

Preach the Word

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[0 : 00] We don't do it that often, and that's because, you know, it's a lot of words.

It takes time, and we're meant to sort of lose ourselves in the drama of the liturgy, and so stopping to explain it can somewhat disrupt that experience.

And yet, as hopefully has become clear by this point in the service, it's extremely important that we take time here and there to explain why we do what we do because it's extremely important for us to know the reasoning behind it.

It's part of what enables it to be a vehicle of worship and relationship with God. At this point in our service, we take time to listen to someone preach a sermon.

And, you know, as Dan implied earlier, that can sometimes take a little while. And Jesus is able to preach one-sentence sermons. I'm very clearly not Jesus.

[1 : 00] And maybe the length of my sermon shows just how far I am from His degree of righteousness. But what purpose does the sermon serve?

We could save a whole lot of time and be out of here a lot sooner if we didn't take time to listen to a sermon. What makes preaching important? To answer that question, we're going to look at 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 through chapter 4 verse 5.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for Your Word and we thank You for the many ways that You bless and minister to us through words. Lord, thank You for all that we're doing this morning.

May it be all worship that glorifies You. As we turn our attention to Your Word and try to understand the role that Your Word plays in our lives, Lord, we pray that You would bless it.

And we pray that You, as Jesus did in the gospel reading, would open the Scriptures to us. We pray that our hearts would burn within us as we attend to Your Word. We pray that we would be changed by it and that You would be glorified.

[2 : 04] We pray this in Your Son's name. Amen. Amen. So, 2 Timothy is a wonderful letter. It's quite possibly the last letter that Paul wrote. He wrote it shortly before his death.

And even as he writes it, he's already contemplating his own death. You can see that in chapter 4 verse 6. He says, For I'm already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

Paul has done all that he can to prepare Timothy to take the helm for the next generation of the church. And at this point, the church is still a tiny, fragile movement.

It's not clear that there will be a next generation. So, Paul has done everything he can to pass the baton to Timothy. And so, in the final chapter of this final letter from Paul to his protegee Timothy, Paul issues this charge.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing in His kingdom, preach the Word.

[3 : 10] Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. If Paul were writing this today, he might have phrased it this way.

I cannot emphasize this enough, Timothy. If you do nothing else, preach the Word. That is your central responsibility.

Preaching is absolutely essential for the life, the health, and the future of the church. But why? And from the text, we can draw out three reasons why preaching is essential.

The first reason is this. Preaching is essential because of the power of God's Word. In chapter 3, verse 16, Paul says, All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

Scripture is God-breathed, or as we often say, it is inspired. Right now, notice the illusion here. God breathed His Spirit first into who or what?

[4 : 25] Into Adam. He formed him out of the clay from the ground, and then He breathed His Spirit into His nostrils at creation. And what happened?

The clay became flesh. Right? He came alive as a result of that. So, Paul is saying in the same way that God breathed His Spirit into Adam, He's breathed His Spirit into His Word.

Which means when we take these words into ourselves, we are taking the Spirit into ourselves. God is breathing His life into us through His Word.

And what we need to understand from Scripture, we see this again and again and again, is God works and God's Spirit works through the preaching of His Word.

That's how the Spirit ministers to men and women. And we see actually in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, verses 4 and 5, it says, For we know, brothers, loved by God, that He has chosen you because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction.

[5 : 43] Paul is saying that when they were among the Thessalonians, they recognized that when they preached to the Thessalonians, something more was at work. He says, I know that God is at work in you.

I know He's chosen you because when we were there, when we were preaching, it was evident to everybody that more was happening. We were preaching, but even as we preached, God's presence was evident. His Spirit was evident.

His power was evident. We all felt it. And you know, there are times when I will preach a sermon and I think I have some idea of how it might come across to people and then down the road, somebody will mention that sermon and some way that God used it in their life.

And it is almost never what I expect to hear. It's almost never the impact that I thought it would have. And it's been long enough now, 15 years of full-time preaching, that I've come to recognize that there is the sermon that I preach to people's ears and there is the sermon that the Holy Spirit preaches to people's hearts.

And praise be to God that the one doesn't depend on the other. That God has an ability to preach through His Spirit, through His Word, to the hearts of people to tell them things that He knows they need to hear in ways that aren't necessarily limited by the limitations of a human vessel.

[7 : 01] So, God's Word has power. That makes preaching essential. The second reason that preaching is essential is because of the competition that exists with God's Word.

He says in verse 3, For time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Paul is saying we all have a kind of pathological condition, a disease called itching ears. And the Greek lexicon says that this phrase, itching ears, is kind of a figure of speech for, as it says, that kind of curiosity which looks for interesting and spicy hits of information.

I love that. It says it in the lexicon. It's a kind of curiosity which looks for interesting and spicy hits of information. Right? So, think about life, right?

Think about all of the podcasts and TED Talks and Twitter threads and news feeds, just chock full of spicy hits of information just for us.

[8 : 11] Life offers a never-ending stream of these things that trigger that dopamine response in us that make us want to come back for more and more and more. And, you know, we ask ourselves, why is it that I can effortlessly spend hours scrolling through social media?

I don't even have to plan to do that. I don't have to decide and make myself do that. It just happens. Right? An hour goes by and I'm just doom scrolling for an hour.

Right? And then, you know, so we can effortlessly do that. But the idea of sitting down and reading the Bible for 10 minutes we call a spiritual discipline. Right? Now, why the disconnect?

Right? And now, for starters, Scripture requires effort to understand and apply. Very rarely do I sit down to read... You know, I've been sort of studying the Bible more or less, I mean, I guess you could say academically, professionally, as well as in my devotional life for, you know, probably close to 20 years.

And rarely do I sit down and open up the Bible and read it and immediately have it apply and speak to my life. It takes an enormous amount of effort.

[9 : 20] You have to read it and reread it and reread it and reflect on it and chew on it and study it and meditate on it and go away from it and come back to it and pray it. And all of those things for it

to eventually you sort of, you know, it's like, you know, eventually you sort of break through and it begins to sort of speak to your heart.

But very rarely for me does that happen instantaneously. It takes a lot of effort and study. Right? And so, we would much prefer content that is effortless to consume.

Why would I sit down with this text that takes so long to chew on and meditate on before it begins to speak to me when I am surrounded by content that is designed, customized by a computer algorithm to be fired like an arrow straight at my amygdala?

Right? Where I don't even have to put effort. It just immediately triggers core primal emotions in me. Right? Like lust or like envy or like outrage.

Right? So, those things just... It doesn't take any effort on my part. It's just, boom, it happens and I'm emotionally engaged. Right? Whereas Scripture requires an enormous amount of effort. Beyond that, there are things in Scripture that challenge us.

[10:34] Right? That unsettle us, that confuse us, that offend our sensibilities. We would much prefer content that suits our own passions and preferences. So, left to our own devices, pardon the pun, we will wander off.

We will wander away from the truths of Scripture over time. It's only a matter of time. And so, every week we come together for worship and the Word is preached in a way that is meant to re-center us on God's Word.

We're like sheep. We wander over here and the preaching pulls us back, reminds us what is ultimately true and ultimately important. So, that's the second reason why preaching is essential because there's a lot of competition with God's Word.

The third reason why preaching is essential is because of the person of God's Word. In this passage, Paul uses the phrase, preach the Word.

But throughout the New Testament, Paul uses several phrases interchangeably to summarize his preaching ministry. He talks about preaching the Word like he does in this passage.

[11:39] He talks about preaching the gospel. And he also talks about preaching Christ. And you say, well, which is it? Were those three different sermons? No, for Paul, it's all the same thing.

To preach the Word is to preach the gospel is to preach Christ. Preaching the Word means preaching the gospel, which means preaching Christ. And you say, well, does that mean that every sermon is ultimately a sermon about Jesus?

And the answer would be yes. If you're in a Christian church, the purpose of every sermon is ultimately to point to Christ and the good news of the gospel. Now, where do we get that from? Well, in Luke 24, which was our gospel reading for today, the resurrected Jesus appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

They don't recognize Him at first. They're very confused about what's happened. They don't understand why Jesus had to die on the cross, nor do they know that He has risen. And they're still thinking, based on their reading of Scripture, that Jesus must have been a great prophet, just another prophet, but a really, really great one.

And it says that Jesus sits down and explains everything to them. How? It says in verse 27, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, the Pentateuch, first five books of the Bible, and then all of the prophets.

[12:50] This is all the Old Testament Scriptures. Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. So, every passage of Scripture ultimately points to Jesus Christ.

Right? So, you read in Genesis the story of Adam, and you recognize that, in fact, Jesus is, in the New Testament, the new Adam. Right? That's what Paul refers to Him as, the new Adam, the true Adam, the better Adam, who didn't fall into temptation but remained faithful.

It shows us what human beings are supposed to be. Jesus is the true and better Abraham. The story of Abraham really reaches its fulfillment in Jesus because, like Abraham, Jesus left everything in order to form a new people and to bless the nations of the earth.

Right? Jesus is the true and better Moses who stands in the gap between God and His people and mediates a new covenant. Jesus is the true and better David who defeats the true Goliaths of sin and death and sits on the throne of heaven.

You go through the entire story of the Old Testament, and all of it, as Sally Lloyd-Jones says in her Jesus Storybook Bible, every story whispers His name. Every story whispers His name.

[14:03] You know, after hearing a sermon, Pastor Dan sometimes likes to ask the question, could that same sermon have been preached in a synagogue or a mosque or at a TED conference?

And I love that question. It always convicts me. And whenever I'm writing sermons, I always have Dan's voice in my head saying, could this sermon be preached equally well in a mosque, synagogue, or at a TED conference?

And if the answer is yes, chances are it's not a Christian sermon. Right? The purpose of preaching is not simply to give you more information or to tell you to do better or to give you a few life hacks. The purpose of preaching is to bring us into the presence of Christ. It's to facilitate a relationship. It's to create an opportunity for us to confess and repent of our sin, to experience the love and the forgiveness of Jesus, to strengthen our confidence not ultimately in ourselves, but in Christ to be our salvation.

Right? To strengthen our confidence that He is able to do what we cannot do, but He does it on our behalf. So, these are the reasons why preaching matters so much. The power of God's Word, the competition that exists with God's Word, and ultimately the person of God's Word.

[15:19] All of that is happening as we preach. And so, I just want to look at a few implications, first for preachers and then for listeners. Implications for preachers.

You're going to hear a lot of different kinds of messages depending on which church you go to. Go to church over here and you might hear a 10-minute reflection on the size of the universe.

If you go to church over here, you might hear an hour-plus-long theology philosophy lecture. If you go to church over here, you might get seven habits to help you manage stress better. If you go to church over here, you might hear a political rant and get confused and think that you're at a political rally.

Based on everything that we've said so far, in this church, we believe that the task of a preacher is not to present their own ideas. The task of a preacher is not to present their own opinions or viewpoints on what the world is or how it should work.

The job of a preacher is not to impose their meaning onto the text, right? Eisegesis, right? Reading your own interpretation into the text or what we would call impositional preaching, right?

[16:26] Taking a text out of context and preaching the message that you want to preach instead of the message that God wants to preach. We believe that it is the job of the preacher to carefully open and explain God's Word as written in context, unfolding it and applying it to people's lives.

It is to carefully open and explain God's Word as written in context, unfolding it and applying it to people's lives. And the term for this kind of preaching is expository preaching.

And the key to what makes expository preaching expository preaching is that the main points and themes of the sermon come from the text and not from the preacher, right?

So in this talk, for instance, I could get up and I could give you several reasons. I could list off several reasons why I think preaching is important. And that might make for a decent talk.

It would certainly be easier to prepare. But instead, what we're doing this morning is we're opening Scripture and we're looking at Paul's letter to Timothy and we are expositing the reasons Scripture gives us for why preaching is important.

[17:36] And it's very important that we understand the difference. In the first example, that message would have no authority. You would just be hearing Tommy's opinion. But in the second example, if we are demonstrating from the text why preaching is important and the reasons why, it has God's authority behind it, right?

The first has no authority. The second has God's authority. All preaching authority is delegated authority. Preachers don't have authority in ourselves. We only have authority to the extent that we are preaching in God's authority, right?

And because of this, those who preach actually bear a massive responsibility. I mean, as Paul says in verse 1, when we preach, we do so in the presence of God, in the presence of Christ who is judge.

It's almost as though he's saying to Timothy, God is looking over your shoulder. God knows the sermon that you're going to preach. He sees your manuscript. He's watching you. This is why James says in 3.1 that God judges those who preach and teach more harshly.

Few should aspire to do it as a result. So, twisting or distorting God's Word, imposing our own meaning on the text, that is a grievous sin because this is how God intends to breathe spiritual life into His people.

[18 : 54] And anyone who does that and thereby suffocates God's people is guilty of a grievous sin. So, an expository sermon starts with a lot of study and reading and rereading and rereading the text, typically in a number of translations, reading all of the surrounding context several times through, studying it in the original language, which is usually either Greek or Hebrew, reading various commentaries that run the spectrum from more application-oriented to more academic.

And so, for all of these reasons, it typically takes me somewhere between 15 and 20 hours a week to go from knowing what I'm preaching on, and typically that's something that I've already been reflecting on for a number of weeks to actually having a fully written manuscript, which for me is typically about a 2,000-word manuscript.

But it typically takes me about 15 to 20 hours to do that, and some people hear that and they think, well, you know, isn't there, you know, isn't that a lot of time to spend on a sermon and aren't there so many other much more important things that you could be doing with your time?

But I think, if I'm reading this correctly, I think that preaching is one of the most important ways that I can serve our community, if everything that we're saying is true. I think it's one of the most important ways that I can minister to and serve our community.

So, that's some implications for preachers, but what about listeners? Last thing I want to talk about is just a few implications for listeners. You know, we often talk and hear people talking about whether this or that person is a good preacher or a bad preacher, but how often do we stop and ask ourselves, am I a good listener?

[20 : 27] Right? We're all first and foremost listeners, and the best preachers, the best preachers are first and foremost listeners.

Am I a good listener? How can we listen well? Four things really quickly. Number one, come expecting to hear God's Word. Come expecting to hear God's Word.

If what we are looking at this morning is true, if the preacher is faithfully expositing Scripture, it means that God can and will speak through the preaching of His Word.

John Calvin writes this, and you may be shocked to hear Calvin say this. He writes it at his institutes. I think it's in book four. He says, God has chosen so to anoint the lips and tongues of His servants that when they speak, the voice of Jesus yet resounds in them.

He said it. God has chosen so to anoint the lips and tongues of His servants that when they speak, the voice of Jesus yet resounds in them.

[21 : 33] Do I come to church expecting to hear the voice of Jesus through the clay pot of whoever's up front? Paul commends the Thessalonians for having this posture.

He says in chapter 2 verse 13, And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the Word of men, but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers.

Thank God, Thessalonians, that when you heard us preach, you didn't just accept this as the words of men, but you recognized the Word of God in it, and you responded accordingly. So, come expecting to hear God's Word.

Number two, verify, this goes hand in hand, verify that the sermon is based on God's Word. Right? That's really, really important. I love the description of the Bereans in Acts chapter 17.

Your job is not just to sit there and whatever the preacher says, you say, Oh, this is God's Word. Your job is to check because, praise be to God, you have a copy for yourself. We're all looking at the same text.

[22 : 42] In Acts chapter 17, it says, They received the Word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. So, I would encourage you to bring your Bible to church.

You say, well, I have it on my phone. Yeah, you can use your phone. That's fine, but I can't do that because the minute I pull out my phone to look at the Bible, I'm on to other things. I just, my brain, I don't have the self-discipline. So, this is what works for me.

And so, I would encourage you, bring your Bible to church. When we tell you what the passage is going to be, open it to that. Put it on your lap. Keep it open. And as the sermon is being preached, make sure that what's being said lines up with what's in the text.

Right? If the sermon you're hearing is based on the text and there's some connection being made, then let it sink into your heart. If it's not based on the text, then don't.

But make sure the sermon being preached is based on God's Word. I love this. One of my late, great heroes, John Stott, there's this story, famous story of him when they had guest preachers. [23 : 42] He would, at the beginning of the sermon, he would open the Bible and he would put it on his lap and he would wait to hear. And if the preacher, in the first few minutes, it was clear that the preacher was not really basing their message on the Scriptures, he would just quietly close his Bible and he'd put it off to the side.

And it was like, oh, okay, we're not going to hear a sermon today. We're going to hear a nice talk from so-and-so. Right? So, make sure it's coming from the text. Number three, come prepared to be challenged by God's Word.

If we really are hearing from the God of the universe through some clay pot up front, how arrogant would we have to be to assume that he should simply agree with all of our views and preferences? Right? Come prepared to be challenged, which means come with humility and openness. Come with a willingness to admit that God knows better than we do.

We should be open to hearing something that provokes us to re-examine our views or to repent of sin in some way. Okay? Good preaching not only comforts the afflicted, but it is meant to challenge the complacent.

[24 : 47] It's meant to stir us up, to provoke a response in us. And then number four, the fourth thing, come in person to hear God's Word.

There are millions of sermons available online, and praise God for that. I probably listen to, I don't know, four to six sermons a week from various preachers that I love, and I'm so grateful to have access to so many amazing preachers.

And I do that not only to try to hone my craft, but also just to hear good preaching, and I think that we can be really nourished by that. So, I'm thankful that we're able to do that. But nothing can take the place of gathering with your church family and hearing a sermon that is delivered not just to people out there in general, but to you.

Chances are by someone who knows you and who has some idea of what you're going through in your life. And as we will emphasize in this teaching Eucharist, the sermon is just one piece of a larger context of worship, and all of it holds together with a kind of integrity.

You know, earlier in the service, we hear God's law, and we confess our inadequacy to meet it. If the preacher does their job during the sermon, you will hear the gospel proclaimed.

[26 : 05] You will hear Christ proclaimed as the one who fulfills the law on our behalf and dies for our sin. And then every sermon is meant to ultimately prepare us to come to the table, to receive Christ through the Eucharist.

You know, some of you grew up in churches that had weekly altar calls. And people have asked, why don't we ever have an altar call? So, people who really are feeling it and they're stirred up by the Spirit, and they want to come, and they want to declare their faith, and they want to receive Christ, and, you know, we come on down front, right?

And I always say, we do have an altar call. It's called the Eucharist, right? Where you have an opportunity to come forward in faith and receive Christ as an act of faith. Every sermon has one main application in addition to any other application you might hear, and that's if you believe what you're hearing, come and receive Christ in the meal.

So, we like to talk about Anglicans encountering Christ in stereo every week, right? Christ is proclaimed through the preaching of the Word, and then Christ is proclaimed through the celebration of the Eucharist.

And in both, we have an opportunity to receive Christ into ourselves. Speaking of which, in a moment, Dan's going to explain a little bit more about this, but we're going to have an opportunity to respond to the preaching of God's Word by affirming our faith using the words of the Nicene Creed, which is actually where it is in the liturgy, so that if the preacher fails to do their job, and you hear nice thoughts, opinions, and stories about this or that, but it's not based in the Scripture.

[27 : 42] Worst of all, it's maybe erroneous in some way. The congregation has an opportunity to correct that poor preacher by standing up and affirming what we do believe using the words of the Nicene or Apostles Creed.

So, I'm going to invite Dan to come up, and I'm just going to close this in prayer, and then we'll move to the Creed. Lord, we thank You for Your Word, and may You not be limited by clay pots. May You continue to speak through Your Holy Spirit and deliver Your power into Your people, that

we would be nourished and fed by You, that we would grow through You, that we would be filled with Word, filled with Spirit, Lord, empowered to do Your work in the world.
We pray this in Your Son's holy name. Amen.