2 Timothy 3:14-17 *How to Eat a Sermon: The Pantry*

***Don’t Get Chopped***I like to watch cooking competitions on TV. I’m not really sure why. They haven’t figured out how to allow us to taste the food through the screen, let alone smell it. But there is something compelling about watching really good chefs create dishes out of exotic ingredients under the pressure of time and rivals.

Watching cooking on TV hasn’t made me a better cook, but it has taught me some fancy new terms like “molecular gastronomy”, “julienne” and “sous-vide.” I also know you should always salt your pasta water and let your meat rest at least 5 minutes before cutting it. Not that I always do.

Anyway, most of these shows follow a similar format: several chefs are given a time limit to prepare a dish that will be judged by a panel of experts before one of the chefs is eliminated. Usually, there’s a “mystery” or “key” ingredient that the chefs are supposed to make the “star” of their dish. But there is also a lavishly stocked pantry that the chefs are allowed to make use of as they create their culinary masterpieces. And when I say “lavish”, I mean these pantries are stocked with all kinds of the finest foods.

So, for example, if the mystery ingredient is fresh sweet corn, a chef might grab some live lobsters and chanterelle mushrooms from the pantry in order to make a rich succotash. Or, if the key ingredient is beef tongue, a chef might reach into the pantry for some poblano peppers and avocados in order to give the dish a Latin flair.

A well-stocked pantry provides a wealth of ingredients for making the finest meals.

Well, that’s the image I have for the Bible, when it comes to preparing a sermon. When it comes to preaching, the Bible serves as the preacher’s pantry. **Sermons feed and nurture us when they are drawn from the source material provided in God’s Word.**

We are in the midst of a sermon series called *How to Eat a Sermon.* Every week, we invite you to come to church and somebody—usually me—stands up and talks for about 30 minutes. We rarely explain why we do that, it is just taken for granted that that is what happens at church. This series is intended to help us understand better what preaching is and how to get the most out of it.

Last week, I said that the weekly sermon is an important way that we are fed spiritually. God’s Word is spiritual food, and the Sunday sermon is a good way to be fed by it. Now I want to talk about why the Bible must be the source of all good preaching.

***The Storehouse***In Matthew **chapter 13, verse 52** Jesus says this:

**52**He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

In the gospels, teachers of the law are a group that are often in opposition to Jesus. Sometimes they are called “scribes”. They were this group who were experts on the Scripture, what we call the Old Testament. They kind of come off as bad guys in the Bible, because they were so often in conflict with Jesus, but they would really have been held in high regard at the time. These were people who memorized God’s Word, they taught in the temple, they were seen as experts.

And here, Jesus talks about teachers of the law who becomes disciples in the kingdom of heaven. Instead of arguing with Jesus, He talks about those who come to believe in Him. Probably, He is also comparing His own disciples to these teachers of the law. Even though most of his disciples came from uneducated, blue-collar backgrounds—by believing in Him and following Him and learning from Him--they are now on a level equal to these scribes and experts.

And what Jesus says is those who would teach, now have this storeroom from which to bring out new treasures as well as old. In other words, there is this vault, this treasury, or—to fit my metaphor—this lavishly stocked pantry, of Old and New from which a teacher can draw on to show others God.

The point Jesus is making is that those who preach in the kingdom have an abundance of riches to draw from in both the Old and New Testaments. And the point that I am making is that sermons which feed the church find their value when they are prepared from the pantry God has provided. The Bible is a rich storehouse of truth.

Preaching doesn’t get its value from the person who is up front doing the talking, or from the church, or from the audience; preaching gets its value because preaching comes from the Bible. Sermons are important because they are serving us the Bread of Life.

***Inspired***So let’s talk about the Bible. Let’s talk about why the Bible is important enough that we would gather on a weekly basis to listen to someone talk about it. Let’s talk about why, last week, I encouraged you to eat on a daily basis from what the Bible has to offer.

There is probably no passage of scripture which has more to teach us about the nature and the purpose of the Bible than **2 Timothy 3:14-17**.

**14**But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, **15**and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **16**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, **17**so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

There are two main things I want to get from this passage. First I want to look at what the Bible is. Then I want to look at what the Bible does.

First, **the Bible is God’s Word**. The Bible is God’s communication with us. The first part of **verse 16:**

**16**All Scripture is God-breathed.

Here is a case where a look at the original Greek may be helpful. The word that is translated “God-breathed” is the compound Greek word ***theo-pneustos.***We can see the meaning of the word by breaking it into its component parts.

You probably already know that *Theos* is Greek for “God.” It is the root of our word "theology", which is the study of God. And *pneuma* is Greek for "breath." Thus, our words "pneumonia" and "pneumatic." So *theo-pnuestos* means "God breath".

And the thing for us to notice is that the words are arranged in such a way as to indicate that the scriptures have been breathed out by God. It doesn’t say that the Scriptures breathe God to us, but that the scriptures are the product of God's breathing. In other words, the scriptures are God’s words.

Another way of saying this is to say that the Scriptures are ***inspired***(from the Latin *spirare,* “to breathe”.) That’s the word theologians use. Inspiration is the doctrine that says that God is the ultimate Author of the Bible.

Now, that doesn’t mean we believe that the Bible dropped out of heaven on golden tablets (like the Mormons believe about the book of Mormon), or that God grabbed hold of somebody and dictated exactly what He wanted written down (like the Muslims believe about the Koran).

We recognize that the Bible is a collection of works by many different authors, written over a period of some 4000 years. As you read the various parts of the Bible, you can see the individual personalities, styles and talents of the human authors emerge—the poetry of David, for example, or the logic of Paul. And yet, God chose to progressively reveal Himself to a number of human agents, breathing out His Scripture in such a way that even as they wrote, He supervised the process to get exactly what He wanted to communicate to us. If Moses and Luke are authors of the Bible with a little “a”; then God is the Author of the Bible with a capital “A”.

And so, when we are reading from our Bibles, we can say with extreme confidence that we are reading God’s Word.

This should affect how you read the Bible, and how you think about what you are reading.

About 10 years ago an author named A.J. Jacobs wrote a book called “The Year of Living Biblically.” Last year, CBS attempted to adapt it into a half-hour sitcom series. I read the book, and enjoyed it. It was pretty funny. I don’t think the same can be said for the series.

Anyway, the premise of most of Jacobs’ books is that he turns himself into a human experiment. He once wrote an article for Esquire magazine called “My Outsourced Life” in which, for one month, he had a team of people in Bangalore, India live his life for him—answering his email, calling his coworkers, even having arguments with his wife. He has a book called “The Know-it-All” which describes the year he spent reading the Encyclopedia Britannica from A to Z.

In “the Year of Living Biblically” he attempts to keep every rule in the Bible. By his count, there are over 700 commands in the Bible and he attempts to keep them all—ranging from growing a ZZ Top style beard to giving up shellfish to stoning adulterers in Central Park.

The book is a gimmick. Jacobs is a self-described agnostic (he says, “I am officially Jewish; but I’m Jewish in the same way the Olive Garden is an Italian restaurant. Which is to say: not very.”) He plays the whole thing for laughs. He’s not very interested in trying to understand the Bible, just finding the rules.

But it raises a question about what the Bible is: is it just a rule book? Just a guide for diet and facial hair and sexual behavior. If it were, it might be easier to understand. Do this, don’t do that.

But by treating the Bible like a rule book, Jacobs misses the person speaking through the book. He’s looking for lists to dictate behavior, but he misses out on the God who is communicating through those words. Josh Harris writes:

The Bible is much more wonderful and dangerous and radically life transforming than a mere book of instructions. But you won’t understand it or gain any benefit from it until you believe what the Bible claims about itself. The Bible presents itself as a living communication from a personal God to the human race—more specifically to you. (*Dug Down Deep*, 55)

All scripture is God breathed. It is the product of God speaking. It is God’s voice. And it is His message to you.

The Bible is God’s Word.

***Useful***Now, second, what does the Bible do? **The Bible is useful.** God wants to accomplish things in us through His Word. **Verse 16 again,** into verse 17:

**16**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, **17**so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

All Scripture is useful. Other English translations use the word “profitable.” And then there’s a list. Great benefits come to those who listen to God’s Word. I count six things:

First, Scripture is useful for ***teaching*.** The Bible is where we learn facts about God. It teaches us that He exists, that He is the creator, and that He is the ruler and judge of the universe. We need Scripture to get our doctrine right. It is through Scripture that we learn God’s will for us.

Second, Scripture is useful for ***rebuking***. This is a word that has to do with the conviction of a sinner. Not only does the Bible tell us the truth about God, it also tells us the truth about ourselves. Like a light shining into a dark place, the Bible shines into the hidden parts of our lives and points out our shortfalls. It convicts us of our sins. And shows us our need of a Savior.

But the Bible doesn’t just show us our sins and then leave us to feel guilty about them. It wouldn’t be a very appealing book if all it ever did was tell us how bad we are. It also teaches us how to turn around and do the right thing.

That’s the third way Scripture has power to change us: ***Correcting*.** Scripture is useful for correcting. The word here means “to restore to an upright position,” kind of like the stewardess tells you to do with your seat back before the airplane lands. The idea is that once we see our sin, the Bible also helps us to turn away from it, to replace sin with good, to get back to God’s original design for us.

Thus, the Bible has power to change us by teaching us, rebuking us, correcting us, and then, fourth, by ***training us in righteousness***. The idea here is also one of education. But where the word “teaching” has to do with passing on facts, the word “training” has more to do with character development. This is the maturation of a Christian into the habits and lifestyles of righteousness. The process of becoming more and more like Jesus.

Then, fifth, Scripture is useful for ***equipping us for good works***. God’s goal is not just to teach and rebuke and correct and train us so that we can be super spiritual hermits out on a holy hill somewhere. He has a purpose. He has designed us to do good works. To love our neighbors as ourselves. To look out for the widow and the orphan. To have compassion on the prisoner and the poor.

And it is the Bible that equips us for all that. It is the Bible that sends us out to be salt and light in the world.

You can see the progression here. It’s almost like Paul is describing a step by step process by which God uses the Bible – His Word--to change us into the people He wants us to be.

But there’s one more way in which the Bible is useful to us, and it is the most important of all. You might even say it summarizes all five of these other ones. And it is mentioned in the verse right before we are told that all scripture is God-breathed. **Verse 15:**

**15**and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

The sixth, and most important, way Scripture is useful to us is by ***making us wise for salvation* through faith in Christ Jesus**. It is in the Bible that we hear the old, old story of Jesus and His love. It is in the Bible that we are called to put our faith and trust in Him and Him alone. It is in the Bible that we discover God’s amazing grace at the cross and the new life of the empty tomb.

More than a rulebook or a list of proper behaviors, the Bible is a story. It’s personal communication from the God of the universe to you and to me, and it tells the story of His love for us. In particular, it tells the story of Jesus.

One of my favorite books about the Bible is this children’s Bible. It’s called “The Jesus Storybook Bible” by Sally Lloyd-Jones. For the past five years or so, Beth and I have been trying to give a copy of this Bible to every family in the church when they have their first child. In fact, if you have a child five years or younger and you do not have a copy of this, let us know, because we’d love to give you one.

The tagline says “every story whispers his name”. I’d like to read to you from the introduction:

God wrote, “I love you”—he wrote it in the sky, and on the earth, and under the sea. He wrote his message everywhere! Because God created everything in his world to reflect him like a mirror—to show us what he is like, to help us know him, to make our hearts sing.

The way a kitten chases her tail. The way red poppies grow wild. The way a dolphin swims.

And God put it into words, too, and wrote it in a book called “the Bible.”

Now some people thing the Bible is a book of rules, telling you what you should and shouldn’t do. The Bible certainly does have some rules in it. They show you how life works best. But the Bible isn’t mainly about you and what you should be doing. It’s about God and what he has done.

Other people think the Bible is a book of heroes, showing you people you should copy. The bible does have some heroes in it, but (as you’ll soon find out) most of the people in the Bible aren’t heroes at all. They make some big mistakes (sometimes on purpose). They get afraid and run away. At times they are downright mean.

No, the Bible isn’t a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It’s an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It’s a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his place, his throne—everything—to rescue the one he loves. It’s like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!

You see, the best thing about this Story is—it’s true.

There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.

It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of the Story, there is a baby. Every Story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle—the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.

The ultimate purpose of the Bible is to lead us to Jesus. It is given to us to make us wise for salvation through Jesus Christ.

The God-breathed Scriptures are the communication tool God uses to reveal Himself and His message of salvation to the world.

***Drawing from the Pantry***So, what does this mean for us? It’s a nice theology lesson. I think it is important to know what we believe about this book that is so important to our faith. But is there any practical payoff? What’s the application of this passage to our lives? In particular, what’s the application for how to listen to a sermon?

I see two applications here. One is for those who preach. And the other is for all who listen to sermons.

For those who stand before God’s people to speak, the application is: **preach the Word**. This is Paul’s advice to pastor Timothy in the **next couple of verses:**

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: **2**Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

The job of the Christian preacher is not to air personal opinions or to echo the conventional wisdom of the time, but to proclaim God’s eternal, authoritative Word of truth. If the preacher is serving a meal on Sunday morning, it should be composed of ingredients found in God’s pantry.

Only the Bible can legitimately claim to be God's true revelation and therefore only the Bible has any business being proclaimed from Christian pulpits. Science, history and personal experience can all be useful to support and illustrate Biblical concepts, but ultimately the only preaching which has any authority is preaching which declares God's Word.

Bryan Chapell writes to would be preachers:

“Ultimately preaching accomplishes its spiritual purposes not because of the skills of the preacher, but because of the power of the Scripture proclaimed. Preachers will minister with greater zeal, confidence, and freedom when they realize God has taken from their backs the monkey of spiritual manipulation. God is not relying on our craft to accomplish his purposes. God certainly can use eloquence and desires efforts befitting the importance of our subject matter, but his Word itself fulfills his agenda of salvation and sanctification. The human efforts of the greatest preachers are still too weak and sin-tainted to be responsible for others’ eternal destinies. For this reason God infuses his Word with spiritual power. The efficacy of the message rather than any virtue in the messenger transforms hearts.”(C*hrist-Centered Preaching*, p. 18)

I am convinced that if I am to be considered a good preacher, it will not be because I am a polished speaker, but because I let the Scriptures speak for themselves. The point of preaching is not to impress people with the ability of the speaker, but to impress them with the power of God. To move them, not to praise me, but to praise Him.

The second application is for those sit in the pews: **listen for the Word.** Your job is to listen for the Word of God in the sermon. **2 Timothy 4** goes on to say:

**3**For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.**4**They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

On our own, we really don’t want to hear from God. Instead, itching ears start to long for messages that don’t try to change us, but allow us to be comfortable with what we are. And there are plenty of preachers out there willing to scratch itching ears.

The caution for us is to exercise a measure of discernment when listening to a preacher. We must ask ourselves: "Is the power of this message coming from the preacher or from God's Word?"

We live in a world that is impressed by the flashy and the talented. We are drawn to the great storytellers and the great comedians. There is room for both in Christian preaching, but not in place of God's Word and its power to change us.

Before we choose to listen to any man or woman’s ministry we must ask ourselves: "Do they preach in such a way that shows they believe God's Word is powerful, or do they preach in a way that would indicate they feel the Bible is not enough?"

If a preacher stands before you and just gives his or her opinions, you can take it or leave it. But if a preacher helps you to see that this is, indeed, what the Bible says, then it is God’s Words that you are hearing.

And God’s Words have the power to change your life.