

# McCabe United Methodist Church

March 11, 2018

***Half-Truths Series: "God won't Give You More Than You Can Handle"***

Sermon on 2 Timothy 3:14-17

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Good Morning Church!

I'm excited that we have this chance to worship together again as we continue in this Lenten Journey. In worship we're thinking about some of these statements we sometimes accept at face value, yet we wrestle with them because sometimes, in different situations, they can feel or be perceived as hurtful. As followers of Jesus we're mindful that making disciples is about helping people meet the Living Christ instead of pushing them away from Him.

Let's pray:

*Mighty and Merciful God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations on each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. You alone are our Rock. You alone are our Redeemer. Amen.*

Do you know what I mean when I say a Texas Longhorn? The Texas Longhorn is a breed of cattle. It has horns that can measure up to 6 feet from tip to tip.

A few years ago my mom and aunt were cleaning some things out when they found a small box. I'd heard stories about the box, but I hadn't seen it, until recently. I looked in the box and sure enough. It was my grandpa's glass eye. When my grandpa was a young man living in Western ND, he got gored by a bull. I always imagined it to be a Texas Longhorn. In the process, he lost his eye.

I share this because some might say, based on Matthew 5:29, that my grandpa's eye caused him to sin so he lost it. After all, Jesus said: If your eye, even your good eye, causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

While everyone might not agree, others would say that my Grandpa didn't lose his eye because of God's retribution. For example, respected Biblical scholar Warren Weirsbe would say my grandpa losing an eye was more likely the result of an accident between an animal and a human.

Weirsbe writes that this passage speaks to the brokenness we each bring in our human hearts. Jesus isn't talking about a **physical** self-harming surgery that gouges out an eye. Instead, Jesus is talking about a **spiritual surgery**. Jesus is talking about a cleansing of the heart.

Today we wrestle with this idea that God says it. I believe it. That settles it. God says it, or the Bible says it. It sounds simple, but it's not always as easy as it sounds. When we approach Scripture, we must approach it 'seeking to hear God's voice.' It's not faithful to read the Bible to put our own words in God's mouth.

Throughout history, the Bible has been used to justify and oppose segregation and the death penalty. Over time, the Bible has been used to oppress and to raise up women. The Bible has been used to support and oppose war, political candidates, immigration, economics, and so much more.

Did you know that the Methodist Episcopal Church, a precursor to the United Methodist Church, split over the interpretation of certain Bible passages? In the 1840's, people took the Bible and used it to justify slavery, while others used the Bible to oppose slavery. People were reading the same Bible and hearing God say different things.

Hear for example Leviticus 25:44-46 (NLT). The author of Leviticus writes:

<sup>44</sup> "However, you may purchase male and female slaves from among the nations around you. <sup>45</sup> You may also purchase the children of temporary residents who live among you, including those who have been born in your land. You may treat them as your property, <sup>46</sup> passing them on to your children as a permanent inheritance. You may treat them as slaves, but you must never treat your fellow Israelites this way.

Some might say: well that's Old Testament and I'm a New Testament person.

And we hear part of the Apostle Paul's letter to the people in Ephesus. It's in the New Testament. This Scripture was used to justify the buying and selling of men and women as property.

In Ephesians 6:5-8, The Apostle Paul writes:

Slaves and Masters

<sup>5</sup> Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. <sup>6</sup> Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. <sup>7</sup> Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. <sup>8</sup> Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free.

These words were interpreted, and twisted, to say that the Apostle Paul was telling slaves to just accept their lot in life. Even though this was written before 100 A.D., in a different political and cultural climate, these words were used to rationalize the owning of slaves in the United States in the 1800's.

Others approached this same Scripture seeking to faithfully understand the writing, the intent and the circumstances of the author and the readers. In reading this Scripture

through the lens of Jesus, and considering the circumstances of the day and the purpose of the writing, we begin to understand this passage is saying: You know what? Life isn't always easy, but whatever our situation, we are God's children. We are representatives of Christ. This passage is saying: Jesus is our true Master, and we can serve him with everything we have, and with all that we do, regardless of our circumstances. God says it. I believe it. Sometimes it's not as simple as it sounds.

Friends, today almost every child grows up learning that the earth revolves around the sun. Remember the name Galileo? We used to think everything revolved around the earth. Then, in the 1600's, Galileo theorized that the earth wasn't the center of the universe. Galileo theorized that the earth rotated around the sun, and the Catholic Church labeled him a heretic for such a belief. In this case, the Catholic Church misinterpreted Scripture to correct Galileo of his perceived "wrong" thinking.

We still wrestle to faithfully interpret Scripture. Currently there are over 12 million United Methodists across the globe. Individually, and together, we are making a difference in the world as representatives of Jesus Christ.

At the same time, we're wrestling with certain passages of Scripture. We're especially wrestling with approaching Scripture in a faithful, humble way as we read in the Bible about human sexuality. People are reading the same Bible and adamantly believing God is saying different things through it.

In the next couple months, as a world-wide denomination, we're going to be wrestling with Scripture and how we humbly and faithfully approach it. We're wrestling with how we humbly and faithfully respond to each another. And we're wrestling with how we humbly and faithfully be the church together, even if we don't interpret certain passages of the Bible the same way.

In the beginning, the Bible explains that God created and longed to have a relationship with humanity. And right away we also discover that we are fully human. We do things. We say things that corrupt our relationship with God. We rebel against God and we hurt our brothers and sisters here on earth.

Sometimes we draw hard lines. Sometimes we stake our claims, and sometimes we use Scripture in ways that harm instead of heal.

Our doctrine As United Methodists does not say that Scripture has every answer to every single question that we might ever have. Our doctrine does say that we believe in the authority of Scripture and that Scripture is sacred. We refer to the Bible as the Word of God, and, that through the Bible, by the power of the Holy Spirit, faith is born and faith is nourished.

We say that through Scripture the living Christ meets us. We say that Scripture is the source for all that is necessary and sufficient for salvation. We also believe that we must read the Bible faithfully, and that it's unfaithful to read the Bible to make it say only

what we want. We can't choose verses and use them because we like them, and then decide we don't like other verses so we automatically reject these verses. When reading the Bible, we must seek to hear God's voice instead of reading it to put words in God's mouth.

As much as faithfully possible we must try to understand the context and the content of what is written. That's why we have Study Bibles, and footnotes in our Bibles. That's why we have commentaries, and concordances, and Bible dictionaries, and so much more.

God is saying it. We believe it. We want to be as sure as we can that we are hearing God's voice, instead of putting our words into God's mouth.

When I was in Israel a couple years ago, my eyes were opened when I saw what was called the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Remember the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm: Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil. Tradition says that the Valley of the Shadow of death is a path that runs at the base of some steep almost cliffs outside of Jericho. Except for around high noon, the path is covered in shadows or darkness. Tradition says that robbers would hide out in the shadows waiting to jump or rob people. For me, it adds a little extra perspective to the Psalmist writing: Yea though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil, for though art with me.

We must faithfully approach the Scriptures seeking to hear God's voice. As we approach Scripture we consider the author and the intent of the writing. We consider the reader and their circumstances. We consider the geography and the politics and the time and the culture as much as possible. Technically we call this exegesis and hermeneutics.

In contrast, exegesis and proof texting are considered dangerous and unfaithful. It can be dangerous to start with what we think the Bible should say, and then go looking for certain verses to support what we want to hear. This is the difference between listening for God's voice, God saying it, and putting words in God's mouth.

In this morning's Scripture, The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to a young believer. His name was Timothy. The Apostle Paul was helping to raise up, support, and unleash young Timothy into ministry.

Hear some of The Apostle's writing in 2 Timothy 3:14-17:

14But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. 15You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood.

(The Apostle Paul is writing to Timothy as one of Timothy's main mentors. He's writing about the Old Testament and the supporting materials. That's what they had to go by

for the Holy Scriptures at that time, right? Then, they faithfully and humbly added in their experiences meeting the living Christ).

Paul's letter to Timothy continues <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. (We faithfully approach Scripture to help us repent and refocus. Scripture) corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. <sup>17</sup>God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

A.J. Jacobs argues that if we are being absolutely transparent with ourselves, we each pick Scriptural priorities. We each prioritize certain Scriptures over other Scriptures. Take, just for example, the entire Book of Leviticus. Have you read through Leviticus recently?

The basic question then, if we might at least consider that we each prioritize certain Scriptures over others... If we're willing at least to consider this idea, then maybe the most important question we can ask ourselves is: Which Scripture are we prioritizing when we say: God says it. I believe it. That settles it. Which Scriptures are the right ones to prioritize as the most important.

Friends, I'm going to restate a line of Hamilton's when he says: love the Bible, because I do love the Bible. I read from it every morning. Reading the Bible has, and continues to, shape and change my life. And yes, when I'm honest with God and with myself, I wrestle with humbly and faithfully hearing how and what God is speaking to me through the Scriptures. I'm also aware there are times I am picking and choosing. So Part of my prayer is that I will humbly and faithfully approach Scripture so that when I am picking and choosing, I am doing it in a faithful way. I want to hear God's voice, instead of putting my words in God's mouth.

As I approach Scripture... I want to try to see life through the lens of Jesus. Part of my prayer is that when I fail in interpreting Scripture I will error on the side of Matthew 22: The Greatest Commandment: Loving God and loving neighbor with everything I have. When I fail at interpreting Scripture, I will error on the side of Matthew 28: The Great Commission: Making disciples of Jesus Christ. And when I fail at interpreting Scripture, I will error on the side of Luke 22: Jesus, after what we call the Last Supper, Jesus left the Upper Room. He went down the valley and started up the other side. He stopped in a garden, The Garden of Gethsemane, and he prayed to God saying: God I don't want to go to the cross. But ultimately, it's not my will God. May Your will be done...

So how about you? If you might error in interpreting Scripture, what might this look like for you?

It is my ongoing prayer for each of us that we will continue to learn the Bible and to hear God's voice. I pray that we will continue to grow and transform as followers of Jesus so we can grow closer and closer to having the same mind as that of Christ Jesus.

Let us pray...

*Dear God, we are so grateful for your mercy and grace. We are thankful for the Scriptures you've given us as a gift to help us know you and know your purpose and will. Mighty God, we give thanks for your life-saving work through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. By the power of your Holy Spirit help us to understand the Scriptures. Help us when we look at Jesus to see you. Give us the wisdom and courage to read the Scriptures and study them. Help us learn them and seek to be faithful to them as they align with Jesus and his teachings. May we approach the Holy Scriptures with humility and faithfulness. It's t's in the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.*