

Ancient Words

St Mark Lutheran
Three services

Pastor Ken Welsh
Sept. 20, 2015

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and 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. 2 Timothy 3:10-17

Bringham Bryant was just a ten year old boy back in 2002. But he loved painting and knew a lot about it. He had had his eye on a painting behind the librarian's desk at school for a long time. It had hung there for seventy years and accumulated dust without much notice. But Bringham's curiosity surely changed that.

One day, he was telling his father about some of the details of the painting. His description caused his father to become curious also, and he went to see it for himself. Although dirty from years of neglect, his father came to find out that it was a masterpiece painted by the famous artist Walter Crane. This old painting that had hung in a school library in Connecticut, ignored by most of the people who went through there, turned out to be worth over a million dollars!

Now you may not have any masterpieces hanging on your walls at home, but I would bet that most of you have an invaluable ancient treasure in your house. I hope it is not accumulating dust and dirt, but if it is, it is time to change that. Your ancient treasure is your Bible. It is a priceless ancient treasure that you should feel honored to possess.

The word "Bible" is from the Greek word for "book". It was at one time the common word for all written documents, but later it came to refer to THE BOOK, the Holy Scriptures that have been cherished by countless millions down through history. THE BOOK is really a combination of sixty-six different books written over about 1500 years. But it has one theme, and that theme is about the coming of Jesus Christ and the redemption of mankind. What really makes the Bible special is that it was authored by God himself. It makes that claim in many places. One of them is our key text for this morning from 2 Timothy 3. In writing to Timothy, the Apostle Paul first makes reference to "sacred writings" which are able to make a person "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus". Then these words follow: "ALL SCRIPTURE is breathed out 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."

It all began on Mount Sinai. That's where, as far as we know, humanity first received a written record of God's will. Those ancient words in writing began with ten simple commandments, which one might sum up this way: "I shall be your only God. You should not worship any man-made gods. Don't misuse my name. Keep my Sabbath holy. Honor your parents. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't lie. Don't covet what belongs to others."

You may be aware of the conflict over the monument of the Ten Commandments in an Alabama courthouse. Among other things, the opposition to displaying them testifies to the power of these words. There are those who do not wish to be reminded of God's Law.

But the real power of these words is in the way they can transform lives and change human nature. In World War II U.S. soldiers retook an island from the Japanese invaders. The Japanese had retreated, and the natives came out to greet the soldiers, many of them proudly carrying Bibles with them. As one native approached a soldier while holding out his Bible, the soldier said, "We've outgrown that sort of thing." The native said, "You ought to be glad we haven't. If it were not for this book, we'd be eating you now."

From the deepest jungles in the world to the largest cities, people measure right and wrong based on these words. God intended for that to be so. Psalm 119:105 tells us the way it ought to be: "Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path." Do you hear that, parents? It is no wonder we have so many young people going astray and wandering away from the church. Yes, we are all sinners and have that tendency, but many of our young people do not know much of God's Book. Parents will spend \$25,000 or so a year to send their children to college, where they will be taught all sorts of non-Christian things, while the precious Word of God that can change lives is taught for free in Sunday school and church and too often they are not around to hear it.

It is not too late to change this. Let's get our youth involved in our "Back to the Bible" theme this Sunday school year. While we are at it, if we are not involved in a Bible study, personal study, small group study, or some other Bible study, let's do so. Let's show by our example that we take the study of the Bible seriously, if we expect our youth to take it seriously. It really lifted my spirits recently when I met with one of our young men here and he said he was going to start reading his Bible. I hope and pray to hear that from more people this year. The Lord imparts spiritual strength to us when we are in the Word.

All of these ancient words point to one event and one main person in human history-Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ we have the presence of God in flesh and blood walking on the face of this earth for about thirty-three years. He called men like Matthew, a tax collector, and John, a fisherman, John's friend Peter, and nine other disciples. They became the greatest messengers of all time, carrying the good news of the forgiveness of sins with faith in Jesus. They and their followers saw to it that their message was recorded for future generations.

God's works and God's words are precious and have been recorded for us throughout history. In his Old Testament church, God usually chose prophets to be his mouthpieces, announcing his message to people of many generations. Thus our Old Testament is filled with prophecies, predictions about the future. There are about one hundred or so about a Savior to come and other prophecies that involved nations and events that would take place. But although men recorded God's words and deeds, it was God who was the author. The Apostle Peter tells us, "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)

After sending the disciples out, God chose a special person, actually an enemy, to be his next great spokesman. If you have ever studied the Bible, you should know that Paul (formerly named Saul) has written more books in it than any other person. But hear what he told the Christians at Thessalonica. He was thankful that they accepted his message (quote) "not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."

People have treasured these ancient words throughout history. They have cost many people their lives. Graves are filled with the bodies of people who were executed because they knew how important the ancient words were and refused to give them up. In 303 A.D. the Roman emperor Diocletian decided he had had enough of the Christian movement and wanted to destroy it. He thought this could best be done by destroying its holy writings. All Christian Scriptures were to be handed over to the authorities for destruction. When local officials came to the home of a local leader named Bishop Felix, he refused to hand them over or tell where he had hidden them. History records that he was executed rather than surrender the precious gospels. Even today people are being executed because they believe what's in the Bible.

I told my young friend that if he were going to start reading his Bible, a great place to start is Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These books are filled with accounts about Jesus and words that Jesus spoke. These are special words. Our Gospel reading for this day quotes Jesus as saying, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (John 6:63) Let's read these words. Let's learn these words. Let's use these words, and watch Jesus change lives! We have the tremendous responsibility of being God's spokesmen at this time in history. Amen.

