses as well, recognizing the value of Scripture across the generations. It takes the whole Bible to make a whole Christian, doesn't it? It takes the whole Bible to make a whole Christian. It's not a pick and mix, but it's a smorgasbord. It's a rich feast of spiritual truth for us as we appeal to it. There is nothing else in life that comes even close to Scripture and its truth. I've always loved what Spurgeon said. Spurgeon said, a Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to somebody who is not. A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to somebody who isn't. So that's the designation of Scripture. But not only the designation, secondly, note the inspiration. The inspiration, and it's there in verse 16, all Scripture is breathed out by God. It is the literal breath of God. And we know that the breath of God brings life, and it fills things with meaning and with life. The Old Testament and the New

Testament, God speaks. He breathes life into it, and it is recorded as the writers are inspired by the very breath of God Himself. Hebrews chapter 1 affirms this. He says there are two occasions, there are two ways in which God spoke. There's the Old Testament where He spoke by the prophets, and there's the New Testament now where He speaks by His Son, by Jesus. He spoke in times past in many ways. There was the Pentateuch, there was historical, there was poetry, there was prophecy. He spoke through visions, and He spoke through symbols, and He spoke through prophecies, and parables, and types, and ceremonies, and theophanies of Himself appearing. He even spoke in audible voices from time to time. The Old Testament is God speaking. It wasn't anything other than God speaking and inspiring ordinary men to write down His inspired message. He gives the inspiration. He gives the inspiration. He sets the inspiration into the heart of man.

[19:09] And that takes us to the process of inspiration, doesn't it? What is inspiration, and how does inspiration work? And what does God-breathed actually mean? Well, we can look at many things in life and think, wow, that is inspired.

We see an artist that draws or paints a beautiful scene, and we say, wow, that is inspiring. We hear a musician play an inspiring performance. Wow, inspiring. It means that the Lord has given them gifts, and they are employing that. They may be gifted. But in Scripture, the men who are recording the Word of God, they're not necessarily virtuosos. They're not generally geniuses. They're not generally academics. They are ordinary men who had been with the Lord. They're shepherds. They're fishermen. They're farmers. Amos was a fig farmer down in the desert. It wasn't like he was around the libraries of Alexandria. No, he's a fig farmer out in the desert, and yet he's inspired by God to write, and to write prophetically, as it is with many others.

It's an inspiration that comes from God. It's not a natural inspiration. Some of us are inspirational in our character or in our gifts that God has given to us. But this Scripture inspiration is something much more than that. It is the inspiration of God himself, breathing life into his Word, breathing life into those he employs in his service and his concepts and his words coming together. Heaven and earth will pass away, said Jesus, but my Word will never pass away, because it is inspired by God. It is not the thought of man. It is not the kind of creative inspiration of a gifted mind. No, it's not that at all. It is the inspiration of God himself, breathing life into his Word. Not a jot, not a tittle will pass away from the law until it's all fulfilled. A jot, the smallest letter in the

Hebrew language, the tittle, just like a comma, just like a little mark, a breathing mark within the Hebrew text. None of these things will pass away until the fulfillment of God's Word. There are approximately, depending on translation, 770,430 words in the Bible, the canon of Scripture as we know it, and all of them are important, all of them inspired by God for our good. And he employs a whole host of different people in that, which should be an encouragement to us as we live. And we might think, well, if inspired by God, would it be uniform? Well, not really. It's not uniform, is it? Because he employed different people in different ways, just as he still does. So different authors have different styles and different personalities and different backgrounds and different experiences, different themes, different emphases. Luke was a doctor. You'd expect medical terminology, and it's there. Matthew was a Levite, conversant in the Old Testament. You would expect Old Testament quotation, and they're there. Paul was a rabbi, schooled in secular and religious thought, so you'd expect him to quote both religious and secular sources, and he does. So it's not a mechanical, human-centered inspiration. It's the inspiration of God to make it into this prophetic message that is unrivaled, that is unmatched in the world as we know it, that he breathes life into it. The Greek word that's employed here for inspiration speaks of a ship being carried along, its sails being filled by the wind and driven along. And it's a great picture, isn't it? Because you can have many different sailing vessels, many different styles, many different designs, many different configurations of masts and sails, but they're all reliant on the same thing, and that is the wind to drive them along. That's how the inspiration of Scripture works. Lots of writers, lots of differences, lots of experiences, lots of styles, lots of backgrounds, all raising their sails, their different sails, as it were, but all reliant upon the wind of God to come along and fill these sails to inspire them. So we have the designation of Scripture, it is God's Word written.

We have the inspiration of Scripture, it is God's Word breathed into, given life, inspired. But then we have the application, and that's perhaps the most important part for us here this morning.

[24:17] All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness, that we may be complete and equipped for God for every good work. It's good for doctrine, it's teaching. It's good for reproof, for giving us a nudge when we need it. It's good for correction, changing the course when that is necessary, for instruction, for righteousness. I don't know of any other book that can do this. A medical book cannot do this. A law book cannot do this. A comic book cannot do this. But the Bible can. The Bible can. It is God's Word. It is Word that is living. It's not inanimate marks on a page. It's not just pieces of ink. It is the Word of God revealed. It is the revelation of God inspired. It is the truth of God made manifest.

Martin Luther, the reformer, used to say, the Bible is alive. It speaks to me. It has feet. It runs after me. It has hands. It lays hold of me. And how many of ourselves could add our amen to that, that the Word of God has almost pursued us. It has unsettled us. It has changed us. One writer said, the Bible has the ability to comfort the afflicted, whilst at the same time afflicting the comfortable. It's not so true. But God's Word is living and active. It's sharper than a double-edged sword. It comes to us, and it either affirms us in what we're doing and builds us up and encourages us. It does all of those things. But it also comes and challenges us and convicts us and exposes the waywardness of our hearts and our minds, the direction of travel, the trajectory of our lives. And there's no other book that can do that. It is the one book that can make us wise for salvation. Isn't that one of the most significant things that Scripture does? And how from childhood you've been acquainted with it,

Timothy, with the sacred writings, with Scripture, God-breathed, inspired, which are able to make you wise for salvation through Christ Jesus? You see, there are many books, and there are many teachings, and there are many mantras, and there are many things in the world that will tell us one thing or another. But the one similarity that they all have is that actually they make no difference, no manifest difference to our lives. Because when life comes to an end, none of these things will make a slight difference, not even the slightest difference to our lives. But the Word of God brings life and changes human hearts and challenges presuppositions, and it will make us wise, wise for salvation. Wise for salvation. What is it that we all need? We all need salvation.

Yeah, we all need to be equipped, complete, and equipped for every good work. Paul says that's what Scripture will do for you. It will correct you, and it will teach you, and it will train you in righteousness. It will make you complete, but first and foremost, it will make you wise to salvation. So the question is, what is the Bible for you today? Is it a book? Is it an important book?

Or is it the book in which you find life, where you have been made wise for salvation, and you are being made complete through it for every good work? Let's pray. God our Father, we thank you for your Word, for its wisdom, for its teaching, for its direction, for its command, for its instruction. Lord, we pray that you would speak to us through it. We thank you that you have breathed life into your Word, and as we come to it day by day and week by week, and as we feed upon it, our souls are richly fed. Our minds are populated and filled with gracious truth, faith. Lord, we know of no other thing, no other resource available to us that can do these things.

[29 : 04] And so, Lord, we pray that we might rest in the finished work of Jesus, that we may revel in the revealed Word of God as you breathe life into it and make it alive to us, Lord, and make us wise for salvation. Teach us, correct us, train us, make us whole, we pray. Through your Word we ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Folks, we're going to conclude by singing to God's praise from Psalm 51 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 51 in the Scottish Psalter at the verse marked 9. This is David crying out to the Lord with a penitent heart, with a contrite heart, from the sin that he has lived. But later in the Psalm, he's talking about how, as he is restored and renewed through the gospel, that he will go and he will speak of the truth of God's Word, that his mouth would be unbridled, and that he would go and speak of the great truth and proclaim the great teaching of God's Word. So, we're going to sing the verses Mark 9 to 15 God's praise. All mine iniquities blot out, thy face hide from my sin, create a clean heart. Lord, renew a right spirit me within. We'll stand up for Abel and sing together.

God's praise. All mine iniquities blot out, thy face hide from my sin, create a clean heart. Lord, renew a right spirit me within. Cast me not from thy side nor take thy holy spirit away.

restore me thy salvation's joy. Restore me thy salvation's joy. With thy praise let me stay.

Then well I teach thy ways unto those that transgressors be, and those that sinners shall be, and those that sinners shall be, and those that sinners shall be.

[32:12] shall then be turned unto thee. O God of my salvation, God, me from blood get thee. set free and shall my soul. Set free and shall my soul. Let sin of thy righteousness. Set free and shall my tongue aloud sing of thy righteousness.

My closet lips, O Lord, by thee let them be open.

Then shall thy presence by my mouth abroad be obliged.

And now may the grace, the mercy and peace of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and remain with us all now. And evermore, and all God's people say, Amen.