PREACH THE WORD

2 Timothy 3:10-4:8

Key Verse: 4:2

Happy New Year! It’s 2014, isn’t that crazy? You may be wondering why we’re beginning 2014 studying this passage from 2 Timothy. Well, our ministry at large has chosen to take on this passage as our direction for this year. And what we want to think about in this New Year through this passage is really pretty simple—the importance of God’s words.

**Persecution (10-13)**

The book of 2 Timothy is a letter written by Paul. It was most written from a prison cell in Rome, towards the end of Paul’s life, written most likely some time between A.D. 64-67. Paul had been in prison before, but this time was different—he was in chains, he was loved by so many, but this time no one came to his defense at his trial, and he had already almost been fed to lions. Paul himself knew that he did not have long left to live (1:16; 2:9; 4:6b). So, well aware of that, he writes this letter to Timothy, a younger man who Paul saw as his own son. Timothy was a part of a Christian community in Ephesus, which is around Turkey today. And these words we read today are not only some of Paul’s final words to Timothy, but some of the last words we have credited to Paul.

In this portion of his letter, Paul reminds Timothy of some things. Let’s look at verses 10-11. Paul reminds Timothy of his own life—how he taught, how he lives his live, his purpose, is faith, his patience and love for others, his endurance, the persecution and sufferings he had already faced. And he reminds Timothy that while living this kind of life, God had been with him and rescued him from it all. He reminds Timothy of all of this knowing that he too would face the same kind of things. Paul must’ve known that what was happening to him in Rome would soon be the situation for not just Timothy, but all to Christians everywhere. In July, A.D. 64 the city of Rome burned for six days. Emperor Nero himself was suspected of starting the fire. But he shifted the blame on Christians, and soon they suffered mass execution. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, “Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired” (*Annals*, 15.44). That’s most likely why no one came to Paul’s defense, and why he himself would be killed. Persecution against Christians would be more than just being laughed at for the way they were living, many would be killed for their faith.

Now, we live in a world today where that’s not happening any more. But now look at verse 12-13. Paul says that anyone who tries to live a godly life will be persecuted. Christians have a fight or flight reaction to persecution. But how should we live in a world where we live sometimes counter to the way everyone else does?

Now let’s look at verse 14. Paul says to Timothy to continue—to continue to live a godly life. To continue to hold onto the Gospel of Jesus. To continue in this kind of lifestyle amidst persecutions.

The big question is how. How can we do this? How can we today live as Christians when it’s not easy to? The answer is God’s word. And we’ll think about that through this passage in three ways:

**Got Milk? (14-15)**

There was a popular marketing complain where famous people would have a curious white mustache on their upper lips, holding a glass, with the words “Got Milk?” Underneath. The complain was to get kids to start drinking milk. Because milk is really good for you—calcium, Vitamin D, protein. It’s good stuff. Kids who grow up drinking milk are taller, stronger, healthier, live longer.

Why am I talking about milk? Well, spiritually, Timothy was a guy who drank a lot of milk. Look at verse 14. Here Paul reminds Timothy of what he had already been convinced of was true. What was it that he was convinced of? It was the gospel of Jesus. The good news of Jesus who came to save us. It was the teachings of Jesus, the new way of living in a relationship with God and of loving one another. Paul encourages Timothy to continue in this. Paul also mentions “those from whom you learned it.” Timothy learned about the Gospel through his mentor Paul. But Timothy also learned it from his mother Eunice and his grandma Lois. He learned about the Gospel from Scriptures through them from when he was young. And I’m sure there were others in the Christian community from whom Paul learned about the Gospel through the Scriptures. These were essentially mentors. And these people helped timothy to be convinced of the truth of the Gospel.

But let’s read verse 15. Paul says that this happened for Timothy from Infancy. In Timothy’s case, it was biological. For many of us, when we accept the Gospel and are “born again,” we’re spiritually kind of like babies at first. 1 Peter 1:23 says, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” It goes on to say in 1 Peter 2:2, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”

So, God’s words are like spiritual milk. My friends just had a baby, and this kid is always drinking his mom’s milk. He’s also growing super fast. The Bible is kind of like that for us—it’s like this jam-packed nutritious spiritual milk. This “pure spiritual milk” is the elementary teachings of God’s word (Heb5:12).

Just as a baby needs milk first, not solid food, we need this kind of teaching first. What is it? Hebrews 6:1 says it is the elementary teachings about Christ. We all first need to know the basics: who Jesus is; and the meaning of his death and resurrection. Hebrews 6:1 also says it’s the foundational teachings of our need to repent and turn to Jesus in faith. Without this, all kinds of Bible study is actually in vain. Let’s read verse 15 again. Here Paul says it’s the Holy Scriptures that are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. The more we feed on God’s word, the more we “grow up” spiritually, grow wise in the Gospel.

Are you spiritually drawing nutrition from God’s word?

**God-breathed (16-18)**

Let’s read verse 16 together. Paul talks about “All Scripture.” Now, this of course is talking about the Scripture of the Old Testament, but by the time this letter was written, much of the New Testament had already been written and was widely circulated amongst the early believers, and were already being referred to as Scripture. So when we look at “All Scripture,” Paul is talking about this—the Bible. And he says that all of this is “God-breathed.”

Now, some people read this, and say, “This means that every word, every letter in the Bible is absolute and literal and is directly from God and should not be questioned.” But I’m not sure that’s what Paul was immediately trying to communicate when he says, “All Scripture is God-breathed.”

We first hear about the breath of God in Genesis in the account of creation. God spoke into nothing, and he created everything—the universe, the sun, the moon and stars, earth, the sky, the waters, vegetation, animals, all of it. And after he created these things, God would say, “That’s good.” And if you look at creation, it all is beautiful and good. But there is one time that God says, “That’s very good.” It’s after he collects some dust, forms a human being, and “breathes into him the breath of life.” God breathed into man his own breath. Man became what is called a “living being” or a “breath-filled being.” God made us as spiritual beings, with his own breath, and the connotation is that our spiritual breathing, our life source, comes directly from God.

But then what happened? When sin happened, we cut ourselves off from God, and we cut off our life source of breath from him. Spiritually, we became sort-of-alive—much like the zombies in the *Walking Dead*; spiritual zombies. Do you ever feel like that? It may be the most beautiful, sunny day out, you hung out with your friends, work and school and everything is going well, but you feel sort of half alive within? It’s because disconnected from God, it’s like we’ve been without oxygen, we’re suffocating from within.

Paul says to Timothy that “All Scripture is God-breathed.” Paul says that we can spiritually breathe again. God gives us his words here, breathed by him through the Spirit, given to us to think about, to mediate on, to listen to the creator of the Universe’s voice, and it can give us Spiritual Life again. Through God’s word, we can be so full of spiritual life. David describes this spiritual life like being a tree planted by a stream, to grow and bear fruit, and that doesn’t wither. No longer spiritual zombies, spiritually alive. It’s by breathing in God’s word.

Let’s look at verse 16b. There are lots of ways we can read the Bible. We can look to it for encouragement and comfort when we’re discouraged and hurting. But in light of this verse, the Bible is also kind of like our trainer. We need to let it teach, rebuke, correct and train us in righteousness. I remember when Joy first started the violin when she was 6. She sucked. It sounded like a cat was being stepped on, and what came out was almost the melody of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” But since then, Joy has practiced, and has been trained—hours a day, for the past 13 years. Her teachers have brutally taught her technique, rebuked her for wrong behavior, corrected her bow form, and trained her to repeat again and again. Sounds brutal right? Who wants to go through that? But now, when Joy picks up the violin, it’s beautiful. It sounds heavenly. Now, I don’t care who you are, you can’t pick up an instrument and start playing Mozart. You have to be trained. Paul is telling Timothy here that the God-breathed Bible trains us similarly. Spiritually speaking, we may be not be making the greatest of music. But if we allow God to teach us, rebuke us, correct and train us, and we continually allow God to mold us, he can change us. We become like him.

And what’s the goal of all this training and rebuking? The operative word in verse 16 is righteousness. God’s word helps us grow in a right relationship with him, in the truly righteous character of Jesus, and in right relationships with others.

Let’s read verse 17. The words “thoroughly equipped” are really moving. They remind us of a soldier who’s been fully trained and equipped with armor and weapons. In the movie *300*, the Spartan king asks some allied Arcadian soldiers, “What do you do for a living?” One says, “I’m a potter.” Another says, “I’m a sculpter.” Another says, “I’m a blacksmith.” They had drafted all kinds of men into their army without any intense training. But Spartan soldiers were all rigorously trained from their boyhood. Even 300 thoroughly trained men could withstand hundreds of thousands of soldiers, a huge rhinoceros and many elephants. Likewise, we need to let Scripture teach, rebuke, correct and train us in righteousness. It may seem like a small thing, but it makes a big difference.

Psalm 119. Verses 98–100 read, “Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.”

**Proclaim (2-8)**

Let’s read 4:2. If we even *hear* the word “preach,” many of us cringe. Many people say, “Don’t preach to me!” The very act of preaching can seem self-righteous and hypocritical. Many preach their own ideas; they’re trying to show how great they are. But Paul solemnly says, “Preach the word.” Paul wanted Timothy to fill the church in Ephesus with the preaching of God’s word. He wrote the same thing in his first letter to Timothy: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (1Ti4:13). When people come to a Christian fellowship, they need most of all to hear the Scriptures. Idealism and what we think is secondary to saying to people, “Hey, check out what the Bible says.” It’s because, as he already said, the Scriptures themselves are God-breathed and able to make people wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

The Greek word for “preach” here means to “proclaim.” This word in Greek was used to describe heralds who would go before Kings would arrive to a town or city, and share what the king had to say. The word also had this connotation of “exuding” in character what one would say. So by saying “proclaim” the word, Paul is saying to share it, but also to convey it through our lives.

Paul told Timothy to be prepared to do it “in season and out of season.” Some versions say, “when it’s convenient and when it’s not convenient.” We always have to be prepared to explain our faith in Jesus; opportunities to do it happen often when we least expect it—when we’re tired or want to do something else. Sometimes, I don’t want to proclaim the Gospel or God’s word. But it’s when we’re tired, when we’d rather keep to ourselves, when people have a lot of questions and doubts, when people are looking at our personal lives, how we actually live, that we should allow people in and proclaim God’s word and the gospel. Paul did this. If you look at verses 5-8. Paul gave his life, both to proclaiming verbally, and also living a life that exudes the Gospel, God’s word, and it’s teachings. His life became like a drink offering.

Verse 2b says, “…correct, rebuke and encourage…” After letting God’s word teach, rebuke, correct and train us, we can then correct, rebuke and encourage others. We need to overcome our fear of hurting people. We need to have enough wisdom, love and courage to touch people’s real problems. To do this, we need to listen very carefully, not jump to conclusions, and ask God to give us his understanding. So many people like to correct, rebuke or encourage based on their standards or their own human wisdom. But we need to learn how to correct, rebuke and encourage based on God’s words. To do this, we need to clearly know what the Bible actually teaches. Paul says to correct, rebuke and encourage “with great patience and careful instruction.” When people have a hard time overcoming their sins, fears or bad habits, we need great patience. Instead of loosely or haphazardly quoting Bible verses at people, we need to teach the Bible in its context, with careful instruction. And it’s important not to study the Bible or share it based on what we want to hear, or we want people to hear, or what we think should be taught (3-4). We should let the Bible speak as it is.

In this New Year, may we dray nutrition and grow through God’s word, let his word train us, and proclaim through our lives.