

February 9, 2020

2 Timothy 3:12-17

“Who says?” You know how to say it. Your brother says: “It’s your turn to take out the garbage.” What do you say? “Who says?” Your classmate says: “You have to go to the back of the line.” What do you say? “Who says?” Your mom and dad say: “It’s time to do your homework.” What do you say? You better not say, “Who says?” right? There’s a time to say: “Who says?” and there’s a time to nod your head, to believe and obey.

What time are we in now? I don’t mean right here and now, but in our world today, are we in a “Who says?” time? Or are we in a “just nod your head, believe and obey” time? Ever since the serpent started talking to Eve in the Garden of Eden, we’ve been living in a “Who says?” time, a time when we need to be careful about whom and what we believe. Before our lesson, Paul told Timothy much the same thing. In these last days we should expect fakes and frauds, liars, cheaters, and scammers. Some of those fakes and frauds, those liars, cheaters, and scammers will be out to get your money. Others are out for something more precious than your money; they’re out to get your heart and mind, to turn your heart and mind against God.

So how are we supposed to know? How are we supposed to know if it’s time to say: “Who says?” or if it’s time to nod and agree? When we’re hearing so many different things, so many new things, how are we supposed to know what to think and believe?

What did Paul tell Timothy? “**Continue in what you have learned ...**” Don’t get suckered in by the latest new idea. Don’t get suckered in by the latest new teacher, preacher, internet sensation. New isn’t always better. When you hear about some new and better way to live, some new and better way to love, some new and better way to believe, ask: “Who says?” [Let me go back to last week’s sermon, back to the Garden of Eden.] When someone tries to sell you on this new and better way to live and love, ask yourself: “Is this really new and better, or is this the devil trying to snooker me like the devil snookered Eve? If I go along with this, am I doing the Adam thing going along - going, going, gone from God?”

Timothy wasn't always sure of himself. But he didn't have to be sure of himself. We don't have to be sure of ourselves. We don't have to settle for self-confidence; we don't have to rely on gut-feelings. Paul pointed Timothy to something better than self, better than our gut-feelings. First, Paul pointed Timothy to some people he could trust: **“Continue in what you have learned ..., because you know those from whom you learned it.”** We know Timothy's teachers - his mom, his grandma, Paul himself. But Paul didn't just say: “Take our word for it.” Just like he didn't say: “Go with your gut; go with what feels right to you.” No, Paul pointed Timothy to the Bible. **“Continue in what you have learned ... 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.”**

I know some people think of this as a bunch of old ideas made up by a bunch of old men. Depending on what page they're looking at, they see beauty and wisdom - **“love your neighbor as yourself,” “do to others what you would have them do to you,”** and there's that cute Christmas story. But if they're on a different page, they see stories and myths that don't fit our science and history and archeology; they see old-fashioned ugliness that doesn't fit today's idea of right and wrong; they see what must be mistakes, proof that this is just a bunch of old ideas written by a bunch of old men. For hundreds of years, people have been trying to prove the Bible wrong, but time and again the Bible-critics are proved wrong. For thousands of years, people have been calling what's in here foolishness, but for just as long, what's in here has been changing hearts and lives for the better.

Why? This isn't just a book of old ideas made up by a bunch of dead, old men. This, all of this, is from God, God-breathed, inspired by God. Not like I might be “inspired” with this or that sermon idea and off I go. Not like a song-writer is inspired and off she goes. No, all Scripture is God-breathed, breathed into the writers by the Holy Spirit. Paul doesn't tell us how. But in a couple weeks, Peter will tell us how the Bible writers didn't make stuff up, they wrote what the Holy Spirit gave them to write.

That means this is the word of God. And because God is true and right, this is true and right. It doesn't mean that this will always make sense to us, or that we'll always find this agreeable. Isaiah tells us that God doesn't think the way that we think - oh, and by the way, that's a good thing. Paul tells us the message of God is foolishness to the world. Peter tells us that Paul can be hard to understand. And it's not just Paul. This last week in our Wednesday Bible study - we're in 2 Kings - one of our fellas asked: "What's the point of all this?" I think we all nodded in agreement, but we figured it out - no matter who and how many are against God, God will work his way; God will have his say; God will keep his promises.

His promise isn't that he will only tell us things we want to hear. His promise isn't that he will only do what we want him to do. No, his promise is that he loves us and that he has something better for us than life in this world.

Think about that. Isn't that amazing that he loves us? Think of a time God has said something you didn't like, a time God did something you didn't like. Think of how hurt, how angry, how frustrated we can get when God doesn't say or do what we want. Now think about how often you don't say and do what God wants, or how often you say and do what God doesn't want. Can you imagine how hurt, how angry, how frustrated God could be with us - with you and with me? But instead of staying stuck in his hurt, his anger, his frustration, God loves you. Instead of taking out his hurt, his anger, his frustration, his just judgment, on us, he found a way to work his justice without taking it out on us.

What did he do? He put his Son in our place; he sent his Son to the cross; and he took what we had coming and he took it out on Jesus. With Jesus, God doesn't see you doubting him, arguing with him. With Jesus, God sees you forgiven. With Jesus, God sees you right for life in heaven where there will be no hurt or heartache, no shame or guilt, no doubt or arguing, no wondering about right and wrong, no confusion about who we are, no confusion about how to love. Just life made right in the peace and love of God. With Jesus, that's what God has for you. Sounds good, doesn't it?

That's what this [Bible] is about. That's what this [Bible] offers. And something else. In here [Bible], God gives us his blueprints so we know what goes where in life. In here, God gives us his GPS so we know where we are, and how to go with God. In here, God gives us his AED machine to start our hearts. In here, God gives us his First Aid to heal our hearts. In here, God gives us his vitamins, his protein to make us strong. Yes, in here God gives us everything we need to be ready for life as the people of God. Who says? He says. Amen.