

2 Timothy 24-12-22a

Good morning. Greetings to all of those who are present and those who are joining us from afar. If you're visiting with us today, be sure and fill out a card.

You'll find it in the holder in the pew in front of you. Feel free to drop something in the plate when it comes by. The elders will be along, passing from one side of the pew to the other.

Be generous, it's Christmas. Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church.

This is the 22nd of December, 2024. We are continuing our study, unbroken, unabated, undeterred, undeflected, undistracted, in Second Timothy. And we're picking up at a very well-known passage, which is Second Timothy 3:16. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study, and we'll begin.

Father, thank you for this season. Thank you for the time we dedicate to expressing appreciation for your love and grace expressed in sending the Lord Jesus in the likeness of human flesh, and for His willingness to come and partake of our nature, and to give His life on the cross on our behalf, knowing as He came that He would be emptying Himself, taking on the form of a servant, and not retaining His divine glory. We thank You for the wonderful blessings that we have entered into as a result, that we are related to You through Him.

We have the gift and presence of the Holy Spirit. We have the wonderful truth of Your Word. We pray this morning, as we look at that truth, that Your Holy Spirit will bless it to each heart, help us to not only understand it, but to see how it applies, how it is pertinent.

In so doing, we can reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus, reflect the light of Your countenance, so that others will see it and be drawn to You through the Lord Jesus. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Rather than reading our passage, I think I would like you all to just say it with me. Second Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." This has been burned into the brains of many of us, having heard it at the beginning of any number of Bible classes, but it is one thing to recognize it. We quote it frequently. It is something else to actually have it make a difference, day by day, hour by hour, in the experience of human living.

So we are going to look at this in its context first and foremost. What does verse 15 say? You remember, this is where we left off last time. "From childhood you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for deliverance."

We are not saved from the lake of fire. We are not diverted from eternal condemnation to eternal glory by wisdom. What kind of salvation? Anytime you see the word salvation in Scripture, ask yourself the question, what kind of soteria is this? The study of salvation proper in systematic theology is called soteriology. It is based on the Greek word soteria or soterios, and the word Savior and many others derive from this. But very seldom, rarely, when you see the word salvation in Scripture, is it talking about what modern evangelical, post-modern evangelical Christianity speaks of. We think it is the conversion point at which I am no longer headed for the lake of fire, I have accepted the Lord Jesus as my Savior, I have placed my faith in Him, and now I am saved.

Many a hymn, many a song: "I am saved and I know that I am saved, saved, saved." Wonderful songs. But most of the time when you see the word salvation in Scripture, that is not what it is talking about.

I was tempted to extemporize on all of the things that Scripture does not say. You think about the Christmas season. I am going to extemporize now that I think about it.

You think about the Christmas season. How much Christmas celebration is there in the New Testament? We have two of the four Gospels. Only half of them give us an account of the Lord's birth. This information was not widely circulating in the days that Paul and Peter and John were establishing churches and training pastors. You look in vain to find anything related to Christmas in the pastoral epistles, First Timothy and Titus, that we are studying.

Why is that? People, I think, are desperate for something to celebrate, and so now Christmas starts in October. Before the pumpkins come off the lawn and before the trick-or-treaters have disappeared with their ghastly costumes, people already have their Christmas lights up, and three months out of the year are dedicated to Christmas. About a month and a half is dedicated to Easter, and we just kind of left foot, right foot between these major Christian holidays. But the Bible does not emphasize the celebration of the birth of Christ.

It celebrates the fact, and there is a great anticipation of the coming of the Messiah and the coming of the Savior in the Old Testament. There is a detailed account of that coming in Matthew and in Luke, and everything that follows because of that coming, primarily the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross, His earthly ministry and teaching, and His commissioning of the apostles to train and make disciples through the inspired Word, obviously is founded upon the coming of the Lord Jesus.

But in the same way that if you graduate college, if you finish a certification course, a training course, some other milestone, what is the emphasis? Now that you have your master's degree, now that you have your doctorate, now that you have your certification and you are licensed to practice or you are qualified to do a particular job, you have finished the course. I can't remember—I remember throwing my cap in the air at Annapolis, but I don't remember the date. Every year when it comes around, I don't celebrate the date when I became an officer in the Naval Service. I don't remember.

We are much more interested in the potential and in looking forward, having passed that milestone. And in the same way, Scripture doesn't encourage the church to spend a lot of time celebrating Christmas. In fact, you look in vain. Paul doesn't say much about the birth of Christ. He refers to it, but he doesn't go into any of the Gospel details. He doesn't draw inferences or applications from it as we so often do.

And one of the things to think about is to endeavor to place our life emphasis where Scripture places it. I like Christmas, and I don't care that Jesus wasn't actually born in December. I think it's a wonderful thing that we celebrate the birth as we do in this season. But what kind of celebration is it? We're big on birthdays. In the ancient world, people didn't celebrate birthdays, but birthday celebration is basically something that greeting card companies came up with. And then, well, let's find other things, Valentine's and so on.

Christmas cards are a major feature of the holiday, but in the ancient world, people didn't look back to memorialize the anniversary of an event. They were more interested, and especially inspired Scripture is more interested, in where are we now because that event took place? And it's much more of an opportunity for application at Christmas to think, because the Lord Jesus came and because of His willingness to sacrifice Himself and His own desires in the interest of the Father's plan, where am I?

And the sacrificial nature of Philippians chapter 2, when the Lord Jesus did not think that equality with God was something that He had to hang on to—and there's so many things that we want to hang on to. We want to be respected, and we want to be appreciated, and there are things we want to hold on to and that we feel like are necessary for our identity and our well-being and our peace of mind. But the Lord Jesus—you think what He had to give up to come.

And rather than shepherds and wise men, I think about the Lord Jesus at Christmas time in glory with His Father and with the Holy Spirit, and the Father says, "I've got an idea. Here's humanity, a lost and fallen condition. To demonstrate what love is that is sacrificial towards self and beneficial towards others, one of us is going to go down and present Himself a sacrifice to benefit others who are completely undeserving. They haven't earned it. They, in many cases, won't fully appreciate it. It is going to be something that the three of us understand. It is something the angels will learn from as they watch us do it. And both angelic and human creation, those who get it, those who are seeking and want a better understanding of the divine nature, are going to see it reflected as the second person of the Trinity, the one in the middle, the Father on one hand and the Spirit on the other, the Lord Jesus Christ in the middle, is going to leave His throne in glory.

"He is going to empty Himself and take on the form of a servant, not even middle management. He is going to the very basement of appreciation. He is going to be ridiculed, He is going to be derided, He is going to be misunderstood and persecuted, He is going to be vilified by people who claim that they know God and know His Word, and He is, with His eyes wide open, going to self-sacrificially take on the form of a servant and come in the likeness of men and humble Himself even to the point of death, the shameful death of criminal execution in a public place, to demonstrate the love of God."

That, to me, is the Christmas story. The Christmas story, the birth, and when the wise men sometime later bring the gold and the frankincense and the myrrh, three gifts. And you think of the gold, which I think reflects the Father and reflects glory. You think of the frankincense, which is something that as it burns creates an aroma that is sensed but not seen or isn't tangible, like the Holy Spirit. And the myrrh is the embalming spice, and it represents the one who is going to die and is going to have the opprobrium of rejection and condemnation and is going to go through the valley of the shadow of death as human beings do.

So as we think about the Christmas season, I think the greatest thing we can do in terms of appreciation is to endeavor to follow the Lord Jesus' example of self-sacrificial love and look at the opportunities that God gives each one of us to do that for which we may not be appreciated, to sustain love in the horizontal and to cultivate love in the vertical for the Father, and to do what we do because we love God the Father and we are so grateful for the Lord Jesus Christ and we are enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit to remember what we've learned from Scripture and to put it into practice and to endeavor to be the incarnate Christ as His body on this earth.

They talk about Christ born in our hearts. They talk about Christ being born in Bethlehem. But the result of that birth is that there was an incarnation and a reflection. The fullness of deity in bodily form was on the earth during the time of the incarnation. Now we are the incarnation.

So how wonderful would it be if we can be what the personal Lord Jesus Christ was during His time on this earth and accomplish what He accomplished: to be reflections of divine love, to communicate divine grace and the opportunity for salvation.

The Old Testament Scriptures anticipated the coming. Jacob's prophecy about Judah, the messages over and over again that are found in the ritual life of Israel, in the Levitical offerings. There is sacrifice, there is atonement, there is the release from the guilt and the penalty of sin through sacrifice. It's anticipated on virtually every page of the Old Testament.

And not only does this by faith in Christ enable us in this age to be transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love, but we have a daily deliverance. We are delivered out of this present evil age. We are delivered from the inevitability of sinfulness and our fallen nature and the flesh that traps us and leads us in bad directions—the way that seems right, but the ends thereof are the ways of death—the roaring lion, the devil and his influences and his effects and his plans and purposes, and the world itself with its temporary distractions and its allurements. We are delivered from the world and the flesh and the devil. This is our ongoing salvation because of what the Lord Jesus Christ did.

That's what Paul is talking about when he says in Second Timothy 3:15, "From childhood you have known the holy Scriptures." In Timothy's childhood, there was only one kind of Scriptures, and that was Genesis through Malachi. Not in that order in the Hebrew Bible, but it was all Old Testament. "From childhood you have known the holy Scriptures." Timothy's mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois, taught him as a child. How grateful we are as adults when we had people who taught us as children. Might have been our mother and grandmother, could have been our Sunday school teacher, could have been others in our periphery.

But notice, the holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for deliverance. The wisdom—we see it on Wednesdays in Proverbs, that wonderful wisdom—"My son, if you will receive my words and hide my commandments with you, incline your ear, apply your heart, seek for it as silver, search for it as for hid treasure, you will understand the fear of the Lord and you will find the knowledge of God." And that wisdom delivers. It gives us perspective and perspicacity so that we don't get fooled. We're not deceived.

We know this is forty miles of bad road, even though it's got a really beautiful door. "Come through this door, open this gate, walk this way. It's going to be great," and it's the ways of death. The Scriptures are able to make us wise for deliverance.

Deliverance from saying the wrong thing, from having the wrong attitude, from messing up human relationships because in our human perspective we think it ought to be handled this way, but the divine perspective, the scriptural perspective, is that of sacrifice and benefit. I'm not going to say the first thing that comes into my mind. I'm going to take a beat. I'm going to send up a prayer. I'm going to listen for the Holy Spirit to provide for me wisdom from the Scripture on how to speak, how to act, what kind of expressions pass across my face.

You have known from childhood the holy Scriptures. They are able to make you wise for deliverance. It doesn't say they have made you wise. Why does he say they are able to make you wise? Because it's a choice.

They are able in the same way that my car is able to take me to Claremore if I go out there having done the maintenance, having ensured it's got gas, having taken the keys, having sat in the seat, buckled the belt, turned the key, learned to drive. If I make use of what has been provided, it is able to do wonderful things for me.

A chainsaw is a great tool. I think if somebody said, "Sam, what is your favorite tool?" I would say, "Chainsaw." I love a chainsaw, but a chainsaw can hurt you if you don't know how to use it, if you're not careful, if you don't know how to stabilize the wood and how to stand so that when it comes through, you don't wind up cutting off your foot or chainsawing your shin bones or hurting someone who's trying to help you.

Scripture has been misused. It's been misunderstood. It's been used to try to beat other people over the head instead of using it as a sharp sword within myself. The purpose of the holy Scriptures—it doesn't say, "Timothy, God has put you on this earth and the Scriptures are able to make these other people wise for deliverance. So you get busy. You're a preacher. You take these Scriptures and you make these people wise so they can be delivered."

Paul is talking to a pastor and he says, "Timothy, ever since you were a boy, these Scriptures have been for you, for you to become wise. You are able to be delivered through the wisdom of Scriptures, you individually."

And the communication of Scripture is not for the pastor to manipulate the people. It is to provide the Scriptures so that the Holy Spirit can manipulate that truth in the heart of each person. And we don't live to please the pastor. We don't live to please our parents. We don't live to please our kids. We don't live to please our spouse, although it's a wonderful thing when that happens. We are here to please God, and the Scriptures are able to make each of us individually wise.

In the hands of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Word, we can live a life that pleases God and God can bless it with deliverance. Salvation is of the Lord. Deliverance comes from God, and we qualify ourselves because we pursue that wisdom and we endeavor to pray that wisdom and to think that wisdom and to speak that wisdom for ourselves.

I am not here to deliver people. As a pastor, just as Timothy, I need to first of all be sure that I have been made wise for my own deliverance. I can speak the truth and share the truth, as can we all. Through example, through action, through practice, through conversation, through the unspoken witness by which a wife can win her husband without a word, there is a communication of truth when we reflect it, when we live it.

But each person has to take that truth to themselves to be delivered. Each person has to pursue wisdom for themselves, and the communication of the Word of God, whether verbally or non-verbally, whether by a pastor or through a book or through personal devotions, whatever it may be, that truth makes us individually wise for our own deliverance.

Anytime we catch ourselves saying, "Oh, I wish so-and-so was here to listen to this. I wish so-and-so could hear this," stop yourself as though the smoke alarm has gone off. That is not the way to think. Don't be thinking, "So-and-so really needs this, and I am going to find a way to tell him." Stop when that thought crosses your mind and say, "I am the one that needs to hear this. I am the one that needs to find a way to apply this more perfectly and more completely and more thoroughly in my own life. I need to pray about this truth."

The fact that it strikes me and I think it would help people means it will help me most of all, and that is my job. The Scriptures are able to make you wise for deliverance, and Timothy has to first be delivered himself. He has to first be wise himself before he can do his pastor job.

That is why Paul then moves in verse 16 to say, "All Scripture is God-breathed." Theopneustos. You have a pneumatic tire. You know pneumatic starts with a P-N. Why is it pneumatic? Because it is filled with an invisible power that inflates it and holds the shape of a tire or a tube that is able to operate rams, and you have pneumatic machines that move tons of weight. There is great power in the pneumatic technology.

All Scripture—and when Paul writes this to Timothy, there is still nothing but Old Testament Scripture that is recognized as inspired. The writings of Paul are not yet circulating. The writings of Peter and John are not yet really circulating and treated as Scripture. You will find that Peter will mention that the writings of Paul are

twisted as they do the other writings, and Peter recognizes that God is revealing things in New Testament Scripture. But when it says all Scripture is given, it is primarily in the present time talking about the Old Testament Scripture as Paul writes and as Paul speaks.

It certainly applies to everything in the New Testament, but don't dismiss the Old Testament. Don't think, that was Israel and the law and Sinai and sacrifices and captivities. There are a few great stories back there, but we should spend our time in the New Testament. All Scripture, from the index to the maps in your Bible, is inspired by God and is profitable.

This is a great license to explore. Do you remember the fun we had back in Genesis going through the genealogies? Nobody does the genealogies, and they are great because all Scripture is inspired by God. You start looking at those names and you start looking at the parallel between the line of Cain and the line of Seth and what happens in each generation, and it is fascinating. There is truth there that is not only of interest, but it is applicable. It brings me to a point of decision and gives me opportunity for implementation in my own life, something to think about and something to condition my view of the world and God's interaction with it, what I can pray about, what I can think about as I act and speak and think my way through each day.

All Scripture is given by inspiration. Can you think of anything else anywhere in Scripture, Old Testament or New, that for us today is an inspired communication that we can look at for wisdom and application? In other words, is there another verse that says all dreams are inspired by God and profitable? All thoughts communicated from somebody's pulpit are inspired and profitable? All of my thoughts because I am saved and I have the Holy Spirit, whatever comes to my mind is inspired and profitable? Is there anything other than Scripture that we are told is inspired by God, able to make us wise for salvation, and profitable for these upcoming things?

Scripture alone tells us of the life and words of Jesus Christ. Scripture alone gives us the background of history, of creation and the patriarchs and Israel, the prophets. Scripture alone gives us John's Revelation. Scripture alone gives us the epistles of Paul and Peter and John and James. Scripture alone gives us the Gospel accounts. Scripture is God-breathed. Scripture is profitable. Scripture makes us wise for deliverance.

Anything else that someone wants to put up—well, but we have latter-day prophets. We have latter-day apostles. We have people in the modern day who are writing wonderful books and giving perspectives on Christian interaction with politics and avoiding the American empire and being sucked in by Babylon and these books of prophecy that tell us to get ready for the end times and these wonderful videos that are being made that are finding correspondences in dates that events are happening around us and blood moons and signs in the sky and so on. None of that is said to be inspired by God and profitable.

Fun to look at every so often. People have interesting observations to make, and interesting is one thing. Thought-provoking is one thing. Inspired by God and profitable and able to make us wise for actual deliverance by divine power is not ascribed to those things.

Ashes of the red heifer—are they rebuilding the temple? If you want to know what Scripture has to say about the ashes of the red heifer, you won't get nearly so excited about, did they breed one? Does it have a single gray hair? Have the rabbis been out there to inspect it? Have they made a little cardboard altar that they can carry up there to the Temple Mount and start sacrifice that the Antichrist can interrupt?

The Scriptures are inspired. The Scriptures have power. Not the Bible—somebody's confabulations, extrapolations, interpolations, protestations, exclamations. There is so much Christian interest in what people are saying that is based on a springboard from Scripture. They used to warn us—I don't know if they still do in seminary or not. You wouldn't think it from what you hear, but they talked about the springboard sermon. You go and you read a verse, like “from childhood you have known,” and then they go off on childhood and you never get back to the Scripture again.

Scripture has the power. When you pray, it shouldn't be, “Well, I read this in so-and-so's book. I heard this online. I saw this on a video.” Scripture is God speaking to us. How do we speak? Unless you are in a wheelchair and paralyzed and using a computer to talk, we speak by passing air through our vocal cords. We breathe our words. Scripture is God's speech. When it says it is God-breathed, it's Him talking.

We don't just pant and somehow that communicates complex thought. We use our breath to form words, sentences, paragraphs, address themes, communicate ideas. That's what God does when He breathes. Scripture

is the speech of God, and it is profitable unlike so many other things that are distractions or distortions in some cases.

Just by changing the emphasis, you can change how useful something is. Profitable for, first of all, doctrine. This is the structure. This is when you lay a straight course of bricks, rightly dividing the Word of truth. That's structure. You notice that in our previous famous, well-repeated verse: "That the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works." One of those good works is our other passage, rightly dividing the Word of truth, laying a straight course. This is structure. This is the immovable understandings, foundation and walls that are built on it.

So doctrine is that straight course of bricks. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and there is no other. Mary is His human mother, and she does not have a role as a redemptrix or as someone to pray to. She doesn't have righteousness that she can dispense. She doesn't have a special ear, and if you pray to her, she can get God to do things. That's not Scripture.

People have doctrines. There are doctrines for denominations. There are doctrines for the Catholic Church. There are doctrines in almost any walk of life. There are doctrines for warfare in the secular world. There are doctrines for corporate management and so on. But our doctrine, our rigid, immovable foundation and walls, comes from Scripture, not from man's traditions. Scripture.

If Scripture doesn't say Mary is a redeemer, I don't care how pointy-hat guy may speak, she's not a co-redemptrix, and the Catholic Church is now well down the road of declaring Mary to be a co-savior, and it's outlandish. Scripture is where we go. If people want to say, "Oh, these lifestyles are not evil, they're not bad, that was just a cultural understanding back in the day," I'm sorry. When Scripture calls something an abomination, that's what it is. When it earned the death penalty in Israel, that means God is serious about saying that is not just wrong, it's way wrong. You don't go outside the camp until evening and come back in the next day for that. The congregation of Israel circles you and stones you, and you are not in the congregation anymore.

There are certain things like murder that are prohibited, proscribed, and are abomination in God's sight. And there are teachings that are abominations in God's sight, and we've seen them in the course of these studies. If God views something as an abomination, how should God's people view it?

"Well, but Jesus was all accepting and all embracing, and He sat down with prostitutes and sinners." And no, He didn't, and that is the devil's own lie. The only prostitutes that the Lord Jesus accepted were those who came to Him with a changed heart. "Go your way and sin no more" is His message. Not, "Oh, I accept you. It doesn't matter. My love is unconditional."

My understanding—there are those who disagree—but from my understanding of Scripture, there is no such thing as unconditional love in Scripture. It is not there. God's love is conditional. Why do you think He hates Esau? Esau is a son of Isaac, a son of Rebekah, beloved in God's sight, grandchild of Abraham and Sarah. Beloved in God's sight—Abraham, friend of God—this is his grandson.

God's love is conditional. God loves the world, but what percentage of the world is going to be cast into the lake of fire and eternally destroyed? Most of it. God loves the world, but that love is conditioned. The expression, the fulfillment, the action, the qualification to receive the benefits of God's love—it is always conditional. "He that hath the Son hath life. He that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

So at this Christmas season, where everyone is talking about joy to the world, do you remember the verse? What does Scripture say about peace on earth? You know, I think the devil got his finger in the pudding there when they were doing the King James: "Peace on earth, goodwill toward men." You know this. It's not what it says. Why? Because the peace of God is conditional. Peace on earth toward men of goodwill. The condition for receiving the peace of God is a positive response to the love of God, to the offer of God, of deliverance. Peace on earth toward men of goodwill.

Just remember, if God's love—and remember our four sort of—this is more of a memory aid. I'm not saying that this is graven in stone in Scripture, but for me it's a memory aid to remember the circles of love. One-another love is conditioned on it being reciprocal. If there is someone in our periphery who cannot reciprocate, it can't be one another, can it? Love one another means I'm loving you and you're loving me back. That's one another.

“Be kind toward one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.” Is God's forgiveness conditional? Yes, it is. Is our forgiveness conditional? Yes, it is. It is conditioned on, in the one-another sphere, reciprocity. This kind of love, this level of intimacy, this freedom and peace and joy, is conditioned on it being reciprocated. If people can't reciprocate, it is not one-another love and the one-another commands are not specifically applicable.

You move out to neighbor love. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Treat them as you would like to be treated. Notice there is no condition on neighbor love. You love your neighbor as yourself. And so whether they're treating me badly, if I was messed up and treating somebody badly, I would want to still be treated nicely so that I could figure out that I'm screwed up. But it's a different condition. It's not conditioned on reciprocity. Neighbor love, you love them because they're in your periphery. God put them there for a reason, and it's your opportunity to be sacrificial and beneficial in a different way than the one another's.

You go out from there to those who are outside. This is the neutrality. “As much as it is up to you, live peaceably with all men.” This is the all-men category. And then on the fringe of that, you have enemy love. “Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you.” The world may not hate you. Your neighbor may not hate you, but there are people who will. That's enemy love. Different conditions, different responses, because we know the Word of God and it makes us wise for deliverance.

We don't open ourselves up to people who are not qualified in the one-another category and get wounded and taken advantage of and lose our witness, lose our effectiveness, lose our peace because we didn't pay attention to what Scripture tells us to defend us and to deliver us and to make us wise.

So, doctrine. These are the walls. You don't climb them. You don't break them down. You don't tunnel through them. These are the walls. If something is wrong, it's wrong. It is not to be tolerated. It isn't to be embraced. It isn't to be overlooked. We have to understand who we are, why we're here. We represent the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ didn't go down to the house of prostitution and say, “I just love all you women.” He didn't go down to the slave market and say, “I just love all you slavers.” He didn't go to the Roman procurator's palace and say, “I just love all you Romans.” Those who came to Him, there's a difference. There's a condition. This we need to understand in the Christmas season.

Well, we're only partway through our verse. We'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, what is doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction? What's the difference? Aren't they all sides of the same thing? We'll see it when we come back from the break.