

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Bible Sunday, 28th October 2018

Text: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

“Bible poverty is robbing millions of the truth that Jesus can set them free.”

These are the words of the UK Bible Society’s former Chief Executive, James Catford.

He says: **“IT’S TIME TO SET THE TRUTH FREE**

The call to care for the world's poor has never been of more concern to Christians. But what of the poverty of not knowing the God who made you? As Jesus said, "The Scriptures say: 'No one can live only on food. People need every word God has spoken.'" Matthew 4.4 (CEV)

He writes: “ ... At the root of Bible poverty are **language barriers**, **blindness**, **illiteracy** and people simply being **too poor** to own a Bible. Others are Bible-poor because they live in a 'sophisticated' **culture** where the Bible is written off as irrelevant.

Bible poverty is robbing millions of the truth that Jesus can set them free. This stark reality of global Bible poverty is a scandal as great as global poverty. Both break the heart of God. How can they not touch our hearts too?”

In John’s gospel Jesus promises: “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free ...” Jn 8:32

That is the truth about God and the truth about ourselves

How we come to be here and why?
Why things are as they are?
How that is being transformed and why?

Questions of purpose
Questions of responsibility
Questions of hope

Christians believe that the Bible is a unique means through which a loving God speaks to us about these truths

The Bible, which literally means “library” is made up of two testaments, Old and New, and 66 books

Just like the books on your shelves, the books in the Bible are in different genres: OT narrative and wisdom, prophecy and NT gospels, and, like our passage from 2 Timothy, letters or epistles

Although covering thousands of years, many different locations and many different main characters, there is a red thread or overarching story running through all 66 books: God working His purposes, His Kingdom out, in this His world.

The Bible records that through the events, promises, and wisdom of individuals and a nation asking: what does it mean to have God as our God?

This running red thread, this story of Scripture, spills off the page as we read with faith and expectation.

It spills off into our lives as God starts to directly address the questions, the situations we face

READ 2 Tim 3:14-15

That comes from one of the letters or epistles of the NT
It was written by St Paul to his young assistant Timothy in direct response to questions and issues Timothy faces about how to allow God’s Kingdom to come in His life and that of the Church he leads

Paul tells him where his help lies: in the Scriptures

READ 2 Tim 3:16-17

It is like the story spilling off the page into Timothy’s life – very much a message from a loving God

Timothy wants to be wise – do the right things for the right reason

He wants to grow and be a man of God, fully equipped to live the kingdom

How?

READ v16

The Scriptures – in his case the OT books – have a unique authority and power which comes from their source: from God

They are inspired by God, literally “God-breathed”, a phrase reminiscent of breath/life passing into Adam, the creative HS

They have a very practical function – “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training” people of God

These words are ones associated with growing and developing

What may also have been in Paul’s mind was that this letter he was writing – and others - would have the same origin and purpose

As an apostle, uniquely inspired by the HS, Paul’s words have within them God’s words: they would become Scripture – God breathed and uniquely useful for developing God’s people – that’s probably what v14 means

In the early Church our Christian forbears read what was written to Timothy and said: this is for more than just him. It’s not just good or interesting suggestions or advice on how to pray, how to live. God speaks through this in the same way He speaks through some other writings. This too is Scripture for us, its authoritative for us.

Apparently, Timothy came from a believing family and it is interesting to see how he was formed as a disciple by the Scriptures

READ 3:14-15

This describes regular, intentional encounter with the Bible: starting in infancy with Bible stories, moving on to learning to read and meditate upon it yourself

It also describes allowing a child to observe, in his parents and godparents, a life shaped and moulded by the Bible

A life that has allowed the Bible to teach and rebuke, to correct and train; to equip us for godly living

I sometimes look at the investment parents in this community make into their children's lives – sport, music, education, opportunities to travel

How far are we investing into their spiritual lives too?

But you know this isn't just about children. The baptismal promises made on our behalf or that we made ourselves are ones that commit us to regular and intentional growth: the word "disciple" means "learner"

Do you remember what James Catford says: "Bible poverty is robbing millions of the truth that Jesus can set them free."

That is tragic

What is not only tragic but unnecessary is that this poverty exists in ordinary churches like ours. Among long-standing and new Christians alike

Some of that is about simply acquiring skills – reading the Bible isn't like reading other books. But those skills are not hard

Very often it's more about motivation

I don't mean to see the Bible sitting on our shelves as a source of guilt, another thing to do

But as containing messages from a loving God: something he has lovingly and wisely provided to make the relationship between Him and us easier

As we come regularly and intentionally to the Bible, with faith and expectancy, with our questions and our desires about how to live as followers of Jesus in a confusing world, the same HS who inspired the writing will inspire the reading and it becomes a place of encounter between us and God.

What won't happen is that will jump off the shelf into our hands by itself or happen by osmosis!

It will take three concrete steps

One – get in touch with your desire for God. And if you don't have that desire but want it, ask Him to enable you to desire the desire!

Two – be prepared to do whatever is necessary to enjoy Him, to meet Him in this God-provided gift called Scripture

Third – act.

On our website under the section Prayer and reading the Bible are links to resources – take time to explore, to try out the ideas there

After Christmas there will be opportunities to get the big picture of the Bible story and how to read different sorts of literature. We will also learn about different ways of reading the Bible.

If you'd like to be part of that use the link to send an email to hear more about that.

READ v14-17

There's the offer – lets enjoy it!!