



# Pastor Ken's Sermon

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SERMON – 19<sup>TH</sup> PENTECOST

II TIMOTHY 3:14-4:5

OCTOBER 16, 2022

“OVERHEARING GOD”

*“God said to Moses... “go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, the Lord, the God of your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has appeared to me saying...I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt.””* This is how it’s done and what it is for...God says to someone...say to someone...and say this! I could give you a hundred examples of a verse like this from the Bible. II Timothy 3:16 tells how people who hear God should regard and understand what he says. It serves as a guide for how to read and what to expect from God’s word.

People ask; *“what is God like”,* and *“how do we know this?”* The answer is *‘we know God through his Word.’* That’s how Israel learned about God. Moses knew nothing of God till God spoke to him on Mount Sinai. Moses was born into a Jewish home but from infancy raised by Egyptians. He knew nothing of God till God spoke to him – witness his question in Exodus 3:14, which went pretty much like this...*when I go to Egypt and the people ask me, who shall I say you are?*

This then is how we should regard the Bible, God telling us who he is so we know what God is like, and understand what we are like without God. *“All Scripture is breathed out by God, and is profitable for teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness”* is how Paul says it. He makes deliberate use of the word “breathed” to connect us to the story of creation, when “God breathed” and all that was formless and empty changed, and became living, good, beautiful, useful, productive.

Apart from God, we are formless and empty. I know that sounds harsh – even judgmental, but that is the sense of Paul’s words to Timothy. Remember, Timothy was a teacher of the church charged with training other teachers, who would in turn teach members of churches – God’s people. *“Say to the people of Israel”* of the Old Testament became *“say to the church”* in the New. Paul says say it all – it is to our benefit. Even, and perhaps most especially, the parts we don’t like.

It is true, when God spoke to Moses and told him to speak to Israel, he was speaking to people in trouble. But trouble is more than physical danger. God spoke through Moses to people enslaved to Pharaoh king of Egypt. God’s word has continued to give hope to oppressed people when and where they are found. But God speaks all the time to people enslaved to sin. If we don’t believe that, then the very words we speak at the start of our worship each week are meaningless. But when we speak them, and as we mean them, God’s word saves us. What is God like? God is kind and gracious to people who by nature are not. God rescues people in spiritual trouble and shows them how to live that they may stay out of it.

John Calvin famously said, *“our knowledge of God is unbreakably linked to our knowledge of ourselves.”* People now days want to define themselves in every manner imaginable- no sphere of life it seems is outside the claim *“this is my truth.”* But Christians are people who have always said God defines us. The first definition the word of God supplies about us *“we are sinners.”*

The second, and far more consequential is *"I am forgiven, I've been rescued from sin...I am a Christian."* Not surprisingly the Bible that claims ultimate truth is not faring well these days. Yes, I admit words like that of John the Baptist – *"you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee the coming wrath"* or Jesus' similarly blunt *"unless you too repent you will perish"* have never worn especially well among folks.

But surveys now tell us that even among Christians, 1 in 6 say the Bible is little more than a *"collection of fables, legends, and moral precepts written by man."* But what does Paul say – the Bible is *"breathed out by God."* About 1 in 4 Christians say the Bible is the literal word of God – and literal is a term that can get out of hand pretty easily – meaning to some *"an exact history"* of what it reports, to others *"the truth of God conveyed with literary conventions appropriate to the text."* Case in point – when the bible says God is our shepherd or that Jesus is the door of the sheep, we mean God looks after us and Jesus is the exclusive entry point to God.

Most Christians read and accept the bible as the inspired word of God – *"inspired"* being shorthand for *"breathed out by God."* In our Lutheran tradition, we say that means the bible is *"the only rule and norm according to which all teaching and all teachers are to be evaluated and judged"* - essentially the same thing Paul said to Timothy! So then, we might ask this question – what is it that makes the Bible *"holy?"*

Martin Luther said, *"dismiss your opinions and feelings, and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things...in order that you may find that divine wisdom which God here lays before you in such simple guise as to quench all pride."* He went on to say, *"here you will find the swaddling clothes and manger in which Christ lies."* This then is how we know the Bible is holy - it shows us Jesus, it shows us what God is like - kind and merciful to a people like us who are not.

Yes, the bible contains mysterious writings, it records events and cultures and phenomena strange to us and it makes claims about the world and upon us that voices around us and within resist. But then again, grace is strange to people like us. Sure, you can argue a six-day creation makes no sense from a scientific point of view. But tell me friend, does God's forgiveness make sense from a human point of view?

Not only do we tend not to be forgiving – we tend not to see the need to be forgiven. Apart from God's word, its teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness words – that is to say, apart from Jesus, we are tempted to say we have no sin. Lest you forget – and it's been close to half an hour now, if we say that we deceive ourselves. Apart from Jesus we are tempted not to see ourselves as sinners but as victims. Now the Israel God rescued through Moses was a victim, but your trouble is your bondage to sin from which you cannot free yourself.

So God breathed through his word what he wants you to hear, because God makes holy what God speaks to. And through his word he speaks to you. What is God like? God is kind and loving to people who are not. So, he speaks to them, to you, for your own good and his glory. Your salvation, your forgiveness, you being transformed into the likeness and image of his Son is *"for the praise and glory of God"* and that you may be complete, equipped for the good you were created to do. AMEN