

The Word of God is Not Bound!
Andrew Kneeland, October 9, 2022
2 Timothy 2:9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the Word of God is not bound!”

That’s what the Apostle Paul said in this letter to Timothy. Paul was writing this letter from a jail cell in Rome, probably just a few weeks or months away from his certain execution. This second letter to young Timothy was one of the last things Paul wrote.

But Paul didn’t want a pity party. He isn’t writing this letter to Timothy to plan a rescue attempt, he’s writing to encourage Timothy to keep on spreading the Word of God. Because even though *he’s* bound with chains... the Word of God is not.

And the survival of our faith doesn’t depend on Paul’s survival; it is guaranteed by the all-powerful Word of God.

We’re going to do something a little bit different with the sermon time this morning. Instead of walking through a passage verse-by-verse we’re going to look at just one short sentence from our reading in 2 Timothy this morning: “The Word of God is not bound!”

Paul was imprisoned in chains, but the Word was not—and will never be—bound.

Let’s pray: *Father God, thank you for this Word. Help us to grow to better appreciate your Word and know that it is your perfect, trustworthy, unchanging, beautiful love letter to us. Give us grateful hearts to receive your Word. In your name we pray, amen.*

Let’s start with this: What is the Word of God? Two words: *inspired*, and *authoritative*.

We believe that everything in this book is inspired by God. That means that God is ultimately the one who gave us this Word. He used many people over the course of many, many years to write down His Word... but this isn’t a collection of human thoughts or human opinions. These are God’s Words.

When you read a story from this Bible, or a Psalm, or a New Testament letter, it’s important to know that you’re not reading just some man’s opinion; you’re not just getting a glimpse into what life was like two thousand years ago... you’re reading and hearing the actual voice of God.

This might seem like an obvious point, but it’s becoming increasingly uncommon

these days. Many churches today—even evangelical churches, even Lutheran churches—do not believe this is a holy book. They look at a passage like our text today, Paul's second letter to Timothy, and they don't hear God speaking, they only hear Paul. They only view this letter as a glimpse into the culture of the day. Paul's words to Timothy don't have any true *meaning* to us today, they just show us what life was like back then.

But that's not all the Bible is. It *IS* an historical document that shows us the writings and background of real, historical people. But it's also a HOLY book, unlike any other book in the world.

God's Word is just that: *GOD'S* Word. Inspired by God Himself, transcribed by apostles and prophets and translated and copied through the years until it's found here in your hands today.

God's Word is inspired, which means that it's also *authoritative*. We don't get to decide which parts of Scripture apply to our lives, and which parts we can skip over. This entire book is God's timeless, unchanging truth... and it has authority over us.

And this issue of authority is another big difference between us and other Christians: We understand the world through the Word. We do not understand the Word through the world. Does that make sense? What I mean by that is God's Word is unchanging, timeless truth. The truths in this Word do not change based on the cultural fads or social trends of the day. The world changes; this Word does not.

Today's world might not like how *exclusive* Christianity appears to be. They might think Christianity is just one option among many; one road to God among many others.

They might not like it when Christians teach against the sin of idolatry. Or adultery. Or homosexuality. Or any immorality. Some people *reject* the Bible because it teaches these things; others *water down* the Bible when it says things that aren't culturally sensitive or politically correct. They say: "The Bible can't *really* mean that." Or: "Maybe it meant that thousands of years ago, when it was first written, but the times have changed."

But we believe that even though the world changes, this Word does not.

Psalms 119 says: "Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens."

Psalms 18 says: "This God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him."

And even in our passage this morning, Paul tells young Pastor Timothy to

“Rightly handle the word of truth.” God’s Word is inspired and it is authoritative.

That’s what this book is, but how do we read it? Should we read the Bible differently from how we read other books?

Sometimes we read this book *historically*. Maybe our text is an Old Testament story about one of the kings of Judah, or one of the founding fathers of our faith back in Genesis or Exodus. We’ll read the story, maybe we’ll be impressed by their heroism or courage, and then think: “Cool story, that was exciting.” Or, “Sad story, that was depressing.” And then we move on.

Or sometimes we read the Bible *moralistically*. We’ll read about a character or an event and interpret its meaning to be all about us. Us—and our situation—will be the central point of the story. The story of David and Goliath is about *us*, and the metaphorical giants we face in our lives today. The story of Jonah and the Great Fish is about *us*, and the problems we’re avoiding and the ways God redirects us.

This is all the Bible is to many people, even many Christians. It’s just a history book filled with stories to enjoy, or it’s just a book of morals to imitate.

But we believe something different. This book *does* have history and this book *does* teach us morals... but it’s so much more than that.

I’ve said it before but it’s worth saying again: this book is a powerful book that can *change spiritual realities*. No other book can do that!

Reading a book like Aesop’s Fables can teach us about virtue and inspire us to do what’s right. We can read a mystery book and *feel* emotionally connected to the story, the words on a page can draw us in and attach us to the plot. I’m sure you’ve also read sad stories, or funny stories, that can make you feel certain ways; they can even make you respond physically in certain ways: crying, or sighing, or laughing.

Words are powerful. But God’s Word is another kind of powerful. Physically, this book looks just like any other book. It has two covers and a bunch of pages—sometimes the binding and printing is fancier than other books, but physically this book doesn’t really seem that different. But these words can change *spiritual* things: reading these words can plant the seed of faith in your heart.

Paul wrote: “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

Reading Scripture is how we hear the word of Christ. God speaks to us through two kinds of words in this book, and you’ve probably heard us talk about them

before: The Law and the Gospel.

The Law is more than just the verses in the Old Testament about the Ten Commandments, or the old ceremonial or sacrificial laws of the Israelites. The Law is anywhere in Scripture—Old Testament or New—where we are reminded of our sin; where we are accused because of our sin. Romans 3:20: “Through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

The Law is not good news. The Law tells us that we have failed, that we are crippled in our failings, and dead in our sin. There is no hope that any one of us can save ourselves. The Law tells us that if there is any chance of salvation, it cannot come from anything inside of us. It needs to come from the outside.

And the Gospel tells us *where* our salvation comes from, and the Gospel gives a name to our savior: Jesus Christ. The words of the Gospel tell us that we have been forgiven and that we have been officially and legally adopted into God’s family. The Gospel tells us that our sins have been completely taken away and we have been purified and made completely holy.

The Law isn’t just found in the Old Testament, and the Gospel isn’t just found in the New Testament. Anywhere in the Bible where God shows us our sin... that’s Law. And anywhere in the Bible where God makes us a promise... that’s Gospel.

The Law and the Gospel, the two overarching messages in this book, are how God speaks to us. They’re how God convicts us of sin so that we repent, and they’re how God creates and builds faith and trust in Him.

So Scripture is inspired by God, it’s the ultimate authority over our life and our circumstances, and it contains God’s messages of Law and Gospel that are powerful to create and change *spiritual realities*.

One last thing to look at: God’s Word is *sufficient*. All that we need to know in order to be saved can be found within these holy, special pages.

The Bible is not an encyclopedia that contains all of human knowledge. And the Bible does not tell us everything about God or heaven or divine mysteries. “But Scripture teaches perfectly whatever we need to know to obtain eternal life.”

In the next chapter of Paul’s letter to Pastor Timothy he says that “the sacred writings... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

And this makes sense, doesn’t it? If we needed to *add* something to these words in order to be saved, the Bible would no longer be perfect.

Another way of putting this is saying that we believe in the *perfect sufficiency* of Scriptures. This is also something that many other Christians don’t believe. The

Roman Catholic Church teaches that Scripture needs to be *supplemented* with the traditional teaching of the “church,” or of the office of the pope. They say that Scripture plus tradition equals the perfect authority of God and the source and norm of all Christian doctrine.

That is simply not true. Scripture alone is the only source and norm of Christian doctrine; the words or teachings of any authority is only reliable *if* they agree with Scripture. Whether it’s me, Pastor Wesley, another pastor, or anyone who preaches or teaches... the only authority comes from Scripture.

Another thing the Catholic Church teaches is that Scripture is naturally *unclear* to the people who read it. Christians need to have the “church” help them understand what the Bible is saying. This is also not true, and a dangerous lie! Anyone can pick up a Bible and read and understand God’s Word that is powerful to give them eternal life.

Because this is the key: We do not illuminate the meaning of Scripture; Scripture illuminates its meaning to us. Psalm 119: “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

“The Word of God is not bound,” Paul wrote to Timothy long, long ago. The devil tries his best to stop the Gospel from spreading; he tries to convince people that this book is *not* trustworthy, that it is *not* truly God’s Word, that it is *not* a special, holy book. The devil can spread lies and he can persecute us and lock us up and even have us put to death.

But the Word of God cannot be stopped. “The Word of God is not bound!”

This perfect Bible is inspired by God, making it the perfect and trustworthy authority over us and our lives. It is also *perfectly* sufficient, containing all that we need to be saved through God’s Law and the beautiful Gospel message.

The French philosopher Voltaire famously quipped back in the 1700s that, “In a hundred years, the only Bibles on earth will be found in museums.” Turns out, a hundred years after Voltaire died, the Bible was still being used, teaching people about God and bringing them to a saving faith in Christ.

And, Voltaire’s old home in Paris became the headquarters of the French Bible Society and was used to store hundreds and thousands of Bibles that were being shipped throughout the world.

“The Word of God is not bound!”

I want to close this morning again by reading an old poem to you. This is from a hymn called “We Have a Sure Prophetic Word,” written over 100 years ago:

We have a sure prophetic Word
By inspiration of the Lord;
And though assailed on ev'ry hand,
Jehovah's Word shall ever stand.

By pow'rs of empire banned and burned,
By pagan pride rejected, spurned,
The Word still stands the Christian's trust
While haughty empires lie in dust.

Lo, what the Word in times of old
Of future days and deeds foretold
Is all fulfilled while ages roll,
As traced on the prophetic scroll.

Abiding, steadfast, firm, and sure,
The teachings of the Word endure.
Blest he who trusts this steadfast Word;
His anchor holds in Christ, the Lord.

Amen.