

## **The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany**

February 4, 2018

Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church

Farmington, NM

**2 Timothy 3:14–4:5** 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.

4 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. 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. 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (NIV)

### **“Scriptural Toughness”**

Once you let someone get inside your head, you’re in real trouble. That’s why you will see football players later today talking trash to each other. Defensive backs will try to intimidate wide receivers. Wide receivers will oversell celebrations after making a big catch. Blitzing linebackers will do their best to strike fear in the hearts of quarterbacks. And the very best quarterbacks will stand cool and calm in the pocket while a war zone of three hundred pound beasts rages around them.

If you are a football fan, you’re probably already tired of hearing about Tom Brady. If you’re not a fan, you probably don’t care anyway. Just in case though, sports commentators and columnists are currently debating whether the Patriots’ quarterback is the all time greatest to play the sport. No one would claim he is the best athlete on the field. Not the biggest or strongest or fastest. But it’s the mental toughness that sets him apart. A chip on his shoulder propels him to prove the critics wrong. A deep desire drives him to keep improving and never settling. And for those of you who don’t follow sports, the man is already 40 years old. So even as he loses mobility and strength and speed, he’s more than made up for it with experience, attention to detail, and precision execution.

For Christians, this mental toughness is just as important. One of the worst things that can happen to us is to let someone get inside our heads. 2 Timothy tells us God’s Word is the solution. God’s Word gets inside your head as you hear and learn it to prepare you for intimidations and threats. God’s Word gives you confidence as you live and share it. We could call this “Scriptural Toughness.” It is so necessary for our faith.

These verses from 2 Timothy chapters 3 and 4 tell us what to do, but we need to go back a little bit to understand why we need that mental toughness. The first part of 2 Timothy chapter 3 describe some of the dangers to our faith. Basically, there is a lot of spiritual trash talking going on around us. Paul himself experienced severe persecution and suffering, attacks from spiritual enemies and false teachers attempting to undermine the gospel. To put it briefly, we shouldn't be surprised by anything we face in our Christian faith. That's why Paul can tell Timothy to stay the course and not grow discouraged by all the craziness: **"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of."** (2 Timothy 3:14)

There's a difference between being childish in your faith and being grounded in child-like trust in God. Being childish makes you susceptible to damaging doubts. We get all kinds of variations on the first lie told to our first parents. Satan hissed to Adam and Eve: 'Did God really say...?' It just takes different forms. You really love your boyfriend. You have to show it. Is there really a verse in the Bible that says you can't have sex until you're married? A widow and a widower get together, but don't want to lose their benefits by getting married. Did God really say it would be so bad? Did God really say he expects the average believer to know and share the Christian faith? Isn't that really just for the experts? And you know how these doubts work. They don't have to convince you or make an airtight case. They just have to cause you to doubt God's Word. They just need to get inside your head.

If your entire faith is based on what your parents told you, your mental toughness is in for a test. That's not to say parents shouldn't make it their top priority to share and train children in the Christian faith. It's just that want each generation to have spiritual toughness that goes beyond: 'I don't know why I believe what I believe or do what I do. It's just what my parents told me.'

We need an awareness of some of the dangers out there. God gives us this warning through the Apostle Paul: **"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. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."** (2 Timothy 4:3,4) Let's look at a couple of examples. When you talk about the truth in Scripture, you will hear a common response: 'There is no truth.' It's very discouraging. So many people look at life this way. And it feels like it's impossible to give a response. Then you will hear someone dismiss anything you share that comes from the Bible. After all, they reason: 'People wrote the Bible and people make mistakes. So the Bible is full of mistakes.' How can you even offer a response? They get inside your head. They make you lose confidence and clam up.

Those are two common critiques of Christianity. But they are both essentially modern myths. The claim that 'there is no truth' is self-defeating. Is that claim true? If 'there is no truth' applies to what you just said, then no one should believe you. If it is false, you shouldn't believe it either. And every time someone assembles facts and truths and knowledge, lines up scholars and philosophers to prove this point, they will ultimately disprove their own point. The argument is self-defeating. Let's look at the other modern myth. If the Bible is full of mistakes because it's written by people, what about the things

you say and write? Aren't you a person? Is everything you say a mistake? Sure, people make mistakes, but that doesn't mean everything they say or write is a mistake. So if you sometimes speak the truth, then there is no reason to toss out everything in the Bible just because people wrote it down. That claim is also self-defeating. Those aren't even faith reasons for rejecting modern myths. Those are just use-your-brain reasons for finding the holes in attempts to get you to doubt God's truth.

In other words, don't let them get inside your head. Instead, you want to be aware of those dangers that try to create doubts. But God wants you to have mental toughness for your faith: **"But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."** (2 Timothy 4:5) That's an important beginning to this verse. It reflects the same idea as 2 Timothy 3:14 when it makes a transition: **"But as for you."** There is something going on around you. People will misuse the Bible. Some will mislead others. You need to be aware of what's going on. But you don't need to let that discourage you or give in to doubts or get disheartened about the power of God's Word. You have a different focus. You know God's calling for your life: **"But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."** (2 Timothy 4:5) You have a different way of looking at the world. Because you have a different way of looking at God's Word. God's Word keeps you grounded when the world tries to get inside your head.

Now look back on the main purpose for which God gives us the Scriptures. He shouldn't have to do it, but Paul reminds Timothy: **"the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."** (2 Timothy 3:15) He's not just talking about the way Scripture can straighten out your faulty way of thinking. The biggest, the number one problem with the way most people see the Bible is that they don't understand it is all about pointing you to a saving knowledge of Jesus. Continue in what you have learned because Scripture contains the power for salvation.

So whenever you face issues in life, whatever issues burden you, Jesus is still there for you. Jesus is your spiritual toughness. In the pages of Scripture. When you struggle and fail, when you feel weak and vulnerable, there is the toughness of Jesus trudging undeterred toward the cross. As the mockery and abuse was flying around him, as powerful politicians and hypocritical religious leaders came straight at him, Jesus stayed calm and collected. He never caved in or collapsed. Neither did Jesus talk trash to his tormentors or snap back at pitifully powerless Pilate. Jesus showed his ultimate toughness when he went to the cross, suffered absolute abandonment, forsaken by God as punishment for the sins of the world. Jesus hung in until the job was completely finished. And Jesus was able to pop right up after taking the most horrendous hit when he rose from the grave on Easter. He was able to celebrate the victory he won by God's strength.

The focus on Jesus in God's Word keeps us grounded. The Bible is so different than any other book, so unique compared to any proposed sacred writing. Remember what Paul said: **"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."** (2 Timothy 3:16) No other writing comes from the mouth of God through the instrument of human writers to give us God's own facts and God's own

truth. It's not just parents and grandparents standing behind Scripture. God stands behind Scripture. So we can use it for teaching the truth. But we also need to use the bright light of Scripture to illuminate the darkness of errors. We use Scripture to correct sin with the goal of improvement. We can think of Scripture as our own spiritual tutor. God's Word serves us to educate, train, and discipline. It takes place in the context of God's favorable verdict for all humanity because of what Jesus did.

God wants to drive you back into Scripture and deeper into Scripture; back to church for encouragement with a community of other strugglers; back to Bible study to deepen your understanding and appreciation of what God has done for you in Jesus; back to prayer to open up your communication channel with God. God gives you the gift of Scripture to combat your feelings with the objective truth of Scripture that declares you holy because of Jesus, an heir of heaven through faith in Jesus.

What Scripture does for you, it can do for others through you. Paul describes the benefit of using God's Word: **"so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."** (2 Timothy 3:17) God's Word makes you completely outfitted and able to meet demands of your life of faith. God outfits you for this challenge: **"Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction."** (2 Timothy 4:2) Announce God's Word without altering or trying to make it more appealing to fit with modern myths. Stand ready with God's Word at all times. Use the Word to convict sinners. Warn Christians who fall into sin or error. Stimulate slow or lagging Christians. Do it in a brave and steady way to ensure faithfulness to the main message of the Bible. Point others to Christ just as you daily point yourself back to Christ.

Whether you watch the Super Bowl to be entertained primarily by the commercials or the game, it probably won't make a lasting change on your life. You can admire tough competitors in the field of advertising or on the football field. But in the pages of Scripture, God gives you his toughness. His words show you his salvation. His word is powerful and reliable. You can confidently use God's word to equip yourself to combat error and share the good news of Jesus. It's not just a feel-good story about an underdog. God's powerful, reliable Word saves lives. Amen.