

Sermon October 19, 2025 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was a dusty monastery perched on the edge of the Sinai desert, where ancient secrets whisper through the windswept halls. In the mid-19th century, a German scholar named Constantin von Tischendorf embarked on a quest that would test his faith and endurance. Driven by a passion for the origins of the Bible, he traveled to St. Catherine's Monastery, seeking manuscripts that could shed light on the Scriptures' authenticity. What he found there began as a glimmer of hope but quickly spiraled into a harrowing ordeal, fraught with danger, deception, and the threat of irreplaceable loss—a loss that could shake the foundations of Christian belief itself. We'll return to his story in due time, for it mirrors the very heart of our text today from 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

Hear the Word of God: *"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*

At the core of this passage rings one profound truth: the inspiration and truth of Scripture. Paul urges Timothy—and us—to cling to the sacred writings, not as mere human words, but as the very breath of God Himself. This is no abstract doctrine; it's the foundation that anchors our souls amid life's tempests. The Greek word here for "breathed out by God" is *theopneustos*, a term that vividly captures how Scripture originates from the divine exhale, infused with God's life-giving Spirit. Just as God breathed life into Adam's nostrils in Genesis, so He breathes out His Word, making it alive, authoritative, and utterly true—capable of piercing the deepest recesses of our hearts, where doubt and despair lurk.

In a world swirling with doubts and distortions, this truth demands our attention. Skeptics in Tischendorf's era, much like today, questioned the Bible's reliability. Higher critics dissected texts, claiming corruption over centuries of copying, whispering that the words we cherish might be nothing more than faded echoes of human invention. Tischendorf, a devout believer with a scholar's mind and a pastor's soul, refused to surrender to such despair. He scoured libraries across Europe, piecing together fragments like a man assembling a shattered mosaic of his own faith. But his heart yearned for something ancient, something closer to the apostles' own hands—proof that God's breath hadn't dissipated into the sands of time. His journey led him to the arid slopes of Mount Sinai in 1844. There, in a basket of discarded parchments destined for the fire—yes, monks were burning old papers to heat their rooms, oblivious to the eternal flame they nearly extinguished—he spotted leaves of unparalleled

age. His pulse quickened as he recognized Greek uncials, the blocky script of early Christian scribes. But the monks, wary of outsiders, allowed him only a glimpse, granting 43 leaves as a reluctant gift. He rushed them back to Leipzig, publishing them as the Codex Friderico-Augustanus. Yet, this was just a taste; he knew more lay hidden, taunting him like a half-remembered promise from God.

Consider how this echoes the broader saga of Scripture's preservation. In archaeology, the unearthing of the Tel Dan Stele in 1993 stunned scholars. This ancient inscription from the 9th century BC mentions the "House of David," confirming the biblical king's historical existence against doubters who dismissed him as myth. Such finds aren't coincidences; they underscore the truth embedded in God's Word, like buried treasures surfacing to silence scoffers and stir the soul with awe at divine providence.

Back to Tischendorf: Obsessed, he returned in 1853, but the monastery yielded nothing new. Disappointment gnawed at him like a desert wind eroding stone. Was the full manuscript lost forever? Critics back home mocked his efforts, suggesting the Bible's text was a patchwork of errors, unreliable for doctrine or life—words that stung like barbs in his spirit. Tischendorf wrestled in prayer, his faith strained by the silence of those stone walls, questioning if his lifelong pursuit was a fool's errand. He pressed on, securing patronage from the Russian Tsar, and ventured back in 1859. Tension mounted as he befriended the steward, who one evening casually mentioned an old book wrapped in red cloth. Tischendorf's hands trembled as he unwrapped it: 347 leaves of the finest vellum, containing the entire New Testament and much of the Old, dating to the 4th century AD—the oldest complete Bible known. The parchment felt alive under his fingers, as if God's breath still lingered on the ink. But joy turned to peril; the monks grew suspicious, fearing loss of their treasure. Negotiations dragged on, laced with intrigue and veiled threats. Tischendorf smuggled parts out under cover of night, his heart pounding with the weight of what he carried—not just pages, but the potential vindication of Scripture's truth for generations.

Paul's words to Timothy cut through such uncertainty like a beacon in the storm. The sacred writings, he says, "*are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*" From childhood, Timothy knew these texts, taught by his mother and grandmother—tender hands passing on eternal truth. They aren't fables but God's blueprint for rescue, stirring the heart toward the Savior. And then: "All Scripture"—here the Greek *pas graphe* emphasizes every part, every scroll—is *theopneustos*, God-breathed. This isn't partial inspiration; it's total, making Scripture profitable for teaching truth, reproofing error, correcting wanderings, and training in righteousness. Why? So that we, as God's people, stand complete, equipped for every good work.

Yet, transformation often comes through trial, where the heart is laid bare. In church history, Augustine of Hippo grappled with skepticism until a child's voice urged, "Take up and read."

He opened to Romans 13:13-14: "Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Those God-breathed words pierced his heart like a divine arrow, flooding him with tears of repentance and joy, leading to conversion. Like a surgeon's blade wielded by a loving hand, Scripture reproveth and corrects, healing what sin has broken and awakening the soul to grace.

Exploration history offers another glimpse: David Livingstone, guided by the Great Commission's mandate in Matthew 28:19—"*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*"—ventured into the uncharted heart of Africa in the 19th century, trusting Scripture's call amid dangers and unknowns. Such faith in Scripture's truth propelled discovery, revealing God's vast creation and stirring wonder in the explorer's breast.

In Tischendorf's adventure, the emotional stakes reached their breaking point. As he negotiated, rumors swirled of rival buyers—unscrupulous collectors who might tear the codex apart for profit. The manuscript, now called Codex Sinaiticus, faced potential fragmentation or fire, its fragile pages a heartbeat away from oblivion. Tischendorf fell gravely ill, delayed by a raging fever in Cairo, his body wracked with pain as he lay in a dim room, sweat-soaked and alone. Doubts assailed him like demons in the night: Was this pursuit vain? Had he sacrificed family, health, and fortune for a mirage? Did God's Word truly endure, or had time eroded its purity, leaving believers adrift in a sea of uncertainty? His prayers turned to anguished cries, echoing the psalmist's lament: "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" He penned desperate letters, his hand shaking, pleading for aid from the Tsar, fearing that if he died there, the codex would vanish forever, and with it, a pillar of faith for the church. The air grew thick with despair; every delay felt like a nail in the coffin of hope.

Then, in a twist of providence that shattered the darkness like dawn breaking over Sinai, the Tsar intervened with imperial decree. The monks relented, and the codex was presented as a gift to Russia in 1869. Tischendorf's exhaustive comparisons revealed astonishing fidelity to other ancient texts, quelling critics and affirming the Bible's transmission across 1,500 years with minimal variance. As Tischendorf held the complete manuscript at last, tears streamed down his face—tears of exhaustion, relief, and overwhelming gratitude. His voice broke as he declared it a monument to God's faithfulness, a living testament that Scripture, against all odds, had been preserved by the divine hand that first breathed it forth. In that moment, his heart swelled with the realization that God's truth wasn't fragile parchment but an unbreakable promise, flooding his soul with peace that surpassed understanding. The tension resolved in triumph: Scripture, God-breathed and true, had been preserved by divine hand, not human whim.

Dear friends, this story isn't just history; it's a parable of our own lives, where doubts—personal crises, cultural shifts, intellectual assaults—threaten to engulf us like desert sands.

Yet, Paul's charge rings clear: Continue in what you've learned. The sacred writings, *theopneustos*, breathe God's life into us, wise unto salvation through Christ. They teach, reprove, correct, train—equipping us completely, mending our hearts as they shape our minds.

In summary, we've seen Scripture's divine origin as God-breathed, its comprehensive scope as all-encompassing, and its practical power for every facet of life. Through Tischendorf's ordeal and supporting echoes from archaeology, military resolve, church conversions, and exploratory boldness, we grasp its enduring truth.

And what powerful, spiritual work is Jesus doing in and for us through this? He, the living Word, inhabits these pages, drawing us into His salvation. By His Spirit, He illuminates truths that convict our hearts, mend our brokenness, and propel us into righteous living. Jesus equips us not for self-glory but for His kingdom's advance, making us complete in Him. In the quiet of doubt or the storm of trial, He breathes anew through Scripture, sustaining our faith, igniting our love, and securing our hope—turning our deepest despairs into triumphant joy. Thanks be to God for His inspired, true Word. Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.

Pastor Ron Breight Christ Lutheran Church Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

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