

**"Jesus Specifically Addresses
Saint Mark's Members"
Sermon on 2 Timothy 3:14–4:2
Weekend of August 26, 2007
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
Pastor Karl Walther**

Your Word, O Lord, is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path! Amen.

Friends in Christ: Suppose God himself planned personally to address us at Saint Mark's today.... What exactly would he say?

Well, let me suggest to you that it would probably sound much like this—Second Timothy, chapter three, verse fourteen, through chapter four, verse two:

As for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you 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, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

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: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction.

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

Introduction & Background

If God himself planned personally to address us at Saint Mark's today, what exactly would he say? ...Well, our first reaction would probably be to answer, "How could we possibly know?! We are not God. He can read every heart here, and he would know exactly what to say. But how could we possibly know?!"

All of that is true, of course. But it's also what we call a "cop out". You see, I asked a fairly answerable question. What exactly would God say to us today at Saint Mark's? ...Well, how is it that God speaks to people? It's in his Word! See, we can know the mind of God—at least: in part, at least: as much as he'd like us to know it. In fact, it is our responsibility to know the mind of God, because he reveals it to us in his Word.

So, now that we have it narrowed down to one book, the Bible, let's get it narrowed down further to a single passage. If God himself planned personally to address us at Saint Mark's today, what exactly would he say? ...Well, given the long history of our congregation, given the fact that many of the people I see in front of me have been Christians for a quite awhile, and given the fact that there are very many members of Saint Mark's that I don't see in front of me, I'd like to nominate the passage I just read to you: *Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of....*

See, as God looks down at Saint Mark's from his throne on high, we know he is pleased that we continue to baptize many people—both adults and children. We know he is pleased that we continue to offer Christ's body and blood to many qualified people for their forgiveness. He is pleased with our worship services—inasmuch as we proclaim his Word, convict you personally of your sins, convince you personally of your Savior Jesus,

and connect you to him to live an entirely new life. God is pleased with our commitment to Christian education; he's pleased with our dear school, he's pleased when we offer what we can to those who are not at our dear school, and he's pleased with our many Bible Classes—again, inasmuch as they proclaim his Word, his Law and his Gospel.

But the one thing God is most displeased with is that so many don't take advantage of all these opportunities. We know he is especially angry that so many take advantage of none of them. For example, we can't doubt that God would look down at our worship services and say, "Where are all the people?!" At least half the adult members this congregation lists – yes, more than fifty percent! – don't worship here more than a few times a year, and usually less than that. The services are fine and the sermons are good – even a lot of times: excellent – but sin and Satan have people deceived. And God is also displeased when we have not loved these precious brothers and sisters of ours enough effectively to address their souls on the issue.

So, let's turn our attention to this Word from God. We'll find it reminding us that because Scripture is so very important, we will want to use Scripture diligently.

Scripture Is Very Important

God's Word to us today gave us three really serious reasons why Scripture is so important. Did you catch them?

- Well, first of all, how about Scripture's source? ...*All Scripture is God-breathed*, we read. In other words, when we hear the words of the Bible, when we read the words of the Bible, we are hearing and reading the words of God himself.

Think of it! That means that every week's worship services are an appointment ... with God! It means that a Bible Class or a devotion in class over in school is a date ... with God! It means that your daily reading in the Scriptures is a visit ... with God!

- Second: Scripture is important because of its character. ...*All Scripture is useful*, we read, *for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness*. Nothing is more useful than that!

So, if you had the chance to pick up a fully equipped computer for free, even including installation and instructions, would you do it? Probably. If you could pick up a nice, new car for free, would you do it? Oh, undoubtedly. Well, the Bible is much more useful! It doesn't just affect your life for the better, it changes you yourself for the better. So, pick it up and use it—for free!

- And finally, Scripture is important because of its results. *The Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*. Without Christ Jesus, we have no heaven. Without faith, we have no Christ Jesus. And without God's Word, we have no faith. So, we need this word from God to give us faith in Christ Jesus for eternal salvation.

If only we knew how happy Satan is to let us have our name on Saint Mark's membership list—as long as we don't attend here and listen, and trust Christ, and live. If only we knew how dangerous it is – maybe eternally, fatally dangerous – to give God our ears for an hour a week, but to give the rest of the world our ears for the other hundred sixty seven hours.

See, our poor souls need to hear weekly that Christ Jesus did well where we did poorly—and so, we are saved. Our fearful spirits need to see daily that Christ Jesus sent into oblivion our sins—and so, we are rescued. Our worried hearts need to know from God's Word moment by moment that Christ Jesus lives to plead for us—and so, we are forgiven. And only God's Word can do that!

We Will Use Scripture Diligently

So, the Bible is important because its source is God himself, it is characteristically useful, and it results in eternal salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All of that means that we want to use the Bible diligently. And again, this passage listed three ways to do that.

- First, we need to learn the Bible! *Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it....*

Learn what the Bible says! If you've never learned the Bible's message, join what we call a Bible Information Class here at church. Phone me anytime for details. If you rarely learn what the Bible says, begin to get to church regularly. If you do get to church regularly, get to a Bible class weekly also—or begin seriously to read the Scriptures on your own. And if you have questions, e-mail me or one of the other pastors. The Scriptures are important; so, learn them!

- Second, besides learning the Bible, we need to live its message. It is, after all, *useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

In other words, after you've read the Bible, put its message into practice! Pray to Jesus, and don't hesitate to tell others that you are praying to Jesus for them. Volunteer for a specific task here at your congregation. At work, when the other employees are complaining, be conspicuous by not joining them. Don't go out drinking with your friends – or without them! – anymore. Refuse to sleep with anyone to whom you're not married. Quit being judgmental. Quit being greedy. The Scriptures are important; so, live them!

- And third, besides learning and living the Bible, proclaim its message. *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.*

Why are we so reluctant to share the Scriptures? Anybody else can go ahead and spout the stupidest stuff in our society. Why can't we go ahead and – lovingly, respectfully, but unapologetically – share anything and everything that the Scriptures say?

“The only God is the Triune God—the Father, Son, and Spirit. Anyone not worshipping Him needs to learn to worship Him, or else he is an idolator and under the condemnation of hell.” We can say that! “God-given faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. Without it, people perish forever and ever in eternal hell.” We can say that! In fact, we have to say that! And how about one more example—just for good measure? “Any and every sexual impulse or action apart from the marriage of a husband and a wife – whether it's homosexual of any sort, or heterosexual, whether it's before, apart from, or after marriage – it's all a perversion. But we have help for you. When you acknowledge your wickedness, we can assure you: Christ Jesus has forgiven you!” We can say that! In fact, we must say that.

Conclusion & Action

So, if God himself planned personally to address us at Saint Mark's today, what exactly would he say?

On the one hand, it would go something like this, “I so love you! No more proof of that is necessary than that I sacrificed my Son for you. I am delighted that you listened to me today, and I look forward now to hearing your prayers.” And folks, I hope you see God's delight reflected on the faces of your pastors—both when you're in worship and out of worship.

On the other hand, God would add something like this, “Say, I’ve got a favor to ask of you—or more of a commission to give to you. That other half of the congregation that’s rarely or never here – they’re your family and friends, they’re your loved ones” – they’re also mine! – “ you go, reach them. Invite them to church with you. Tell them why it’s so very important. And then, when it comes time soon for your congregation – your pastors – to back up all the words with bold and loving actions, support them.”

You see, my friends, the time has come. After several years’ worth of more than a hundred thousand general invitations, after thousands of personal invitations by phone, and after hundreds and hundreds of visits, the time has come. Not so long from now, our bold and loving actions must match our words, in an effort finally to reach and to rescue as many precious individual souls as we can. And if you’d like to be in on the discussions how best to accomplish that, come to next month’s open forum on the subject.

Meantime, as we’ve heard this morning, *God himself is present. Christ Jesus will soon appear in his kingdom. He will judge the living and the dead.* Jesus’ body bled for our lost loved ones. And our hearts bleed for their souls. Let’s go reach them together! Amen.

Lord, how sweet are your words to our taste, sweeter than honey to our mouths!
Amen.