



God-Breathed

Genesis 2:7; 2 Timothy 3:14-17

October 8, 2017

Prayer: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by the breath of your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Genesis 2:7 "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."

We are going to talk about breath today. So to get you ready, take a deep breath through your nose and exhale through your mouth. I want it to be a really big breath. Inhale as much as you can. Now let it out slowly through your mouth.

Feels good, doesn't it? It's like a little buzz. That's because your brain just got more oxygen than it is normally used to getting, and it is making your brain happy.

Job 33:4 "The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

Psalm 33:6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

Take a deep breath through your nose and breath out through your mouth.

Ezekiel 36:26 – God says to his people, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit (or my breath) in you." And it will change your heart of stone into a heart of

flesh. God says he is going to breathe his very being into them, and it will change their hardened heart into one that is alive, one that is responsive to God.

Ezekiel 37 is the story of the valley of dry bones, the dry bones representing Israel. And God says, "Can these bones live?" Then God says I will make by breath enter into them and they will come to life (verse 5). And God did so. Breath entered the dead, dry bones and they came to life (verse 10).

Take a deep breath through your nose and breath out through your mouth.

John 20:21-22 when Jesus, resurrected from the dead, appears to his disciples who had huddled in a room. The room was closed and the windows were shut. And Jesus, the resurrected Lion of Judah, appears in their midst. He probably scared them half to death, because Jesus' first words are "Peace. Calm down. It's me." Then he says, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." John continues, "And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

Acts 2 And then on Pentecost God breathed into the disciples in Jerusalem. It was such a dramatic encounter that it transformed a bunch of simple fisherman, hiding in a room, into a band of courageous evangelists who proclaimed Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Pentecost. The day God breathed.

Take a deep breath through your nose and breath out through your mouth. Are you thinking about breath now? The breath of God? What does the breath of God do? In all those passages I read, it creates. It gives life. It changes hearts. It gives us purpose.

Keeping this in mind, follow along as I read 2 Timothy 3:14-17 - written by the Apostle Paul to his young charge, Timothy:

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, **15** and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **16** *All Scripture is God-breathed* and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, **17** so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

I came across this list of the 10 most read books in the last 50 years in the world (this list is from 2012):

10. The Dairy of Anne Frank
9. Think and Grow Rich
8. Gone with the Wind
7. The Twilight Saga
6. The DaVinci Code
5. The Alchemist
4. Lord of the Rings
3. Harry Potter
2. Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung (Mao tsee tongue)
1. The Bible

We are in the midst of a sermon series on what Christians, specifically Presbyterians believe. Today's theme is scripture in life and death.

What is it about this book, the Bible, this odd, eclectic collection of ancient texts, many of them written more than 2000 years ago? Why are we still reading it today? What makes it so special? I

Well, it has the breath of God. All scripture is God-breathed. It gives life. It softens hearts. It has been providing hope and guidance for men and women over all those years. It's a book that beckons and demands a reading because it has the breath of God.

I have told this many times, but it fits here. I remember after having an encounter with Christ when I was 17, sitting on my bed reading the Bible and the words leaping out at me as if on fire. It was alive. I have loved it ever since.

What is this book?

Here it is in very simple terms: it is the story of a love affair between God and the human race; the Bible tells *us* of God's love for us. The Bible is a finger pointing to

God. The Bible is a lens through which we view God. It enhances our experience of the presence of God. It gives us wisdom and equips us for every good work. Nothing else is like it. It has an energy. It is inhabited. It is living. It has breath. And how we need it for life and death.

In the children's message, I told you about two scripture verses that I have used over and over again in ministry. These passages keep me going even when it seems like my ministry has no effect, no fruit. Because these two passages equip me to do ministry, I keep going.

All scripture is God-breathed.

Those of you who have been longtime Bible readers have no doubt noticed that you can be reading along in a passage you've read many times before when all of a sudden something jumps out at you, some word of encouragement, hope, guidance, conviction or whatever it was that you needed to hear at that particular juncture of your life. The Bible seems to possess that uncanny capacity. It gives life. It is living.

Example: Ever since the early days of being a Christians, I have known the verse about the fruit of the Spirit: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control." I always believed that these were qualities I had to strive for every day. Which, by the way, didn't work out so well, especially when I drove my car.

Then one day I was reading the passage and the word "fruit" jumped out at me. How come I didn't see this before? All fruit does is hang on the tree. As long as it stays connected to the branch it is hanging from, it will develop as fruit. As long as we are connected to God (perhaps "hang" with God?), those fruits of the Spirit will develop within us. They are not qualities we strive for.

All scripture is God-breathed.

Earlier in the book of Timothy, the author, Paul, says he is being chained like a criminal (he apparently is in prison), but then he says the Word of God is not chained (2 Timothy 2:9). In fact, it can be freeing. It breaks open the prisons that life builds around us...whatever those prisons are, whether psychological or circumstantial.

All scripture is God-breathed.

I think of the victims who survived the Las Vegas shooting this week. They will face psychological trauma in the days, months, years ahead. You can see it in the eyes of the victims who have been interviewed. I pray that they will find solace not only with family and friends, but in the scriptures. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me.” Over and over again, God says in the scriptures, I am with you, I am with you, I am with you.

All scripture is God breathed.

The Bible gives us insight. The experts are trying to find answers to the “why” of this shooting. They know how he did, but they don’t know why he did it. But scripture teaches that within all of us is the capacity to do evil because of sin. “All of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” But some take it too far.

It says in the book of Timothy: ““They are the kind who ...are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desire” (2 Timothy 3:6).

All scripture is God breathed.

Yes, even the parts that are messy, human, broken in the Bible. Tomorrow in my class, we will study the book of Judges, probably the most violent book of the Bible. It has something to teach us today in the midst of the human mess in the world. It teaches us that God wants to redeem the broken and the messy, that God never gives up on us. And I find great hope in that.

All scripture is God breathed.

A couple of weeks ago, I was called to Minneapolis to speak at a funeral for the 33 year old daughter of a lifelong friend. At the visitation, I kept hearing, “This isn’t the way it is supposed to be. A child should not die before the parents.”

The Bible speaks to that. At the funeral, I told them about how in the first two chapters of the Bible, God creates the heavens and the earth. It is as the world should be. And on this earth, God plants a tree of life.

And then at the very end of the Bible, God makes the heavens and earth new. God re-creates them as the world should be. And on this renewed earth, God plants a tree of life. Scripture gives us hope that one day we will be with God in this new earth as the world should be where there is no pain or grief or tears or death. It will go on for eternity.

But meanwhile, I told the hundreds of people attending the funeral, meanwhile we live between the trees. We live in a world that's not the way it is supposed to be. This time between the trees is temporary compared to eternity, but the question is: how do we live between the trees?

The rest of the Bible (the part between the trees) tells us. It tells us about a God who loves us, who lavishes us with grace, who is with us always, who gives us strength to face what life throws at us, who sometimes carries us when we cannot go forward on our own, who delights us with creation, who gives us family and friends and brothers and sisters in Christ. And the list goes on....

All scripture is God breathed.

George Mueller, a preacher said this, "It is of supreme and paramount importance that you should seek above all things to have yours souls truly happy in God himself. But in what way shall we attain to this settled happiness of soul?... This happiness is to be obtained through the study of the Holy Scriptures... Our souls should feed upon the Word. . . . This intimate experimental acquaintance with Him will make us truly happy. Nothing else will. . . ."

All of this brings us down to one final point. We cannot benefit from the Bible unless we have some knowledge of what's in it. A cartoon once depicted a young man talking on the telephone, and saying, "I think I've made one of the first steps toward unraveling the mysteries of the Bible ... I'm starting to read it."

Let me tell you how God made me happy by the reading of scripture. I was in my mid-thirties. Still not married. No children. Feeling pretty crappy about it. Even shame. Then one day, I read this passage from Isaiah 54:

Verse 1 "Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; [For your children will be more numerous than the married] says the Lord."

I read those words over and over again. But it goes on:

Verse 2 “Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back.”

With that, I felt the call to go to seminary to stretch my experience. It wasn't easy. I cried my first day back to school in 12 years. I even brought a friend with me for encouragement.

The passage goes on:

Verse 4-5 “Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame...for your Maker is your husband, the Lord Almighty is his name.”

Open the Book, my friends. In it, you will find a God of love. It will give you life, hope, encouragement, challenges, wisdom, and maybe even a purpose. Because it contains the very breath of God.

Amen.