

(Keswick) 1959, Ministry From 2 Timothy - Part 4

by Paul S. Rees

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Bible in its initial impression, central intention, and supernatural derivation, highlighting its role in salvation and redemption.

Duration: 35:49

Scripture: Matthew 5:3

Topics: "Keswick Convention"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a missionary who encounters a young boy filled with hatred and a desire for revenge. The missionary tries to convince the boy not to commit murder by explaining the consequences and referencing the Bible. However, the boy reveals that he does not have a Bible at home. The missionary gives him a Bible and the boy is eventually converted and leads his mother to Jesus Christ. The sermon emphasizes the importance of teaching children the scriptures and highlights the transformative power of the Word of God.

Transcript

Fourth address in this series on 2nd Timothy, we present Dr. Paul Rees. On our first afternoon, we were in the first chapter of 2nd Timothy, where we discussed the making of a dying fire to flame again. And yesterday afternoon and the preceding afternoon in chapter 2, our theme was making Jesus Christ the center of everything.

Now this afternoon, in our consideration of chapter 3, I want us to consider the theme making sacred scripture what it deserves to be. What God intends that it shall be. And the particular focus of attention is found in the passage that begins with verse 14, where Paul says to Timothy, but as for you, by way of contrast with others, as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

To which Paul adds, in the following verse, all scripture is inspired by God, and is 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. Now first of all, I want you to notice what the scriptures are, so far as Timothy is concerned, particularly in their initial impression.

It's a very remarkable thing that Paul says concerning Timothy. It's something he couldn't say about all of the Christians in the churches of that first century. It's something he could not say about all of us, though I dare say that he could say it about most of us in a group like this.

But he says, knowing how from childhood you have been acquainted with the holy scriptures. You know, most of us who have come up in Christian homes, where we have been taught the holy scriptures from the time that we could learn anything in our mother tongue, were taught to list such things as the 23rd Psalm and the Beatitudes from our earliest remembrance, and scarcely realized what a ghastly omission it is when the Bible is left out of the childhood of our boys and girls. Down in the mountains of the South, a missionary of the American Sunday School Union was jogging along in a rickety old wagon.

By his side sat a mountain boy driving, and the missionary was drawing the lad out and asked him, among other things, what he was doing with the money he was making. He was hauling the mail. He said, I'm going to buy a rifle.

Oh, he said, what are you going to do with a rifle? He said, I'm going to kill old man Yelvington. He said, what do you mean? He said, I mean just what I say. He killed my father, and I'm going to kill him.

And if he gets away, I'm going to kill his oldest son. And if he should get away, I'm going to kill the next one. And there was the light of this consuming, feuding hatred and vindictiveness in the lad's eye.

Well, the missionary went to work on him. And he said, why, dear Philip, you don't want to do a thing like that. You'll get in trouble with the law.

You'll have to run away. You'll be certain to be arrested sooner or later. You'll be sent to prison.

You may hang for it. Don't you know what the Bible says about murder? Whereupon, says that missionary, the lad turned to him and said, we ain't got no Bible at our house. And the missionary said, well, you're going to have one from now on.

And he gave him a Bible and made him promise he would read it. And in six months he was converted. And before another six months had passed, he had led his mother to Jesus Christ.

The whole family was transformed. We ain't got no Bible at our house. You don't have to go to the mountains, the illiterate and feuding mountains of our Southland, to find situations in which that has to be said.

We've got them right in Chicago. We've got them in New York. We've got them in my city of Minneapolis, even, which is an extraordinarily religious city.

We ain't got no Bible at our house. There may be somebody listening to me, not so much in this visible audience as in the invisible one, who is letting your son or your daughter, your children grow up right here in Chicago, right here in the United States of America, without allowing the sacred scripture to produce the kind of impressions that only the scripture will produce on the developing mind and the plastic conscience and the fertile imagination of boys and girls. Now, Paul was able to say something concerning Timothy that is of priceless value in anybody's life.

The scriptures reached you early. The scriptures began to mold your thinking and to shape your character from the very beginning. This ought to be one of our great concerns in the United States just now, with the

Bible more and more ruled out of our schools, even the reading of it, with many influences at work calculated to remove the Bible from all phases of our common life, our public life as American citizens, and with the Bible too often neglected in our own homes, even though there may be a copy of it there, we are not actually using it.

It is small wonder that we are producing what Professor Trueblood calls a cut-flower culture in the United States. With a beautiful bunch of roses, you can maintain their fragrance for a few days in their beauty, but they've been cut off from their roots, and they'll sooner or later fade, and their petals will curl. And we've got a cut-flower culture.

We're living on the wonderful Christian heritage of the past, when people really took God's word seriously, and they took the Christian faith seriously, and they took the Christian church seriously, and they took the Christian gospel seriously. And today, we want to take everything for granted, and nothing very serious. The sacred scripture in its initial impression.

Well, then will you consider the sacred scripture in its central intention? To this, now, Paul addresses himself, when he says in verse 15, the sacred writings are able--now, here the authorized adage--to make you wise under salvation, which is a fine rendering, incidentally. I don't know that the revised is any improved, to instruct you for salvation. I do judge it worthwhile to take just a moment to remind all of us that it's quite as important for us to understand what the Bible is not, in some situations, as it is to understand what it is.

And there's a clue here, my dear friends, to what the Bible is, and is not, in its central intention or purpose. That is, what God really intends in giving us this matchless book that we know as the Holy Bible. Now, when Paul wrote this, I'm not forgetting this, I'm assuming that--I'm assuming that you understand that I'm assuming that when Paul said this to Timothy, there was no New Testament in existence.

Well, there wasn't. And when he talked about the sacred Scripture, he was talking about what you and I understand today as the Old Testament. I understand that further.

But we now have, you and I, we have both Testaments, both the Old and the New. We have this rounded Scripture, this rounded revelation, so far as Scripture is concerned. It isn't the only revelation, because Christ Himself is the living Word, and in personality, the revelation of God to men.

But this is the revelation inscripturated or reduced to writing. Now, what is God's central intention in the Holy Scripture? It is salvation. If you were to take any copy of the Bible that you have in your possession, or ever will have, and after looking at that title, Holy Bible, which is standard, at least in the United States, you were to say to yourself, what would a good subtitle be for this book? What would a good subtitle be? What would you put there? Do you know what I'd like to suggest? The Book of Redemption.

That's what it is. The Book of Redemption. This is God's great concern in giving us the Bible.

The Bible isn't a book of science. It isn't a book of anthropology. It isn't a book of astronomy.

It isn't a book of chemistry. You don't even go to the Bible to get the multiplication table. It isn't there.

It isn't a book of mathematics. The grand theme of Holy Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is redemption. What God is wanting to do here is to enlighten our minds, to illumine our whole being concerning His purpose in His Son, Jesus Christ, to provide for all men everywhere a free salvation, and

from sin a full salvation.

Now, this is the central intention of Scripture. It's perhaps worth noticing in passing that the word salvation, as it appears here, and as it appears in many passages in the New Testament particularly, is a very great and many-sided word. It doesn't always mean precisely the same thing.

There is salvation that belongs to the past. There is a phase of our salvation, as it is disclosed in Scripture, that belongs to the past. There is a phase of our salvation that belongs to the present.

There is a phase of our salvation that belongs to the future. By the way, only a few pages from where we are here in 2 Timothy, there's a very lovely setting forth of this, the three major aspects, in sequence at least, of our salvation. You find it in the book of Hebrews, the ninth chapter, where we have the three appearances of our saving Lord, Jesus Christ.

In verse 26, we read that He hath appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He hath appeared at the end of the age, that is, the end of the old covenant age, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Now that is salvation provided.

And when our Lord cried on the cross, it is finished. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain, and the whole thing was sealed by the resurrection, salvation. As God's loving provision for these unworthy creatures of His, you and I, salvation was provided for all time in Jesus Christ.

And nobody can add a thing to it, neither man nor angel can add anything to it. It's done. He hath appeared.

This is a matter of history. It isn't a matter of theory, it's a matter of history. He hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

A judge and a policeman and the law can put away the sinner, put him behind bars, but it can't put away sin. He took Jesus Christ and His suffering love, His perfect atonement, in the shedding of His blood upon the cross to put away sin. Now that's a fact.

Then there is this other appearing of Jesus, of which the writer speaks in this same paragraph. Notice verse 24, For Christ hath entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, like the old tabernacle, or later the temple in Jerusalem, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but Christ hath entered into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God in our behalf. He did appear once in the end of the age and made a perfect atonement for sin.

He now appears in the virtue of that perfect atonement and the power of His endless life as your mediator and mine. And that's why we can sing before the throne, my surety stands, my name is written in His hands. He's our mediator, He's our intercessor, and there by virtue of His session at the right hand of the Father He ever liveth and is able to save to the uttermost here and now all that come unto God by Him.

Now this phase of salvation includes justification and sanctification, in both of which you have the working out in terms of personal experience and in the life of the church in terms of collective realization of all that God intended when He gave His Son and when His Son died upon the cross. And there is one more appearing, you remember, in this same paragraph at the end of the chapter, the writer to the Hebrew says, So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him. He did appear and provided for our salvation.

He now appears in the glory as our mediator enabling us to realize salvation. And someday He's coming again. And then He will consummate salvation, particularly in the glorifying of our bodies when this mortal puts on immortality and this corruptible puts on incorruption and death is swallowed up in victory.

Now there is a phase of salvation yet to come. When in a passage such as that in the second Thessalonian letter, Paul says that God hath from the beginning chosen you, the believers, to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth. He is lifting our vision, the final salvation, God's ultimate purpose.

Purpose He had in mind when He sent His Son. Purpose He had in mind when His Son died upon the cross and rose again. The purpose He has in mind in justifying us, in sanctifying us, in conforming us to His own image, is that in the end He may present us to Himself, part of His glorious body, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

And that this future and final and consummating salvation shall include even the glorifying of our bodies. In some ways Christianity is a very spiritual religion, if you may describe it as a religion. And from one point of view it is, though from another it isn't.

From one point of view I say you may describe Christianity as a spiritual religion. God is a spirit. May that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

And Christianity will have no truck with idols, wholly against the whole system of idolatry. It recognizes that man is a spirit. But from another point of view Christianity is a very materialistic religion.

It believes in an incarnation of God who came in the flesh, in Jesus Christ. And Christianity has never taken the position, for instance, that the human body is inherently corrupt. It's an unfortunate rendering in Philippians, where we read of our vile body.

He shall change our vile body, and it's altered in far better Greek, or a far better rendering of the Greek in almost all of our later and modern translations. He shall change the body of our humiliation, our frail body, that it may be fashioned like unto His own glorious body. God is concerned even with the lifting of the consequences of sin from the body.

Someday we're going to have bodies that are patterned after the magnificence of the resurrection body of our Lord Jesus Christ. A lady came down the aisle on Easter Sunday after her pastor had thrilled her beyond all words with his Easter Sunday sermon, talking about the resurrection. And she had been born clubfooted.

It was a rather pathetic spectacle, dragging her clubfoot wherever she went. But her faith was radiant. She came up to her pastor and thanked him for the sermon.

She said, I never saw it as I did this morning. I dragged this old foot all through my life, and I'll drag it to the grave, but hallelujah, not beyond that. In the morning of the resurrection, she'll have a body without any mar or scar upon it.

That's in the purpose of God for our salvation, final and eternal. This is the central intention of Scripture, that we might know these things, that we might enter into the realization of these things, that we might everlastingly share in the fellowship of those others who also know them through Jesus Christ our Lord. There is a third consideration that now comes before us as we try to follow Paul here.

It's not only sacred Scripture in its initial impression, in its central intention, and it's also sacred Scripture in its supernatural derivation. For now, Paul says in verse 16, all Scripture is inspired by God. All Scripture is breathed by God.

It's a very remarkable and a very pregnant sort of phrase that you have here in the Greek. It's really one great term that requires anywhere from four to five English words to draw it out. Scripture is God-breathed.

Elsewhere, you remember, we are told that holy men speak as they were moved, as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit. Here is a sailboat that skims gracefully along because there's a wind that fills its sail. Now, in some manner such as this, it is suggested it can never, no figure that you may use, can ever exhaust the mystery or precisely describe the mystery of how God built human minds and human imaginations and human memories, human genius, frail and faulty as it is, and somehow breathed His enlightening and enlivening spirit into those men so that what they wrote down was what God intended for the written Scripture for our learning under salvation for all time.

And while it's perfectly true to say that the Bible is a very human book, it was written by men, written with human hands, it was written with human materials, and it's even preserved for us in a very human way--printed and bound, strikingly different from the way other books are printed and bound. A very human book. But if that's the only term of reference that we have in our discussion of the Scriptures, we have left out the most notable thing about the Scriptures.

Just as it's true to say that our Lord was very human, so human He got thirsty and tired and hungry and lonely, and if we were to say that He's no more than human, we would simply leave out the thing that makes Him the watershed of history, that everything that goes before Him is B.C., and everything that comes after Him in world history is A.D. He is human. Thank God for it. That brings Him so close to you and me, doesn't it? But He who was so human that He found His place in time, in the world of time and space, born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, growing up in Nazareth, dying in Jerusalem, He is at the same time the titan, the titan of history, who transcends it and can say, before Abraham was, I am, in His preexistence.

And is the reason one can say, I was dead and am alive forevermore and have the keys of death and of Hades. Hallelujah. Now, the Bible is like that.

God used human instruments to record its history, its historical sections, to give us its beautiful poetry, its psalms, its prophecies, its doctrinal teachings in the epistles, its prophetic word in the last book bears the title of the Apocalypse. It is all of this at the human level, and still it is divinely produced. God built the Bible, and I use that word built advisedly, because it took Him a long time to do it.

I suppose if He wanted just to engage in a little fancy, you could say, believing about God as you do, that He's not limited as you and I are. I suppose that if God had elected so to do, He could have just dropped this book like this right down into the world and said, there it is. Kind of a magical way of giving us the Bible, but He didn't do that.

He built the Bible. He built it, piece at a time, through holy men whom He selected for this purpose, until at last it was finished. And now we have a book that nobody's going to improve on.

Of the writing of books, there is no end, and that was never more true than it is in our day. And most of them ought to go to the junk pile as soon as they're printed. In fact, we ought to save the printer's ink and

not print them at all.

Here is a book upon which there will never be an improvement. It is our business. I don't want anybody to draw any foolish conclusion from what I'm saying.

God save us evangelicals from any more folly. When we talk about Scripture revision and translation, it is the business of the Christian church. Since the original autographs were all lost, and there is no hope of our recovering them, it is the business of the Christian church to keep working at such manuscripts as we have, so as to preserve for the church the very finest translations of Scripture that we can have.

It is the business of the church that cares about its Bible, that cares about the circulation of the Scripture, and the preservation of the testimony of Scripture. We said some terribly foolish things the last time that there was a notable revision of the Scriptures made, and even took copies out and burned them. We think we're doing God's service when we do a thing like that, but we're only demonstrating our folly.

Part of the miracle of the Bible is that having undergone translation after translation, whenever there is any serious and faithful attempt made in any language--and now it's been done, at least as far as part of the Bible is concerned, in roughly 1,200 languages and dialects--but whenever it's done, with any degree of fidelity at all to the manuscripts available, there is nothing left out that's necessary to our salvation. The miracle of the Bible's preservation is second only to the miracle of its origination, about which Paul is saying to Timothy, I want you, Timothy, to continue, continue to make yourself increasingly the master of this book. And then lastly, Paul says a word concerning the Holy Scripture in continual regulation, a never-ending process.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching--notice, for teaching. We need to have our minds regulated, our minds enlightened, and our thinking governed--that is, our thinking upon these great themes of the faith, the manifold aspects of our salvation, and what we are to be and do as witnesses thereto. Have our minds continually brought under the governance of the truth as we have it in Holy Scripture, and we'll be saved from doing the thing that Paul cautions us about.

He says, there will be these people, silly women and others, who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Millions of copies of astrology magazines being sold every month. Where? In Indonesia, from which I've just come, where they're so backward that on the island where we were for one of our conferences, a million people, and one dentist and two doctors for a million people.

Is that where astrology is being sold, right, left, and center? No, in the United States of America. Curious people, blind people, wanting to read their destiny in the stars instead of reading their destiny in Jesus Christ our Lord. We need their minds informed, their thinking regulated by what we have in Sacred Scripture.

And a few words follow, which I sum up under one heading, reproof and correction. The Bible not only regulates our minds, the Bible regulates our conscience. Reproof and correction.

How we need this. Nobody is born with a Christian conscience. Nobody is ever born with a Christian conscience.

You never have a Christian conscience except as you put the content of Christian truth and of the mind of Christ into the conscience. That's why it's never enough for anybody to say, well, my conscience doesn't bother me. That's what one of our big labor leaders said just the other day, as quoted in Time magazine.

I've never done anything wrong with a record that reeks, but his conscience doesn't bother him. And you don't have to be a racketeering labor leader to talk like that. I know people in the church who say, well, my conscience doesn't bother me.

That may not mean one thing. I want to know, have you made Jesus Christ the Lord of your conscience? So that he sensitizes it. You can have a hard conscience, or you can have a healthy conscience.

The only way you'll ever determine which is which is as you submit your conscience day by day to the sensitizing that is received from the word of God. And then there is this word, which is finally translated in their eyes, by the way, for training in righteousness. It regulates our wills.

When it comes to training, the will is involved. Not simply the intellect, and not the conscience, but the will. Training in righteousness.

It's unfortunate that we don't realize more than we do in the life of Christian sanctity and victory, the place and power of habit. Most of the time we talk about habits. We think about bad habits.

We say of a certain man, is he any habits? And by that we mean bad habits. Well, of course he has habits. Everybody has habits.

You can't live life without habits. Habit is a matter of doing. You've done a thing often enough, so there's groove now.

You have a habit of doing. I read an interesting article titled, Don't Decide to Go to Church. It's a very clever thing.

Don't decide to go to church. At first glance you say, well, what in the world is a man saying? Telling people not to go to church? No. You wouldn't have put it that way if that had been his meaning.

You would have said, decide not to go to church. But his title was, don't decide to go to church. And very adroitly, he said, anybody that comes to Sunday and has to think it over, well, now am I going to church today or not? What about the weather? What about the children? What about this, that, and the other? Well, I guess I will go.

He says, anybody that approaches church like that doesn't know the meaning of Christian worship. Because when church going is a habit, you don't consider the weather. You don't consider this, that, and the other.

This is a secondary consideration. You simply go because that's the habit pattern of your life. And you'll delight to go to God's house and listen to God's word and be in the fellowship of God's people.

Now when your will is subjected to the word of God, the sake of scripture like that, these habits are groomed in your personality and in your life. Training in righteousness. Let's make the word of God what He purposes it shall be in our lives.

God, only by the enabling of Thy Holy Spirit shall we be able to do this, but to the glory of our Savior, help us to do it. In His dear name, Amen.

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