

“Strength for Today; Bright Hope for Tomorrow”

2 Timothy 3:14-17, Proper 24-C, October 13, 2016

Second Timothy has long been regarded as the **last of those 13 letters** that St. Paul ever wrote that are recorded for us in the **New Testament**. For good reason, therefore, the **Church** has, throughout the ages, regarded **Second Timothy** as: **“St. Paul’s Last Will and Testament!”**

Even though St. Paul is **incarcerated in a dark and dank prison in Rome**, while he writes this letter, he **still gives thanks to God that he, Paul, has by the grace of God, has remained faithful to Christ throughout his whole ministry** and is hereby encouraging Timothy and his fellow believers at Ephesus to do the same!

Here **in these words of St Paul’s LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT, Paul is convinced that things in this world were no doubt going from bad to worse!**

He says to us, earlier in this **same chapter 3 or Second Timothy**: *“In the last days people will be lovers of self, loves of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, not holy, but heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”* (Vv. 1-4). Paul says: *“They will hold to the form of religion, but deny the power thereof”* (RSV, v. 5).

It was just three years before Paul wrote this, his Second Letter to Timothy around 67 AD, that the **crazed Roman Emperor named Nero, had torched his own capital city of Rome**, thereby burning it to the ground!

The Roman historian TACITUS TELLS US THAT NOT ONLY the wooden shacks of the poor, but also the stone mansions of the rich were destroyed by fire; including massive public buildings AND THOSE magnificent pagan temples and shrines were all completely gutted with flames!

Why would Nero do this? He was hoping to rebuild the whole city of Rome, but this time---on a much grander scale than this city had ever been before. Tacitus also points out to us—that the vast majority of Rome’s citizenry – knew that it was **NERO who had ignited that horrendous fire**, nevertheless **NERO** was still looking for someone or some group of people to become the great **SCAPEGOAT** for his horrible misdeed.

Therefore, Nero finds it very convenient to put all this blame on all of those believers who were now constituting the **EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH**. Waves of persecution were now coming their way! Because of Nero now Christians were being persecuted as they had never been persecuted before! They were demeaned and demoralize and put to death in a horrendously bloody and gruesome way!

Yes, conditions in the world were going from bad to worse!

Secondly, the treatment that Paul was personally receiving at this time from the Roman authorities had gone completely bad from worse too!

During Paul first incarceration at Rome, he was only a man under house arrest.

Within the parameters of that arrangement he was still free to have visitors and to continue preaching and teaching the Gospel publicly (Acts 28:30-31). **But now, at the time Paul had written his Second Letter to Timothy, some three or four years later (67 AD) he was now in chains, languishing in a Roman prison and being treated as a hardened criminal**—with a very little amount of **daylight available** – for him to **read by or to write by**, in a very **unsanitary environment**—and the only real hope he had of ever being rescued from all of that—**was through the promise of heaven—God had given to him through the perfect life, death and resurrection of his only-begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!**

Because of Paul's imprisonment **some of his most trusted Christian friends, whom he had loved and who had loved Paul dearly in return, were now beginning to desert him!** Perhaps they found it to be **publically embarrassing that St. Paul**, who was without a doubt **the greatest preacher of the Gospel alive at that time**, had somehow **done something whereby he got himself tragically arrested and furthermore put into prison by the Roman authorities!**

The **Old Testament lesson** and the **Gospel lesson** that we just read in this worship service—**both encourage us to pray—and to make time for prayer—and to be faithful to God in our prayer lives.** Certainly **Paul, we know from his own letters and from Luke's witness to Paul's ministry in the BOOK OF ACTS** was a man **deeply devoted to prayer.**

St Paul would have certainly appreciated those great words of the hymn-writer named **Joseph Scriven**, who in the early **19th Century** wrote these words for his **dear mother** on

her **death bed**: *"Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged— Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows, share? Jesus knows our every weakness — Take it to the Lord in prayer!*

Are we weak and heavy-laden, cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer! Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer. In his arms he'll take and shield you! You will find a solace there" (LSB 770:2-3)!

In this Second Letter to Timothy, St. Paul was writing this young pastor to hopefully strengthen him in his own calling as pastor of the church there in Ephesus!

But Paul was not only writing Timothy to strengthen him in his own calling as a pastor, but to in turn also encourage **Timothy to strengthen the faith of his fellow believers in the church of Ephesus in their own calling too!**

Thirdly, Paul was reminding Timothy that GOD'S NUMBER ONE POWERSOURCE FOR STRENGTHENING TIMOTHY HIS OWN MINISTRY AND FOR TIMOTHY TO USE TO STRENGTHEN ALL OF THE SAINTS IN EPHESUS, IN THEIR RESPECTIVE MINISTRIES TOO—**WAS THE SACRED WRITINGS OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES—GOD'S "BREATHED-OUT" WORD—WORDS THAT ARE COLLECTED SO BEAUTIFULLY FOR US IN THAT BOOK WE HAVE COME TO REGARD AS THE HOLY BIBLE**, remembering that the word "**Bible**" is actually the **Greek word for "book," putting the Holy Scriptures, as the inspired Word of God—the HOLY BIBLE in a class that is forever, uniquely its own!**

Brothers and sisters, the Bible has always occupied the central place in the lives of believers who are adherents of the Christian faith. From the time of the writing of the **first five books of the Bible in the days of Moses until modern-day times, the Holy Scriptures** have been regarded by theologians as the **unique and incomparable Word of God.**

More copies of the Bible have been sold to people throughout the ages **than that of any other book** and **more books have been written about the Bible, and more talk has been generated endlessly about the Bible than that of any other book throughout the entire history of the world.** Though sometimes **neglected and made the object of constant attack, the Holy Scriptures** contained in both the Old and New Testaments continue to **be read and believed more than any other writing that has ever come forth from any kind of writing utensils of any other people anywhere!**

So what do we mean when we translate this word in 2 Timothy 3:16 as "inspired" or as "God-breathed?" Here St. Paul is expressing a very fundamental truth about the true Source of all of the Holy Scriptures—that they have all come to us from Almighty God. The phrase "**inspired by God**" is a translation of the one Greek word - *theopneustos* - which literally means that Scripture is 'God-breathed'.

This word is not used anywhere else in the Bible. However, the literal meaning of the word brings to mind the creation of that first man Adam, back in **Genesis 2:7** when it says that "*God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*" Paul seems to be saying that Scripture is as **much the product of God, or as much to be traced to Him as all human life itself.**

But some people might ask, aren't the Scriptures written by man? Do we not know that the Bible is made-up of 66 different books written down by **40 different authors?** How is it that it was written by men but is a product of God? St. Peter himself answers that question for us in **2 Peter 1:21**. Peter writes, "**No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**"

Here, Peter is speaking of prophecy as a Divine message. **He says two important things. First, no prophecy or Divine message was ever made by an act of human will.** At no time was the message instigated, initiated or prompted by the desire or will of the messenger. The product was not of the human will.

The second truth is that prophecy or the Divine message came as the messenger was “moved by the Holy Spirit.” The word ‘moved’ is very important here. The Greek word is *phero*. **It means ‘to be borne along or carried along.’**

Thus, Peter is telling us that prophecy or the Divine message was not initiated nor invented nor under the control of the will of the messenger. Instead, the Spirit of God guided the faculties of the messenger. **The bringing forth of a Divine message was not an act of human will but of the will of God. The messenger was passive, speaking or writing only what the Spirit moved them to say or write.** Thus, the message came from God rather than man.

Let’s dig just a bit deeper. To what extent did the Spirit guide the message? Did the Spirit provide the basic concepts or ideas and then the messenger expressed those concepts and ideas according to their own manner of expression and vocabulary? Or did the Spirit totally dictate every part of the message, even selecting each and every word?

The answers to those questions are provided, by the inspired Apostle Paul, in I Corinthians 2:11-13. *“For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit Who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.”*

I would have us note from this passage that Paul says that the **Spirit of God conveys to the inspired messenger the thoughts of God.** He goes on to say that the **messenger does not speak words taught by human intellect or wisdom but words taught by the Spirit.** Inspiration is the combining of God’s spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. Or, to say it differently, inspiration is when the Spirit of God conveys God’s thoughts by selecting the appropriate spiritual words that best express those thoughts and places them in the mind of the human messenger.

Therefore, we can assuredly say that not only is every thought and concept found in Scripture to be from God but so is every single word found in Scripture chosen and taught by the Spirit of God. Scripture is nothing less than the words of God.

Brothers and sisters, St. Paul wrote the words of Second Timothy to strengthen Timothy in his own calling; so that Timothy in turn might strengthen the saints at Ephesus in their own calling too! The PRIMARY SOURCE to empower Timothy, or the saints in Ephesus, or for any of us today—to be used by the Holy Spirit to strengthen our own faith --- and to work through us to strengthen the faith of others – **is the gift of the HOLY SCRIPTURES.**

God uses the Bible to sanctify our lives by literally teaching some of us how to teach the Bible—and the good news about Jesus our Savior—to other people. God uses the Bible to expose to us our poor behavior and set us on the right path of godly living again and again and again. He corrects us so that we might walk in greater harmony with the Holy Spirit’s direction and guiding—training us how to live out righteous lives in this world.

One of the first movies I remember seeing, while growing up, was entitled: **“The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe”** that was produced in **1954**; based on a novel written by the British author Daniel Defoe that was first published in **1719**. The storyline is about the **experience of a man who had become shipwrecked and suddenly found himself alone and homeless on a deserted island.** So what did this man need? Initially it would seem to most people viewing the movie that the most important thing he

needed was for someone to rescue him from that deserted island. **But both the novel and the movie present to us something that Robinson Crusoe may have needed even more than a physical rescue** from that unknown place.

One thing that happens in the story is that **Crusoe discovers a crate with a Bible in it**. And so **he begins to read it** and opens to **Psalm 50:15**, in which God promises: *"Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you and you will glorify me!"*

A little later, Crusoe picks the Bible up again and comes across another meaningful passage that reads: *"All these things have not brought you to repentance!"*

To make a longer story short, **Robinson Crusoe's greatest need was not to be rescued, only in a physical sense from that deserted island or from his situation!** What he needed **most of all was to be rescued from himself, meaning that he needed God's forgiveness for his sins and the complete expunging from him of a lot of guilt he had been carrying around with him for a very long time; yes, over some big sins he had commitment, but also forgiveness for some choices he had made against the advice of people who really loved him too!**

It turns out what Robinson Crusoe needed the most was God's forgiveness for his past by being born again into the kingdom of God. Through this horrible experience, this lonely man discovers a relationship with God as HIS DELIVERER AND THAT THE BIBLE IS HIS LIFELINE TO GOD!

Finally St. Paul wrote this letter to Timothy to GIVE TO TIMOTHY AND TO ALL OF US BRIGHT HOPE FOR TOMORROW.

Fanny Crosby wrote over 8000 hymns, among them are those two great hymns: "Blessed Assurance," but also "Great is Thy Faithfulness." You remember how that 3rd verse goes: "Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide; STRENGTH FOR TODAY AND BRIGHT HOPE FOR TOMORROW, blessing all mine, with ten thousand beside!

"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the LORD, the righteous Judge will give to me on that day and not only to me but to all who have longed for his appearing!" (2 Timothy 4:6-8) AMEN