

OUT OF CONTEXT - THE BIBLE'S AUTHORITY
A SERMON BASED ON 2 TIMOTHY 3:10 - 4:5
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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SUNDAY, JULY 15, 2018
10:00 a.m.

We don't do well with authority.

We are reluctant to recognize it.

The very word authority tends to make us question it,
get our backs up a little.

We are more comfortable questioning authority, resisting authority
than we are recognizing and submitting to authority.

Pulled over by a police officer for speeding,

we are more prone to question authority than recognize authority.

Officer, are you sure I was going that fast?

I really don't think I was.

Are you sure your radar gun was pointed at my car

and not the car ahead of me?

Officer, I was just travelling with the speed of traffic.

Why am I being singled out?

We question authority.

If the doctor says surgery is required.

We question it.

Can I have a second opinion?

Who else can I speak to?

And goodness, a preacher in the pulpit?

Well there are TED talks with actual experts.

There are people who know way more than that guy.

Why listen to him?

We hear our mechanic, and question him.

We hear our financial advisor and question her.

We read op-ed pieces or watch the news,

and question if it is just another back channel

that is being used to get to us, to manipulate us

or whether it is fake news, or a bad actor.

We read reviews, of the restaurant, the hotel, the movie,

and we question them.

We do this because we know stories of people who shouldn't have listened.

We know all too well,

stories of people who should've questioned authority.

People who ended up paying too much,

or didn't get their problem solved,

or were taken down the garden path.

We know that questioning authority

and a touch of mistrust

or a healthy dose of mistrust

can actually serve us very, very well.

Questioning authority can protect us

from abuse of power,

from actions taken in ignorance,

from manipulation and unwarranted trust.

So where do we find authority then?

What allows us to trust and submit to another's opinion?

It could be who it is telling you.

The financial person was referred to you by a friend.

The friend seems happy with her.

It could be experience that has grown into trust.

Your doctor has got it right almost all of your time with her.

It could be sheer power requires you to submit.

The officer has a pad and pen and has handed you the ticket.

It's no longer a negotiation.

It could be knowledge that allows you to recognize authority.

You yourself are trained or well read or have completed

what is being shown to you.

The reviewer is saying something you yourself know,

because you've been there too.

Trust, experience, power, knowledge,

these can lead us to recognize authority.

But authority for faith, while helped by these things,
needs more.

For almost by definition

faith is trust

apart from any authority.

Today we heard Paul directing and preparing his mentee Timothy.

Timothy was in Ephesus, a big cosmopolitan city.

The Manhattan, Paris, Beijing, Cairo of the day.

Timothy was responsible for leading the church there.

Paul told him this about the church.

I'm always amazed when I hear a text like this.

It is 2000 years old.

It reads like it was written yesterday.

“The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine,
with solid teaching.

Instead, to suit their own desires,

they will gather around them

a great number of teachers to say

what their itching ears want them to hear.

They will turn their ears away from the truth,
and turn aside to myths.”

It is pastor and author A.W. Tozer from the last century who wrote,
“What comes into our minds when we think about God
is the most important thing about us.”

He calls it the law of the soul.

Your life will move toward whatever it is you think about God,
however you envision God, describe God, think what God is like.

Whatever that one sentence is you say about God,
whatever the belief is that you hear running in your head
it will guide your direction, your steps
and can ultimately shape your life.

So if when it comes to God, you are

Unknowing. Uninformed. Unlearned.

You could be lead anywhere.

Without authority to lean into, to trust, to guide.

You could be lead anywhere

Without authority for your faith you could be lead to places like,

There is no God.

Grab what you can before you die.

Or some other way people will tell you

is a wise way to think about life.

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

You want to be sure the right things are coming to mind.

Especially in a context where we are always questioning authority.

Where will we find authority for the life of faith?

Let me give you an example of how this can unfold.

It is the belief of some, that financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God for us.

They will say that with positive faith, positive speech,

speaking out and claiming the blessings,

and with donations to religious causes

you can prompt God to bless you

and increase your material wealth.

It's called the prosperity gospel.

Think about how that belief translates into behaviour.

If you are a preacher who is teaching that

God wants to bless you financially,

and that you only have to have enough faith,

believe hard enough

and give to causes to prompt a return blessing from God,

If you are the preacher,

what do you need to be driving to church

to show the church this is true

to show that God has blessed you?

This is how we have churches in developing countries,

where the preacher drives one of his several Mercedes to worship,

while the congregants, hungry and even greedy for blessing

hang from schoolbuses to get to service,

where they are then invited to give an offering,

then another offering, then another offering,

until their wallet is empty,

and Brinks trucks are brought in to take away the offering.

It sounds exploitive.

And it is.

Where is the authority for this?

The congregants' hunger for blessing

and I would dare say at times, greed,

and poor theology makes them vulnerable.

There are people who,

because of their belief that God wants their financial prosperity,

and their financial prosperity,

serves as a sign of God's favour,

who because of their own uninformed thinking

and lack of knowledge,

have been willingly lead

to a dramatically unhelpful place.

They recognized and submitted to an authority

when they should have questioned it.

But questioned it and measured it against what?

In the Christian faith, as a follower of Jesus,
our authority, is Scripture, the Bible.

And if those leaning into the prosperity gospel
had leaned into the Bible instead
simply knowing that Jesus said,
would challenge the authority of the preacher in the Mercedes.

“Whoever wants to be my disciple
must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.
For whoever wants to save their life will lose it,
but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”

Simply knowing how Jesus answered the rich young ruler.

“One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have
and give to the poor,
and you will have treasure
in heaven.

Then come, follow me.”

If this had come to mind when a preacher said,
 put more in the plate and God will multiply it,
If they could call to mind that
Jesus had said nothing about a house with a yard,
 a comfortable bank account,
 and a nice car and vacation or any of that,
 well they would have found
 the trust, experience, power, knowledge,
 that would guide and protect them
 in a life of faith.

Paul told Timothy.

‘The time will come when people
will not put up with sound teaching.

The evil and fakers will go from bad to worse,
 deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you,

I love this phrase, they will do what they do.

But as for you,

continue in what you have learned and become convinced of,
because you know those from whom you have learned it,
and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures,
which are able to make you wise for salvation
through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful;
for teaching, rebuking, correcting
and training in righteousness,
that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped
for every good work.

Scripture is useful

For teaching, rebuking, correcting
and training in righteousness.

It is God-breathed.

It is the same breath that God breathed into Adam
and brought him to life.

It is the same breath that God breathed into the dry bones in Ezekiel
and brought them back to life.

The Bible has authority.

And it brings life.

The Bible is a place for trust, experience, power, and knowledge,

One of my most important lessons in seminary

came in my Old Testament class.

It has stayed with me my whole ministry.

We were at a point in our training where we had been exposed

to quite a bit of interpretative theory and critical methods

that can be used when reading Scripture.

There is textual criticism.

Criticism here being used

in the sense of making thoughtful evaluation,

not just complaining.

There is philological criticism.

Literary criticism.

Tradition criticism.

Form criticism.

Redaction criticism.

Historical criticism.

Reader response criticism.

Canonical criticism.

There was a time where I could pass the exam

to explain what all these were,

and could use the methods.

Which actually, I still do at times.

My Old Testament professor, knowing we had been exposed

to all these methods of biblical criticism

gave us what sounded like a trick assignment.

He assigned us one of the Psalms.

I still remember, it was Psalm 95.

The assignment was write and to answer the question,

‘What does it say?’

Hands went up everywhere.

What do you mean by, ‘What does it say?’

What critical method should we use?

Do you want commentary?

Should we use commentaries?

How long does the paper need to be?

He simply repeated to us

“I want you to hand in as your assignment ‘what it says’.”

My fellow students went crazy.

Psalm 95 is only 11 verses.

They handed in 20 page papers.

They invoked the leading theologians and

biblical scholars.

They divided up the Psalm

into parts that some thought one person wrote,

and parts someone else must have written,

because they were so different.

They wrote a lot about the Psalm.

They wrote about the Psalm.

But the assignment was,

‘What does it say?’

Maybe it's the German in me.

But I followed the instructions.

I handed in 'what it said'.

It really only took a couple of pages.

I basically repeated the Psalm in my own words.

I was nervous handing it in.

My paper fluttered onto the professor's desk.

Some of my fellow students' papers landed with a thud.

I thought, 'uh oh'. I'm toast on this one.

When they were handed back,

those whose papers had landed with a thud,

well they didn't do so well.

I did fine.

The professor said to us,

you want to be pastors,

if you are going to preach,

if you are going to counsel,

if you are going to teach,

if you are going to shepherd,
you will first and always need to know what the Bible says,
what it actually says,
not what someone thinks it says,
what you thought you remembered it said,
or what it should have said.

You need to know what it says.

What does it say?

Truth is. For many. We don't really know.

For many. The only Scripture they will read or hear,
happens for about 3 minutes on Sunday morning.

One quick shot.

So we end up not really knowing what it says.

So people have trouble finding the verses in the Bible like

'Hate the sin, love the sinner.'

or 'Forgive and forget.'

or 'This too shall pass.'

or 'To thine own self be true.'

Which they won't find because they aren't in the Bible.

Who are you listening to?

Whose authority are you recognizing?

What are you using to guide your faith?

Make the Bible your authority.

In your journey you've likely seen the phrase somewhere,

'Love is love.'

And we all say, yes, that is great, so very profound.

Love is love.

By what authority do we submit to that sentence?

Our own?

The person saying it?

The culture?

Compare how the Bible speaks to and about love.

Love is patient, love is kind.

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

Love does not dishonour others,

it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered,

it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails.

Love is quite a bit more than a circular statement 'love is love'

that takes you nowhere.

Love is something that calls us out of ourselves.

It calls us to be more.

It calls us to greater character.

The Bible says,

This is how we know what love is:

Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

This is love: not that we loved God,

but that he loved us and sent his Son

as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Dear friends, since God so loved us,
we also ought to love one another.
God is love.

Who will you listen to in matters of faith?
The Bible can give you so much more.

In the movie *Walk The Line*,
a movie about Johnny Cash,
there is an opening scene from Johnny's youth.

The family is very poor,
picking cotton for a living.
Johnny shares a rough bedroom
and the bed,
with his older brother Jack.

Having been listening to the radio,
Johnny, whom his brother calls J-R,
jumps into bed
and asks one of those late at night, intimate questions

of his older brother.

“Jack?”

“Hmm”

“How come you’re so good?”

“I’m not so good.”

“You pick five times more cotton than me.”

“I’m bigger than you.”

“You always do your chores.”

“Not always.”

“You know every story in Scripture.”

“You know every song in Mama’s hymnal.”

“That’s not the same. Songs are easy.”

“Not for me.”

“There’s more words in the Bible than in ‘Heavenly Highway Hymns’

To which with amazing depth of insight, Jack responds,

“If I’m gonna be a preacher,

I gotta know the Bible JR.

Front to back...

you can’t help someone if you can’t tell them the right story.”

You can't help someone if you can't tell them the right story.

Where do you find the authority for your faith?

For your decisions in your life?

For how you conduct yourself?

For what it is you think about God

and where those thoughts take you?

In a world that too easily goes adrift,

that can easily be taken advantage of,

we need to question authority.

Then we need to measure it against this book.

A book that is God-breathed.

A book that brings life.

A book that has survived and thrived for millennia,

sustaining the saints and when respected and followed,

brings wisdom, compassion, freedom, and generosity, and

reconciliation and life.

We need to study this book.

We need to know this book.

We need to understand this book.

We need to know what it says,
so we can lean into and on its authority.

Paul wrote to Timothy and he writes to us.

He's pretty straightforward

and there really is no mystery in what he says if you pay attention.

“As for you,

continue in what you have learned and firmly believed,
knowing from whom you learned it,
and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings
that are able to instruct you for salvation
through faith in Christ Jesus.

It is inspired by God and useful

for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness.

Know it, recognize it, live it.

Amen.