

The Heart of the Shepherd

The Reformation

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 3. It's so good to be back home and good to be back in the pulpit here at Providence as well just to worship together again. We had a wonderful time in Italy and Spain with our missionaries and we were able to share a little bit about that on Wednesday night and some of the pictures. Continue to pray for those ministries.

Anyway this morning, I want to share a message, part of what I shared at the conference in Italy and just the work in doing for it, it just felt like it was so rewarding for me personally that I wanted to share it with you as well, and it came from the conference was titled "Luther Shepherd of Souls," and we were looking at Martin Luther and the Reformation, and particularly what really motivated his heart was his shepherding concern. So often people misunderstand Luther. I mean, there are errors in Luther, he was not perfect by any stretch of the imagination. At times he could be caustic and harsh, but even in understanding that, one of the helpful things is to put yourself in his place and realize what he was up against and to the challenges that he faced and understand that what really burdened his heart was the welfare of the sheep that he cared so much about in Wittenberg. He wanted them to experience the liberation that he had experienced from the torment of just the guilt and the torment of being trapped in that guilt in the Roman Catholic system which does not offer life but kills. So when Luther came to be delivered from that through the word of God, through studying the Bible and seeing that salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, the liberation of that motivated his heart with a passion that others might know that freedom. So when he saw the Catholic Church resisting the preaching of the word of God, trying to stifle that and to keep people trapped in the darkness which he had been in, he was rightly angered and motivated to preach the word. So as we understand his heart, he wanted to shepherd those souls of those people in Germany that were entrusted to him and he wrote so that people throughout Europe could be delivered from that darkness.

Well, anyway, this morning we're going to focus on one aspect of the shepherd's heart and that is the confidence in the word of God. So we could title the message "The Heart of the Shepherd," but really it's sola Scriptura what we're going to talk about this morning, Scripture alone. If the material principle of the Reformation, this is how church historians and theologians define the Reformation, the material principle of the Reformation was sola fide, faith alone. That is the matter at dispute in the Reformation,

the primary issue of difference was over how is a man made right before a holy God, how are sinners made right before God, and the Reformers, Luther and the Reformers said by faith alone. That was the material principle of the Reformation. No works, just faith alone in the finished work of Jesus Christ. That's the material principle of the Reformation. Theologians point out that the formal principle of the Reformation was sola Scriptura, that is that the foundation of everything was actually the conviction that the word of God alone is the final authority for faith and practice and for the church. Scripture alone. But if it weren't for Luther's conviction in the perfection of Scripture, he would never have had the courage to stand up against the weight of the Roman Catholic Church. He would not have had the courage to pronounce, as he did at the Diet of Worms, "My conscience is captive to the word of God, therefore, I will not or cannot recant. Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me. Amen." It was his confidence in the word of God and so today it is urgent for any shepherd to have confidence in the word of God and we are all called to shepherd one another, to minister the word of God to one another, and we all need to have confidence in the word of God.

So we need to understand Scripture alone and I want us to talk about that today. We're going to use as a point of departure really the passage 2 Timothy 3:14 through chapter 4, verse 2, and we're going to look at it but it's not going to be an exposition of that passage as much as it is a doctrinal consideration of Scripture alone, the Bible as a foundation for our lives and our ministry and for our salvation.

2 Timothy 3:14 through chapter 4, verse 2. Paul's letter to Timothy. A very familiar passage as we read it. Paul writes to the young pastor, Timothy, and he says this in verse 14,

14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask that you might help us by your Spirit and through your word to understand the riches that you have given us in the pages of Scripture which are able to give us the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. Be glorified now. Lift up your word and lift up your name we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

I want to put before your consideration four principles that I think undergird confidence in the word of God and that make, it should make our confidence unshakable in the Bible. Four principles and a couple of these we see right here in this passage. The first is the inerrancy of Scripture. Luther was driven by confidence in the inerrancy of the Bible and truly faithful Christians throughout history have believed in the inerrancy of the Bible, that is that when God speaks, when Scripture speaks, he speaks so without error. Jesus himself believed in the inerrancy of the Bible. In John 10:35, he says, "and the scripture cannot be broken." Matthew 5:18, he says, "truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not a single letter or a single stroke will pass away from the Law until all is fulfilled." That every stroke written in the Scriptures is perfect.

You see, it's actually what Paul is saying in 2 Timothy 3:16 when we read, "All Scripture is inspired by God." This is a claim to the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture. Verbal inspiration of Scripture means that the words themselves are inspired. Plenary means all. All of the words in the Bible are inspired. That's what Paul is saying here in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired by God." Now this word "inspired by God" in the Greek is one word, one verb, which Paul apparently coined by putting the word God, Theo, with fustos, the word for breath. Pneo means to breathe. So he puts together the word God and breathe. That's literally what the text says. All Scripture literally is God breathed, that is, it is breathed out by God. Now, it's important to understand that when it says "Scripture," that the word there means "that which is written." The word is graphe in the Greek from which we get our English word "graph" and "graphics," and that word means "that which is written." There have been many heresies that have come up in the church through the generations of the church, Satan's strategy is always to attack the word of God. What was his first thing he said to Eve? "Has God said?" That's his strategy.

So they have said that the thoughts of the Bible are inspired by God but that between the mind of the man and the pen on the paper, of course, errors happened. This is one of the teachings of the 20th century neo-orthodoxy, that the ideas of the Bible are inspired but we don't have a perfect record of them in Scripture. That's not what Paul says. Paul says that what is God breathed is what was written down on the page. All the words on the page are breathed out by God. That is, God superintending overriding the human author, working through his own thought processes, his circumstances, to produce a perfect word from the Lord. So all Scripture is God breathed and therefore the God who cannot lie, cannot err, his word must be perfect. And it is. And as I said, Jesus himself makes clear that the word of God must be perfect and the faithful have always believed that.

Now, this gave Luther great confidence because he was teaching things that contradicted the teaching of the pope, the teaching of church councils, but in Luther's defense, at Worms he says, "Listen, it's not safe to trust in popes or in councils. They have contradicted themselves." One pope contradicts another pope. One council contradicts another council. The Bible alone never contradicts itself. The Bible alone is worthy of our absolute confidence and trust.

The inerrancy of Scripture is a foundational commitment that we must believe and the fact is everything it says is true. Every time people have doubted the Scriptures and said things like, you know, you look at the last several hundred years of history and the skeptics, you know, they'll bring up something like for a while they were talking about there was no, I can't remember which Assyrian king it was, they say it was Sargon or somebody, there was no guy that ruled by that name in history or whatever, then they find out, sure enough there was. They uncovered some documents. The Bible says there was, they say there wasn't, and then of course, they keep digging and they find out there was. There was never a Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, this was up until like 1960, this was one of the popular things, until they found an inscription about Pontius Pilate in the 60's. You see, they keep digging, they will eventually prove that anything in the Bible is true because everything in the Bible is true. What it says about history, what it says about geography, what it says about science, it's not a science book, it's not primarily a history book, but whenever it speaks to any of those issues, it does so perfectly. It is a book about faith, it is a book about life but it's a book about real life, real-time, things that happened in time and space. These things are true.

So the inerrancy of Scripture. The second thing that we need to understand and that Luther made clear is the perspicuity of Scripture. Perspicuity. That's the word that's been used over the last 500 years specifically, or in English it's the word that's been used, it really means the clarity of Scripture. It means that its meaning is clear and attainable; that the Bible when God speaks in the Scriptures, he speaks to be understood by the common man. And though there are differences as you read the Bible, there are some things that are more complex than others, some doctrines that are more difficult to ascertain, that the basic teaching of the Bible is attainable to anyone who reads the Bible and studies the Bible.

That's the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture. This was something that was recovered during the time of the Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church had before the Reformation and still pretty much even to today in some sense, maintains that you need them to interpret the Bible for you. This is why in the Middle Ages they did not allow the Bible to be translated into the language of the common people. This is why they dug up John Wycliffe's bones and burned them, because Wycliffe, an English priest, had the audacity to translate the Bible into the language, the vernacular, the English language in the late 15th century. They condemned him after he had died, dug up his bones and burned them for that blasphemous act, translating the Bible into the language of the people. That's what the Catholic Church did. They killed Tyndale for doing the same thing, translating the Bible from the Greek and Hebrew into the English language in the 16th century. They did not want the Bible in the language of the common people. They believed that the Bible needed to continue to be housed in the magical language of Latin, which wasn't even the language the Bible was given in.

So they didn't think the people could handle the Scriptures. William Tyndale made that statement to a Catholic priest who was chiding him in a conversation they were having. Tyndale was saying the Bible needed to be in the language of the people. This Catholic priest was just telling him it's nonsense. And Tyndale in his consternation over this man's

stubbornness said, "If God spare my life, I will make it such that so that the common plow boy will know more of the Bible than you, my friend. A common plow boy will know the Scriptures better than you, the priest." And his dream, God did spare his life long enough to translate most of the Bible into English.

It is true that Scripture in places is more complex than others and so we have to remember that Scripture interprets Scripture. The plain things or the main things, the main things are the plain things, and by the main things you can interpret the less clear things.

It's amazing to think about what it was like to go to church before the Reformation, to go into a Catholic church on a Sunday and to experience a service in a language entirely in which you could not understand a word that was said. Most of the people, I mean, there were a few, those who were studying at the university, those doctors, lawyers, they could understand Latin so they could understand what was being said, but 95% of the people in the audience had no idea what was being said. The Bible is being read, it is being read in a language you can't hear. One of the things that we experienced when we were in Italy and Spain was I preached both places and, of course, I preached with a translator. It's interesting to hear, you know, in English my Southern vernacular, in English we take a while to say anything anyway, but then from the South, you take even longer to say something, you know? But I was amazed at how I would say something and Johnny speaking in Italian, like this, would take longer to say than I said it. I'm like, "What is he doing? He must be adding some really great points to what I just said." But I said to that audience in the conference, I said, "Imagine that right now Johnny stops translating and you listen to me speak in English for the rest of the sermon." That's what it was like to go to church in the medieval world, and if the Catholic Church had its way, it would still be that way.

It's such a foolish and unbiblical argument, as are all their arguments. They believe that the Bible needed to be kept from the common man; that the common man couldn't handle the word; that you need an interpreter to handle it. Now, it's important for us to have leaders in the church and shepherds, and they do help us with the more complex things, but that basically God intends his word to be handled by every one of his sheep, to be able to get into his word. And this is made so clear when you consider the fact that when God gave the New Testament, he gave it in the language of the people. I mean, here you have most of the New Testament, almost all of it is written by guys who grew up speaking Aramaic or Jewish men, and most of the apostles were Jews. So when they are inspired to write the Scriptures down, though they write them in Greek and not just any Greek but Koine Greek. Koine, k-o-i-n-e. The word "koiné" means "vulgar; common." We get our English word transliterated from that, the word "coin." A quarter, a nickel, a dime. That's coin. That's common currency. The common language of Greek. There were those who spoke classical Greek, the higher Greek, and then there was Koine Greek. Well, the Bible wasn't written in the higher Greek, it was written in the Greek of the common man, the vulgar language. Now if God is going to speak his New Testament in the language of the common man, do you think he wants the Bible translated again and again into the language of the common man? Of course he does.

Even more amazing than that to me is the fact that, and as we studied Daniel a few years back, we worked through the book of Daniel on Sunday mornings, and it's intriguing to note that Daniel, half of the book is written in the language of Aramaic, which at that time was just the language of the Babylonians. The Jews speaking Hebrew, Daniel and his friends taken, remember, from Israel to Babylon, captive. Daniel grows up in the Babylonian court, grows to be an old man there and then becomes a part of the Persian court after the Persians take over, that when he writes down his prophecy, half of the book is written in the language of those godless Babylonians. From chapter 2, verse 4, through chapter 7, verse 28, the heart of the book is written in Aramaic. Why? Why did God do that? He wanted his message of who he is to be in the tongue of the common vulgar people. "For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word."

So the perspicuity of Scripture is something that we must hold to. The Bible, and if we have the Bible, we have all that we need. The Bible is clear. God will make it clear. When you come prayerfully, dependently, you study yourself, he will teach you all that is necessary for life in godliness. So if the inerrancy of Scripture, we understand the Bible is perfect, the perspicuity of Scripture, we understand that the Bible is clear. The Bible is clear. Thirdly, we talk about the canonicity of Scripture. The canonicity of the Bible.

Paul says, "All Scripture is inspired by God," and one of the questions that we have to wrestle with is "all" referring to what? How do you know what is covered by that word "all"? How do you know which books are in the Bible? Something that has become really popular in the last few years and much more aware of since the writing of "The da Vinci Code," by Dan Brown, written about 10 or 12 years ago. I remember I made myself read that book and it was a well-written story but, I mean, a compelling story but a bunch of garbage and some terrible history. He is a laughable historian. He is a fanciful fiction writer of history. He writes about things that he acts like are history and they are not history at all, and any historian worth his salt acknowledges this.

But Brown basically in his book made the point, was making the point that, trying to make the point that we have the wrong Gospels in our Bible. That Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are not the original Gospels. This is what Brown argues in his book, that the original Gospels were things like the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Judas. These were the original Gospels and that what happened was in the 4th century at the Council of Nicaea, Constantine hijacked the church away from its original pure form and he had some Gospels written pseudepigraphically, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, in which they claimed that Jesus is God but the original Gospel writers never claimed that Jesus was God. This is what he says but he does it in a very clever way. His character is always like, "Well, of course we know that this..." You know, he just matter-of-factly, it's just like a fact, "Of course we know that these were the original Gospels." Well the problem is, of course, when you go back and you look at history, that the Gospel of Judas, the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, the ones he says were original are never quoted before the 3rd century BC. We can't find anybody referring to them before the 3rd century while Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which he says were written later in the 4th century, we find quoted in the first century and the second century.

Do you see what I'm saying? They are clearly the originals and the others are the fabrications and the false Gospels.

Well, that said, it did raise the question how do we know which books belong in the Bible? That's the question of canonicity. The word "canon," c-a-n-o-n, comes from a Greek word which means, it originally was a reed or a staff. It was a reed used for measurement and so the word means "standard or rule." So the Bible, the church has used this to refer to those books which are the standard or rule of faith. What are the books that belong in our Bible? It's a very relevant question, isn't it? How do we know that some books belong and others don't? How do we know that the Old Testament Apocrypha that the Catholics included in the Bible at the Council of Trent in 1545 when they added those books to the canon, how do we know those don't belong? Books like 1 and 2 Maccabees, Enoch? How do we know those don't belong in the Bible? How do we know that the 27 books we have in the New Testament do belong in the Bible?

Well, Brown has his fanciful idea and the Catholic Church has its own erroneous view of this situation. They basically make the point that the Church determines the Bible and they'll say it this way: the Church gives you the Bible. Without the Church, you would have no idea what the Bible is and they go to something like the Council of Hippo, late 4th century where the 66 books of the Bible are outlined and finalized. So then at that point, from then on we know that the Church, that this is the Bible. So the Catholics draw on this same kind of mindset that Brown was drawing on that, "Hey, we just don't know. We have no idea. There are all these books out there and nobody knows what's the Bible and what's not until the Church speaks definitively, this is the Bible." The problem is that is a completely erroneous picture of how canonicity has worked from the beginning and I want to show you biblically how canonicity was addressed in the very first books of the Bible and how it has carried on throughout history.

Turn with me to Deuteronomy 18. God is going to give his revelation in words, in human words, and he's going to make sure that we know when he spoke and when he has not spoken. We can see this at the very beginning. Moses writes the book of Deuteronomy shortly before he dies. He knows he's about to die and to leave the people of God without a leader. He has given them, the Lord has given him, inspired through Moses, the first five books of the Bible, this one included. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, all written by Moses. So Moses, the great prophet, leads the people of God and he gives them what Jews call the Torah. So they had at Moses' death, a canon that included five books. They had a five book canon. They weren't waiting until 70 A.D. or I forget what year it was, the Council of Jamnia when the Jews determined or outlined again the canon of the Old Testament. It wasn't like they were swimming around wondering, "Which books do we have? Are these books of Moses the canon?" No, they knew. Moses is God's prophet. He raised him up. These five books.

Now, Moses knows they are going to need to know when God is speaking going forward and the Lord has him address this issue of canonicity in Deuteronomy 18:15-22. Let's read that passage.

15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. 16 This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.' 17 The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. 18 I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. 20 But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21 You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'"

Isn't that the question of canonicity right there? How will we know?

22 "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him."

The Lord addresses this question at the very beginning. It's so important when you're studying doctrines and theological questions, to even read the Bible from the beginning as God reveals himself, as he helps us form our thinking about how to understand an issue, and when it comes to canonicity, he does. At the very beginning he addresses this issue. He lays down this principle: how will you know when someone claims to speak for God if they are speaking for me or not? Moses gives, I think we have in this passage three tests of canonicity, three tests by which we can test the prophet and know if he's speaking from God. The first is authority. So point 3: canonicity of Scripture, three subpoints, A, B and C. The first is the test of authority. We will know that he is not speaking for God if he doesn't claim to speak with authority. Verse 22, "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD." You see, when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord he says, "Listen, thus says the Lord." That's the first thing. If they don't say, "Thus says the Lord," well, you know they are not speaking from God. This would be one of the reasons we reject all of the Old Testament Apocrypha. The books of the Old Testament Apocrypha don't have the character of the books of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the 39 books of the Old Testament, you have 4,000 times, think about that, 4,000 times you read phrases like this, "The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. God said. The Lord said." The prophets are claiming to reveal the word of God. They are saying, "Listen, the word of the Lord came to me and I am now giving it to you." And if that's not there, you reject it. It's got to have the claim of authority.

But that's not enough by itself. There are two more tests. The second is the test of accuracy. In verse 21, he said, "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'" Some guy may come along and say, "The word of the

Lord has come to me," and they tell you something. How do we know the Lord didn't speak that? How do we know that they are not a prophet? Verse 22, "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken." That's the test of accuracy, that the prophet must speak truth. What he says is going to happen has got to happen. And you see this as you read the Bible. The prophets are proved by their accuracy.

Do you remember the story of Samuel when he is going to anoint Saul king? God tells him to go and anoint Saul king. God is going to give them a king like they want at first before he gives them a king after his own heart, so he says, "Go and anoint Saul king." He finds Saul looking for his dad's donkeys, I think it was, that had gotten lost, and he tells Saul, Samuel says, "You're going to be the king of Israel." Saul is like, "Who, me? What are you talking about?" "So that you will know this is a word that came from the Lord, I'm going to tell you what's going to happen to you over the next 24 hours," basically. And he says, "You're going to go to such and such a place and somebody is going to come up to you and they're going to say this, and you're going to say this, and then you're going to go up the hill and this is going to happen, and then you are going to go down the hill and this is going to happen." And everything that he said happened exactly as he said. That's a prophet. That's someone speaking the word of God.

So in the writings of Scripture, if there is something that is not true, if something is said to be true and is not true, you reject it. So accuracy. Authority, accuracy, and the third test is consistency. It must be consistent with what you've already received. You see this in verse 20, the second half, "the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods." He's saying, "Look, if you have a guy come along and he's doing some signs and wonders, whatever, and he tells you to worship other gods, he has not come from me. You see, the prophet will call you to follow the same standard that you have previously received. That's how you know I have spoken. Does he have authority? Does he speak with accuracy? And is there consistency?"

This is exactly what Luke commends the Bereans for in Acts 17:11. Do you remember that? There the author Luke says when Paul and Barnabas are preaching there, that the Bereans "were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica," and that's high praise because the Thessalonians were very noble-minded, they were a good church, their letters, no problems basically. Compare them to Corinth, the Corinthians. So the Thessalonians were great guys, basically, but he says the Bereans were even better. Why? What made the Bereans better, more noble-minded than Thessalonians, Luke says, "they searched the Scriptures daily to see if the things that Paul was saying were true." Now think about that. Here they have the apostle claiming to speak for God, "I have been called by Jesus Christ himself. I am giving you the word of God." Authority. The things that Paul is saying seem to be true, accuracy. But we've got to make sure it's consistent with what we've seen. So they are reading their Old Testament day after day to see if what he is saying consistent? Does it fit together with what we've already received? If so, it's true.

This is why the book of Mormon and all that nonsense is complete hogwash. It's completely inconsistent with the Bible. "It's the New Testament of Jesus Christ." No, it's not. It is a foreign, strange, alien bunch of false teaching. Completely different character. In fact, one of the things that I try to share with Mormons is, you know, you say the book of Mormon and these other things are Scripture, the Old Testament and the New Testament are shown to be archaeologically accurate 100% of the time but the book of Mormon and all of its stuff about the tribes in North America, there is no archaeological evidence for any of that. How do you believe that, then? They just change the subject. That's when I go, "Well, if you'll just trust in your heart and believe in your heart, you'll know it's right." I can't believe in my heart what I can't accept with my mind and the beauty of the word of God is God speaks to us through our ears into our minds to our hearts.

So the test of authority, accuracy and consistency. So the canon grew by accretion, by addition one book at a time. Accretion is like you lay down a new layer. You have a five book canon. Moses dies. Joshua claims to speak for God. Joshua says, "The Lord has told me we are to go to Jericho and we are to march around it once a day and we have to be quiet the whole time and we are to do this for seven days. On the seventh day, we are to march around seven times and we are to blow a trumpet and he's going to deliver them into our hands." You know, they did that and the walls fell when they blew the trumpets and you see he spoke with authority and accuracy and he didn't tell them to worship other gods, he's still telling them to worship Yahweh, consistency. So what did they do? When Joshua dies and he writes down his prophecy, they now have six books and they are not wondering, "We need someone to help us." No, they have six books. Samuel comes along and maybe he's the author of Judges. We don't know for sure, all the books aren't delineated who the author is, but God is speaking through his prophets and they are giving to his people and book by book the canon is growing all the way through the Old Testament. And the Jews knew that after the preaching of Malachi, that God had become silent. He wasn't speaking through the intertestamental period. Josephus acknowledges this in his writings. They knew that the unbroken line of prophets had ended with Malachi and that unbroken line that ended with Malachi and became broken, this darkness, this silence, was ended when a man named John, John the Baptist, began to have the word of the Lord.

So the issue of canonicity was something that the faithful understood and so the New Testament then comes, remember, when you watch Paul going about preaching throughout the Mediterranean world, where does he always start? He starts in the Jewish synagogues and there is always a little kernel of Jews in each of these churches. Though they are becoming more and more Gentile over time, there is a kernel of Jews and they know the test of canonicity. That's why the Bereans are searching the Scriptures to see if what Paul is saying is true. They are deciding if they can accept the writings of Paul as Scripture.

And let me show you how this happens, even in a relatively short period of time. My favorite example of this is Daniel 9. Daniel 9:1 and 2. Daniel, now Daniel is writing 539 BC. Jeremiah probably finished his ministry around 575, 580 BC. Okay, now remember

that's BC. We're counting down. So it's like less than 50 years after Jeremiah ends his ministry, somewhere around 40 years after Jeremiah ends his ministry, Daniel is writing. He is reading the Bible and you know what he's reading, he's reading the book of Jeremiah and in Daniel 9:1 and 2, he says, "I was reading the word of the Lord which came through the prophet Jeremiah and I saw that Jeremiah prophesied that the captivity in Babylon would last only 70 years." And when he reads that, he knows it's true and he begins praying for God to bring about the release of the Jews which, of course, happens right after that. But he knew that Jeremiah was the word of the Lord. He didn't need the Council of Jamnia to tell him that a couple of hundred years later. He knew it because what had Jeremiah done? He had prophesied the things and everything he said happened. And so what did the faithful do? They added a book to their Bible. There it is, Jeremiah.

That's the pattern, so when the New Testament authors come, the same thing is the pattern. Paul claims to speak for the Lord. They test it. He writes Corinthians. He writes Thessalonians. The Thessalonians receive it. They look at it. They test it. Yes, he claims authority. Its accuracy. It is consistent. We add it to our canon. That was a little bit tricky because he wasn't sending out a mass email, you know, a group email, or a group text, you know, send it to everybody. No, he was sending a letter to a particular place. Well, the Thessalonians were receiving it and saying, "This is canon." They were copying it and sharing it and the Corinthians were taking their letters, copying them and sharing them. So it took a little while for everybody to get all the different letters and so for a couple of centuries people are kind of passing these things around, of course, but they were doing so with a mindset not how do we know what in the world is Scripture, we know how to test these things.

So that's the way the canon grew. So when the Council of Hippo happens in the 4th century, what are they doing? They are dealing with heretics who are trying to talk about other books that have been added and they are clarifying, they are not defining in a first sort of way what the canon is, they're just reaffirming. Do you see that? Reaffirming what the faithful had always known. The same way that the doctrines are reaffirmed. In fact, the Catholics would say this, they would agree with us that the Council of Nicaea did not invent the doctrine of the deity of Christ, as if nobody believed Jesus was God before the Council of Nicaea. Dan Brown teaches that. The Roman Catholic Church says, no, of course the faithful always knew Jesus was God, and the Council of Nicaea just reaffirmed what we had always believed. But they failed to understand the same thing is true about the canon. They didn't invent the canon, they reaffirmed what we had always believed.

So we can have counsel in our Bible. It is complete. This book that is inerrant and clear, the perspicuity and the canonicity, then leads us to the fourth one which is the sufficiency. The sufficiency of Scripture. Back to our passage, 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17. After Paul has laid down the fact of inerrancy, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable," is valuable, "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness," it does all of these things, "so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." The word of God is sufficient to make every believer equipped for everything that God would ever call you to do. The sufficiency of Scripture. This Bible that is perfect, that is clear, that is complete, is also enough. The Bible is

enough. We don't need more. We don't need esoteric experiences. We don't need things like "Jesus Calling" where someone imagines that God is speaking directly to them and writing it down. Those books have sold like wildfire, amazingly even among Reformed churches. I was at a Presbyterian church I attended some years ago, I'm thankful for the ministry. I went in the bookstore and there is "Jesus Calling" on the bookshelf. I couldn't believe it. A big display of it. Jesus is speaking in his word, in the 66 books of the Bible. That's his complete canon. If you want to hear Jesus speak, read your Bible. Don't read "Jesus Calling" because he has finished, the canon was closed, we don't need that.

It is sufficient. It's everything that we need. It will teach us the doctrine we need to believe. It will reprove us, that is, it will show us where we are in error. It will point out with great clarity what's wrong in our hearts, what's wrong in our lives, what's wrong in our thinking. And it doesn't only just expose what's wrong, it corrects. It straightens out. And once it exposes what's wrong and straightens out what's right, it shows you how to walk in the truth so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. The idea is thoroughly furnished. Have everything that you need. Nothing missing.

The word of God, Jesus said himself in his humanity, fully God, fully man, but living as true man. Remember when he is tempted by Satan after 40 days of fasting? He's hungry. His hunger has returned. If you have ever fasted for long, about three days into your fast you get past the hunger pangs and they tend to stay away until about 40 days and now the body needs food or it's going to start dying. So the 40 days have happened. Jesus is hungry and he is feeling the pangs of that hunger and Satan says to him, "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread. Satisfy your physical needs by using your divine power in a way that will be outside of God's will for you. Because God intends for you to live in dependence upon him, I'm asking you to assert your deity for the sake of your humanity." And Jesus answers him and says, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. What's more important for me living as true man is that I have the word of God to feed my soul."

You think about that. What do we need more than anything else at every moment, every day, every circumstance? We need the word of God. It's the word of God that feeds our souls. It's the word of God that gives us life. It's the word of God that if you're born again today, how were you born again? Peter says you were born not of perishable seed but of imperishable by the living and abiding word of God. The word of God gives new birth. His Spirit works through his word to give new birth. It's the word of God which causes us to grow up into salvation. We speak the truth in love to one another, we grow up into all aspects unto him. Peter also says in 1 Peter 2, "as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby." You need the word like a baby needs milk and then as you grow up, it becomes meat to you, and you grow in your faith, you grow in your love. And what do we need every moment? We need the word of God. The word of God saves us and the word of God continues to save us. You are sanctified by the word of God. It's what overcomes sin. It's what changes our thinking. How are you transformed? You are not conformed to this world, how are you transformed? By the renewing of your mind. It's taking out wrong thinking and replacing it with the word of God and that brings about the transformation and we become more and more like Christ.

And the reason the word of God is enough is because the word of God for us, the word of God is where we do meet Jesus. The Scriptures, the Old Testament, every book in the Old Testament, every book in the New Testament, what is the focus? The focus is Christ. That's where you find Jesus. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures for you think that in them you have life, and these are they which testify of me." He said, "Moses wrote about me." The whole Bible is about Christ. The Old Testament is anticipating him. The New Testament is announcing him and celebrating him. So what we need in every moment is we need Christ. You're hurting, you need comfort, there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother. We have a high priest who can sympathize with us. Where do you find him? In the pages of Scripture. Prayerfully meditating, considering, reading the word of God. You need victory over sin, how do you become a conqueror? Jesus is our victory. He is everything that we need.

So to shepherd one another, to shepherd our own souls and to shepherd those around us, we need confidence in the word of God. We need to be absolutely clear on its perfection, its inerrancy. We need to understand the perspicuity, the clarity of the Bible. We need to be confident in the canonicity of Scripture. And we need to know that it is sufficient. The Bible is perfect. The Bible is clear. The Bible is complete. And the Bible is enough.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for being a God who is not silent. You are a God who has delighted in making yourself known. You speak continually as the psalmist says, the heavens declare the glory of God. The firmament speaks forth his praise. Day after day they pour forth speech. Night after night they make known your knowledge. There is no place where their voice is not heard. You are a God who speaks. You reveal yourself. You are generous in your goodness. And not only do you speak in nature, but you have spoken with great clarity in this precious book. You have spoken in human language in words we can understand. You have spoken to us through the prophets in many portions, in many ways. You have given us all the books of the Old Testament and we praise your name that in these last days you have spoken to us in your Son and he is the radiance of your glory and the exact representation of your nature and he upholds all things by the word of his power, and when he made purification of sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High. So much greater than the angels. Lord, we thank you for Jesus Christ and we pray that you would make us a people who pursue intimacy with Christ fervently and more fervently every day. Help us be people of the book who abide in your word, who continue in your word, and your words might continue in us and bear fruit. We pray these things in his name and for his glory. Amen.