

The Bible is sufficient

2 Tim 3:14-17

I'd like to begin today by speaking about one of the most versatile tools you can have in your home. What do we call this? Duct tape! Apparently there is a saying in the world of engineering: if something is stuck but it's meant to be moving use WD40, but if something is moving and it's meant to be still, duct tape it! It really is one of the most versatile pieces of equipment you can have, suitable for all sorts of applications.

Duct tape is a standard piece of equipment for every NASA Mission, such is its versatility and usefulness. In 1970, when the Apollo 13 mission to the moon got into trouble, duct tape was a key ingredient in bringing the astronauts safely home. There's a scene in the Apollo 13 movie with Tom Hanks, where they use duct tape to fix their air filtering equipment. True story.

You may have seen the TV show *Mythbusters*, they've confirmed a number of myths surrounding duct tape. They've been able to confirm that you can use duct tape to suspend a car in mid air and to repair aeroplane wings. According to the Wikipedia article on duct tape, it can even be used as a remedy for warts! That's not an application I suggest you explore. But who would have thought that the one simple piece of equipment could be applied in so many different ways, that if you were ever to find yourself in a difficult spot, then a roll of duct tape would be sufficient to get you out of trouble.

Some years ago I met a Mongolian woman who had become a Christian, and she was telling me that when she was investigating the Christian faith She found it hard to comprehend that Christians are people of the one book. "When you finish a book you move on and read another!" She thought, "Why do you keep going back to the one book?" And then she heard that some Christians go to theological colleges where they spend entire degrees studying the one book! "This doesn't make sense!" she thought.

But it's true, isn't it? We do order our lives around the one book, and in this series of talks we've been exploring why that is. One reason is because this book is inspired by the Holy Spirit; it's authored by God himself! So if we are searching out who God is and if we desire to know who we are in relation to him, then this is the book that will guide our understanding. And today we're seeing another aspect as to why we afford this book such a prominent place; it's because we Christians believe that the Bible is *sufficient*. Even though it's only one book, the Bible contains enough; enough for us to know who God is, enough for us to know how we are to relate to him. In the same way that a roll of duct tape was enough to bring those astronauts home on Apollo 13, so too the Bible contains all we need to bring us home to God. This is what we mean when we say the Bible is sufficient.

The classic Bible text regarding the sufficiency of Scripture is 2 Timothy 3:14-17. I guess you could say that this is a classic Bible text about Scripture full-stop! And as we begin in verse 14, we hear Paul recapture some of the ground that we've covered already. He says to Timothy But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of. What has Timothy learned and become convinced of? Well, in chapter 1 Paul has been speaking about the message of the gospel: the message that Jesus is the Savior who has destroyed death, bringing light and immortality. This was the message that Paul preached, this was the message that Paul passed on to Timothy, this was the message that Paul wrote down, this was the message that became the backbone of the New Testament. And what is Timothy to do with this message? Paul simply says "stick with it!" Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of. It's not a hard instruction, "Stick with the message" Earlier on in the letter Paul uses words like *keep* and *guard*. It's the same idea. "Don't change the message, Timothy. Don't add to it, don't subtract from it, just stick with it!"

We see the dangers of not sticking with the message each night on Masterchef, don't we? To impress those judges you need to stick with the recipe, you need to stick with what's on that piece of paper. You leave an element out, then the dish is ruined. Or perhaps you over cook the dish or have too much spice or seasoning, that's another way to stuff it up. This happened to me the first time I tried to cook a curry for my friends. I got one of those Patak's jars, and the instructions called me to add cream. I was a little tight on money so I thought, "I'll just make it without the cream, it will be healthier that way". Well, what a disaster! So bitter! I had to throw it all out and ended up wasting more money than if I'd just bought and added the cream in the first place. You need to stick with what's written.

But what is it about these words that make them worth sticking with? Why is this recipe for life the one worth reading? Paul gives two reasons, the first is there second part of v14: because you know those from whom you learned it. Paul is asking Timothy to think about the people from whom he learnt the gospel. Are they trustworthy? Paul has in mind Timothy's mother Eunice and his Grandmother, Lois. Timothy knew that they weren't in the business of tricking him and that they would only want to teach what was useful and loving.

Paul also has himself in mind; he was Timothy's teacher. This touches on one characteristic of the Bible that we've already seen in this series, how the New Testament is *apostolic*; it has its origins in the ministry of the *apostles*, those men who saw and heard Jesus in the flesh. Paul is trustworthy because he saw and heard from the risen Jesus himself.

And not only that, but as a teacher Paul lived out the things he taught and he was willing to pay a huge personal cost for his teachings. Cast your eyes back to verse 10: You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹ persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Paul is saying "My life is backing up what I say, I'm no hypocrite, I am willing to suffer for the truth of

what I believe". So it's the trustworthiness of the messengers that commends the message.

But the character of those who teach us isn't the only reason to stick with the gospel message of the New Testament, in v15 Paul points Timothy to what he calls the Scriptures (by which he means the Old Testament). The message about Christ is a message that fits in with the Old Testament. It's in the Old Testament that we find prophecies about Jesus, it's in the Old Testament that we find promises which are fulfilled in Jesus, and Paul is saying to Timothy, "You know the Old Testament, and you know that the story of Jesus fits in with those Scriptures perfectly".

We spoke a little bit about this last week, but notice also how Paul mentions the fact that Timothy knew these scriptures from infancy. We spoke about how the Scriptures are clear and understandable, so much so that a child can know them. There was that great quote from Pope Gregory the Great: "The Bible is shallow enough for a child to wade in but deep enough for an elephant to swim in." This is a challenge to parents and grandparents to ensure that you are teaching your children and grandchildren the Bible. It's not just for adults! If you weren't here last week then pick up this list of ten ways to read the Bible with your children, with some recommended resources on the back. It's also a challenge for us to be supportive of and perhaps be involved with our ministry to children here at church. Wouldn't it be great if the next generation can say "I have known the Scriptures from infancy!"

But Paul's main point is to encourage Timothy to continue on with this knowledge. How many things have you continued on with from childhood? If you were to rumble through your garage, how many failed childhood interests would you stumble across? Roller skates, tennis racquets, musical instruments...Don't let the scriptures be found among the dusty relics of decades past as something you were interested in once but have since put to one side. Continue on with what you have learnt and become convinced of.

And that which you have learnt is enough to take care of every spiritual need that you might have. From the second half of v15 Paul explains the details of the Bible's sufficiency. And the Bible is sufficient in two ways; first of all, the Bible is able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Every religion is aiming to somehow solve the problem of how we get to heaven. They all admit that there's a problem, but they all offer different solutions. The *Muslim* would say that following the Koran and obeying its teachings *might* lead Allah to have mercy on you and so following the rules is your best bet. *Hinduism* would have you strive to gain a better reincarnation and so if you make enough jumps up the chain instead of down the chain then one day you'll be able to rejoin Brahman – the ultimate universal reality. *Buddhism* says that it's your desires that are the problem and so if you can rid yourself of those desires then you'll gain enlightenment

But Christianity says that the secret to salvation is found in this book, and that the secret is faith in Christ Jesus. "Faith in Christ Jesus", that's a different prospect to what the other religions offer. The other religions all require us to do the hard work: submission to Allah; striving for reincarnation; ridding ourselves of desire. But the Bible says "you don't need to look to yourself, you just need to trust in Jesus and let him do the saving!" Salvation is gift from God, one that he simply asks us to receive.

And this story is all the way through the Bible. In Old Testament scriptures that Timothy knew from his childhood we have the story of the Exodus. God's Old Testament people, the Israelites, they are enslaved under the cruel Egyptians but they cry out to God and he hears them and he saves them. The story is very clear, it's God who does the work, not the Israelites. And so this pattern is continued into the New Testament where the enemy is not Egypt but something more invisible: Sin and death and evil and the devil, they all conspire together to keep us from God, a conspiracy that we happily buy into because we cannot choose to do anything different. Who will rescue us from this mess? Thanks be to God who delivers us through Jesus Christ!

This is why I think Christianity makes more sense than the other religions on offer. They all agree that we humans have a problem, but the answer they give is for humans to try harder. The hope they offer can feel a little bit like a car stuck in the mud. If you rev your engine the wheels spin but you end up sinking deeper. What you need is for someone to come and pull you out, and that's a message that you will only find in the Christian Bible, salvation is found through faith, not in yourself, but in Jesus Christ.

And once we have been pulled out from that mess, we'll want to make sure that we start driving our vehicle on more solid roads. And the Bible can help us with that too. Look at vs 16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

A couple of times already in this series we've found ourselves speaking about the Holy Spirit. The Bible and the Holy Spirit act together as a duo. We learnt in our first week that behind the prophets and apostles we have the Holy Spirit who is the ultimate author of Scripture. Paul says the same thing here when he says that all Scripture is God-breathed. And last week we spoke about how the Holy Spirit is not only an author but a teacher, and again, Paul repeats this aspect of the Spirit's work in these verses; it is through the Bible that the Holy Spirit teaches rebukes corrects and trains us as we seek to live as God's people.

I remember one of the poorest teachers I had was my high school physics teacher. He was a lot of fun in the classroom but when we got into the HCS exam we saw questions the type of which we had never seen before. He hadn't taught us the whole syllabus! His lessons in the classroom were not sufficient! But that's not the problem we have with the Bible. Everything God wants us to think about is

contained here in the Scriptures so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

It also follows that if the Bible is silent on a matter, and if we cannot make reasonable conclusions about an issue based on what we do have, then we have freedom to act according to our own conscience! You see knowing that the Bible is sufficient is helpful not only in understanding what is spiritually necessary but it's also good for determining what is excess to requirements. For years I was guilty of overpacking my suitcase when I was travelling. I got to the stage where I was sick of unpacking clothes that I never wore, so now I pack only what is necessary. This means I don't need to use check in, so the flight is cheaper, and I don't have to wait at the baggage carousel.

The Bible's sufficiency means that you don't have to carry excess spiritual baggage. You don't have to worry about meeting God half-way with your own works, You don't have to worry about pleasing God with rules made up by people. When we had Theo at The San, there was no meat in the cafeteria. That's because it's a Seventh Day Adventist hospital, so they're vegetarian. That's not a Biblical idea, that's a human idea made up by Ellen White in the the 19th century. It's one extra thing you have to worry about, and Paul would say it's a needless worry. Why? Because this is all you need to be thoroughly equipped. It makes for a lighter journey!

And I think it's the confidence of knowing there is nothing else we need to know which is the great pastoral blessing of the Bible's sufficiency. Psychologists these days speak of the FOMO phenomenon: Fear of Missing Out. In a world where there is so much going on and where we are so connected to everything that is happening we can become distressed that we are missing out on something, and so we chase our tails keeping up with everything on the news or on our Facebook feed. The same thing can happen spiritually. There are lots of spiritual options out there, and we can worry that we might not have all our bases covered. Even within the Christian tradition there are some who say that you need more than the Bible, that you need a verbal word from God or that you need a particular experience or the teachings of a particular person. But what does our passage say? The Bible's message is sufficient. It's enough.

When the Apollo 13 mission got into trouble one of the engineers back in mission control said that as soon as he heard that there was duct tape on board he knew that they were home free. He knew they had all they needed to do the job. And so it is with the Scriptures. But Duct tape is versatile, more versatile than what you think. I had a friend at university who owned a wallet made completely out of Duct tape. The Bible is all you need, but it can do a lot. Make sure you explore all that it has to offer.