

Habits of a Healthy Church: Preaching and Teaching

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- [0 : 00] Now, we have two New Testament readings at the moment. The first is from 2 Timothy. 2 Timothy chapter 3 from verse 14 into chapter 4 and verse 5.
- So 2 Timothy 3 verse 14 to chapter 4 verse 5. But as for you, Paul writes to Timothy, They will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.
- So the place of preaching and teaching God's Word is being emphasized there. And now we're going to read from Acts chapter 10. So we're about to begin a series, Healthy Habits for a Church or Habits of a Healthy Church.
- And the first thing that we're going to think about is preaching and teaching of God's Word and commitment to that. And so in Acts chapter 10, we have one of the many examples of preaching of Jesus that we find in the book of Acts.
- [2 : 16] So Acts chapter 10 from verse 34 to verse 43. Then Peter began to speak. This is in Cornelius' house.
- I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.
- You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee, after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who are under the power of the devil, because God was with him.
- We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross. But God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.
- He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen, by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.
- [3 : 35] All the prophets testify about him, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. And we'll return to that passage in just a few moments.
- But before we do that, we're going to sing together the hymn, Christ the Sure and Steady Anchor. So we'll hear that and we can sing and we'll stand while we sing.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.

- [5 : 49] Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you.
- [8 : 15] The first why question for us. Why is it that we regularly, week by week, spend one hour between the morning and the evening listening to the Bible being read and preached?

Why is it that we devote time through the week to reading and teaching in small groups in different contexts regularly, week by week, month by month?

It's an important question because preaching is under pressure. It's under pressure in part because of the media age. It was that drive to find more effective forms of communication.

People are consuming and being disciplined by different sources of information in ways like no other. And so even within the church, you'll find many people asking, is preaching still relevant?

Perhaps because of that, there is even among preachers a loss of confidence. Perhaps we've heard one time too many, it's not how people learn best.
- [9 : 23] Preaching won't attract people in. Asking people to listen to two sermons is simply too much. And so we have choices.

Churches have choices to make. Do we cave in to that pressure? Do we try and conform? Change the way that we communicate?

Or do we commit ourselves for the long haul to preaching and teaching? So our big goal today is to show, in the first instance, the central place that preaching and teaching had in the church from the beginning, by God's design.

So that hopefully we ourselves and we as a church will grow in our conviction about the importance of preaching. But also at the same time, as we look at Acts chapter 10, we see an example of gospel preaching.

That we might learn some of the priorities, the emphases of the apostles and others for ourselves. As we look to communicate the good news of Jesus with people around us.
- [10 : 34] So think of it, in a sense, like visiting the doctor for a health checkup. If you ever find yourself doing that, when you do the BMI, you do the blood pressure, you check your heart.

This is the first part of our church spiritual health check. Now, are we committed to hear God's word through preaching and teaching?

And this deliberately comes first, because if we get this wrong, eventually everything else will go wrong. As I hope we will all be able to see. So let's begin simply by recognizing the place of preaching and teaching in the book of Acts.

There's one verse to get us going. Acts chapter 8 and verse 4. If you don't have a Bible, I can read it for you. So this is the church is facing persecution.

They're scattered. And in 8 verse 4, those who've been scattered preached the word wherever they went. So preaching is everywhere. And remember, Jesus said to the disciples, you will be my witnesses and you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.
- [11 : 44] And so they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue the work of Jesus through preaching and teaching. Just to give a sense, in case we miss it, about how ever-present preaching is.

Chapter 2, as Pentecost. That's when the Holy Spirit comes on the disciples in power. And the first thing that happens, Peter begins to preach. Preaches to that huge crowd.

3,000 are converted. And we find that this first church are devoted to the apostles' teaching. So from the beginning, a church devoted to the word of God.

Then in chapters 3 to 5, we find the churches preaching, but preaching largely because of opposition. They find themselves communicating the gospel before the Sanhedrin, who keep asking them questions and saying, Will you please stop talking about Jesus?

And they refuse to stop. So they preach in the context of opposition. That grows. So chapter 7, chapter 8, there is preaching in the context of persecution.

[12 : 50] We have Stephen's sermon. And he eventually is martyred at the end of that. And you find Philip preaching to the Ethiopian.

And it's interesting as well. So the apostles have been preaching. But there, chapters 7 and 8, there's deacons in the church who are preaching. And then we discover, as the church is scattered, everyday believers are preaching wherever they go as well.

And then in chapter 9, one of the crucial turning points in the book of Acts, Saul is converted. We know him as Paul. As he is converted, what does he do? Begins preaching.

Chapters 10 and 11, and this is our context, we find Peter preaching to the Gentiles. So here, just as Jesus said, you'll be my witnesses, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth.

We see it begin here. And then chapters 13 to 21, we have Paul's three missionary journeys recorded. And we find churches established through the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

[13 : 54] So for those first 20 or so chapters, you can hardly move, but there's preaching happening. The church began, the church flourished, as they committed themselves to preaching and teaching the Word of God about Jesus.

And they do it in different settings as well. That's one of the really interesting things about the book of Acts. So they'll preach in synagogues, lecture halls in the public square. They will preach and teach in houses.

We find Philip in the middle of the desert. They're preaching in a chariot, teaching the Word of God. We find them preaching to different audiences. So sometimes that's to believers in homes.

Often that's before very hostile crowds. Sometimes that's teaching that happens one to one. As we've said, it's done by different people. It's often by the apostles, but also these deacons, and also unnamed believers.

The church from bottom to top believed that their message, their responsibility was to preach the gospel. And so, you know, as historians and church historians recognize the way that the Christian church ultimately transformed the Roman Empire, how does it turn the world upside down?

[15 : 08] It does it because they are totally committed to preaching and teaching the Word of God and living in response to it. And so it's really important for us to see.

And it's amazing for us to think about how God worked. And I think it's important for us to be encouraged. So it was recognized by the Sanhedrin, in Acts chapter 4, that the people who are preaching are largely untrained.

And that's very striking in its day. And bear in mind, too, that these first apostles, these first teachers of the gospel, they only had the Old Testament, and they wouldn't have had their own personal copies of it.

And they also had the apostles teaching about Jesus. Bear in mind their context. They are working in the Roman Empire. We see how totally un-Christian and anti-Christian much of society was, whether that's Jewish leaders or the Roman establishment.

They are working, operating in a context where Caesar is Lord is what you hear every day. It's a culture that was wild. A time of intense persecution.

[16 : 24] But, these first Christians, they had the Spirit, and they had the Word of God, and they had the life-changing message of Jesus. I love the way the guys in the Sanhedrin recognize the distinctive quality of Peter and John, that although they were largely unschooled, they were men who had been with Jesus.

Something about their life and their message. Jesus spoke about that mustard seed that would grow into a huge tree. That's what we see happening in the book of Acts, as God's people are committed to God's Word, and that tree continues to grow today, wherever God's people are committed to preaching and teaching God's Word.

And so, for our own encouragement, it's good for us to remember, we have the same Spirit that these first Christians had. We have the same good news. We have the same Lord Jesus. We have the same God who loves to save sinners.

And so, in a day where we can feel weak and marginalized, where we wonder, does preaching, teaching, proclamation make any difference? We're invited always to take heart and to keep on going.

From an overview, let's move directly to Acts chapter 10 and to think about preaching Christ in the book of Acts. There was lots of places, lots of places we could go, for examples of preaching in the book of Acts.

[17 : 51] And as you compare, it's very interesting to compare the different sermons as they're recorded by Luke, and you see certain key themes emerge again and again. And so, we're going to notice some of those coming here in Peter's sermon.

And hopefully, we can then think about, how do I communicate the good news? Are there any gaps? Is there any help for me in thinking about how to communicate the gospel as we read the book of Acts?

I hope there will be. Just to remind ourselves, the setting here in Acts chapter 10 is that Cornelius, who is a Gentile soldier, has been told by an angel to go and send for a man called Peter and to bring him so that Peter can preach to him.

And so, here is Peter in this soldier's house about to preach to his household. Again, a reminder of the different audiences, different places where preaching happened.

So, Luke records a summary of the sermon, and we can see six key elements of gospel preaching that we find in the book of Acts.

[19 : 00] So, we'll notice them together. First key element that you will find across loads of the sermons is a recognition and understanding that Jesus fulfills Old Testament scriptures.

How do we see it here? Verse 34, I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

That's not something that merges brand new in the New Testament. That's something that's promised all the way back in Genesis 12 to Abraham. One of your seed will bring blessing to the nations. If you remember, Martin Patterson preached for us on our mission Sunday from Zechariah chapter 8, and in verse 23, we have that picture of here's the one Jewish guy and there's ten people from different nations grabbing onto his coat.

Why? Because God is with you. And there's that expectation that in the new age, God's kingdom of grace is going to go wider.

Whether it's going to go global, Jesus will be acknowledged as Lord of all. And so people from all nations are called to repent and to believe.

[20 : 13] God does not show favoritism. It's not just for a few. This is good news for the nations. Verse 36, we can also see Old Testament fulfillment.

You know the message God sent to the people of Israel announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all. Maybe that makes us think of Isaiah chapter 9, verses 6 and 7.

Let me read those famous words that we often connect with Christmas. And actually words that are mentioned in the Hope Explored course as well. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. There's our word. Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom from that time on and forever. The promised Prince of Peace is here, therefore the way of peace is open.

[21 : 25] Peace, as we discover and as they declare through the broken body and the shed blood of the Lord Jesus. So what we remember today as we share the Lord's Supper, that our peace, our reconciliation comes through Jesus, the Prince of Peace, who lays down his life so that our sins could be forgiven, so that we might be reconciled to our God.

So this expectation of peace is fulfilled in Jesus. And so to read the sermons of the book of Acts is to discover that these first apostles, they read the Old Testament and they saw the glory of Jesus.

They read the Old Testament and they saw the ministry of Jesus being anticipated in the pages of Scripture. Second key element of gospel preaching we find in the book of Acts, an emphasis on Jesus' unique ministry.

Verse 37 and 38. You know what's happened throughout the province of Judea, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power and how he went around doing good and healing all who are under the power of the devil because God was with him.

He is anointed as the king. At his baptism the Holy Spirit came on him. His ministry was one marked by power.

[22 : 51] And it's significant that Peter can say to his listeners, you know, so perhaps some of them had seen it firsthand, but perhaps it's true that the reputation, the stories of Jesus were spreading far and wide and he was known for doing good.

His miracles, his miracles demonstrate that Jesus is none other than mighty God. Jesus does unique things to serve people, to show compassion.

We thought about him healing the blind so that many people were asking, who is this? And he's not just doing good, he's also driving out evil spirits, a reminder that Jesus is a spiritual king and he's come to wage spiritual battle.

And that every time Jesus drives out a demon it was an anticipation of his kingdom coming, of that promise of a world that would be free of evil.

Every miracle stands as a snapshot, a trailer to the great movie of the kingdom of God, to the future hope of a world free of suffering, free of sin, free of evil where Jesus will reign over all and where we will see and celebrate his glory.

[24 : 17] So they focus on Jesus' unique ministry. And then, verse 39 and 40, they focus, Peter focuses attention on Jesus' death and resurrection.

He says, they killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.

They killed him, God raised him. This isn't the first time Peter is preached in this way in Acts chapter 2, Pentecost sermon. He can speak directly to the leaders and say, now here was your plan, your plan was wicked, you put Jesus to death, but it was God's plan.

You didn't derail God's purpose of salvation. Think about the number of times Jesus predicted his own suffering and death, as we said this morning, six times at least. The cross was God's way of salvation.

And the apostles clearly understood it after Jesus rose from the dead. They were confused beforehand. How can God's king suffer and die? But after, they understood.

[25 : 29] This acceptance that was promised in verse 35, this peace that is open to all in verse 36, how will it come? It will come through the blood of Jesus being shed for many.

But then there's the focus too on the resurrection. And actually when you look at the emphasis on all the gospel sermons in the book of Acts, the emphasis falls on the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead.

The miracle of the resurrection is the reason to listen and to believe the good news. That the resurrection of Jesus shows God's promise fulfilled.

Psalm 16, Jesus is the holy one who is not abandoned today. Isaiah 53, he was the suffering servant who would see the light of life and be satisfied.

So the central events of Easter, the central events of the Christian faith, always stand central to the preaching of the gospel that we find in the book of Acts.

[26 : 37] It should always be central to our communication of the gospel message. Another emphasis you may have picked up in verse 41, and you see it often in the sermons in the book of Acts, the apostles are eyewitnesses to Jesus.

Actually, you see it in verse 39, we are witnesses of everything he did. So they are witnesses to his life and to his miracles and to his teaching. Verse 40, they are witnesses to the fact that he was raised from the dead.

41, he was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen, by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. Why talk about eating and drinking with Jesus?

They are eyewitnesses to a real and physical resurrection. They've been chosen by God to see the evidence of this great reversal and then to share the reality of Jesus' risen Lord and the eternity shaping significance.

The emphasis from the apostles is on them as reliable eyewitnesses. Luke, in his introduction to Luke Acts, Luke chapter 1, verses 1 to 4, that's where the emphasis falls on reliability, on eyewitness history, on it being an orderly account.

[28 : 03] It's not myth or legend. It's truth and they stand as eyewitnesses. But they're not finished. perhaps often when we communicate the gospel, we stop at the resurrection. But they push us further. The apostles often push us further and Peter does it here.

Verse 42, Jesus is Lord and judge. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and of the dead.

verse 38, Jesus was anointed as saviour. Verse 42, Jesus is appointed as judge.

What Peter reminds Cornelius and his household and reminds us is that Jesus today occupies the place of honour and power and glory and authority in heaven. that Jesus in the future will return to judge the living and the dead.

[29 : 11] This is Jesus himself said so often in his parables, those parables that speak of separation. You know, the parable of the sheep and the goats as one example. It gives an urgency.

The apostles could testify that at his trial, Jesus found himself in the dock unjustly, falsely accused. His enemies said that he had committed blasphemy, claiming to be the Son of God.

But here, Peter, the apostle, testifies that Jesus will return and he will return in his exalted, glorious position as judge and king. And each one of us will stand in his courtroom, be in the dock before him as judge.

And so, as Paul said to Timothy, because that's true, there's an urgency in our communication of the gospel message and there's a need for people to hear.

Remember, Paul said something similar in Acts chapter 17. He spoke about God setting a time when he'll judge all people and he's given proof of that by raising Jesus from the dead.

[30 : 29] Jesus is God's judge and the proof of that was the resurrection. One last element of gospel preaching we find in the book of Acts here in Acts chapter 10 is calling people to recognize their need to believe in Jesus.

Verse 43, all the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

So, in a sense, we're back to fulfillment of scripture again. Here we're invited and especially as we look forward to sharing the Lord's Supper to recognize that Jesus brings in the new covenant.

And what's the promise in the book of Ezekiel when the new covenant comes, there'll be forgiveness, there'll be a new heart, there'll be a new ability for the people of God to obey. And that reality is true for all who will believe in Jesus.

And so, in light of the uniqueness of Christ, in light of his identity, his power, his death and resurrection, Peter calls on Cornelius and Cornelius' household to faith, to belief, to trust in the Lord Jesus.

[31 : 54] This week, outside our school gates, some primary fives have been collecting for Ukraine. And the people who were collecting, let's just say they were very invested in their task.

They didn't let anybody off the hook very easily. You know, they knew that Ukraine needed help and they guessed that people had money and so the buckets were being shaken.

The request was being given repeatedly. And do you know in a sense, I think, as a church, we could do with more of that. Sometimes we're content with information transfer.

forever. But the gospel proclamation calls for decision, calls people to repent and believe.

We want lives to be transformed because we believe that this truth matters eternally. So what you see from Acts chapter 10 from Peter's sermon is six of the elements.

[33 : 02] You can go through the book of Acts. It would be very interesting for you if you had time to go through the book of Acts and to see all those sermons and you'll see those elements. But when we think about our own desire to share the good news of Jesus with others, perhaps some things that come out for us.

One, I think a reminder that we can trust the New Testament record. that we can invite others to examine it without fear. The reliability of the Word of God, the reliability of the Gospels, the account of the resurrection, they stand up to examination and we can invite our friends to examine if they are curious, if they are even skeptical.

We have eyewitness history and that history is reliable. I think too we are reminded when we look at the preaching in Acts that we focus on the uniqueness of Jesus.

He isn't just one among many, he is utterly unique. Unique in his identity, unique in his powerful ministry, unique in his death and resurrection, unique in the fact that he will return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and he will bring in the world we all want.

one of the things that I certainly find challenging in thinking about how do we share the gospel is this reminder from the book of Acts that the future is always part of the gospel message.

[34 : 34] And indeed Paul would say to Timothy that the future is part of the motivation for communicating the gospel message. And maybe one other thing for us to reflect on is how often you find when you read through the sermons in the book of Acts, whether they're public or whether they're more private, is that they call for a moment of decision.

And isn't that so often perhaps the hardest bit? If we're trying to share something of our faith. But it's something that people need to hear. Especially when we live in an age where it's like, well that's fine for you but that's not really my thing.

Because the authority of Jesus is absolute, because he is Lord and judge over all, everybody needs to know and to be called to respond. What we'll do just as we close is to go back now to 2nd Timothy and just think very briefly about three reasons Paul says why we need preaching and teaching.

preaching. So I hope we will have this firmly established in our heads that we need preaching in the context of a spiritual health check.

Maybe that thing that we've always done and we've never really thought about it. We always preach. That we'd understand its importance. three things that Paul says to Timothy.

[36 : 07] One, the church is a community that is formed by God's word. We're not formed because we share the same culture, because we don't.

We're not formed because we share the same lifestyle or we share the same struggles or we happen to listen to the same speaker. That's not what brings us together.

We are formed as we live under the word of God. Look at all the words that he mentions about the word of God. It's the word of God that makes us wise for salvation.

It's the word of God that teaches us. It's the word of God that rebukes and corrects when we are prone to disobedience and drift. It's the word of God that trains and equips us.

Just as every soldier needs equipment, every sports person needs equipment, the equipment we need to live the life of faith is the word of God. So we are a community formed by God's word.

[37 : 15] But secondly, the church is a community in awe of God's word. So we mentioned this a couple of times. Why is Timothy to preach?

What does Paul say to him? In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing in his kingdom, I give you this charge, preach the word.

So because Jesus is judged, because Jesus is returning, because Jesus is establishing his kingdom, the church is to preach and to be committed to preaching and teaching.

Paul's point is it's crucial to listen to and obey the word of God if we are to be justified, if we are to be ready, if we are to be part of the kingdom of God. So we preach and teach with a sense of awe and wonder.

Our God and Father and Christ our Savior. And finally, Paul says to Timothy, the church is a community holding firmly to God's word.

[38 : 26] Verse 3, for the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Verse 4, they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

The Bible's always been under attack. Philosophers, scientists, artists, governments, the church always faces temptation, or just give people what they want to hear.

Perhaps leave the hard bits, soften some of the rough edges. Why not blend in and give a message that culture is going to receive better? Paul knew that temptation, Timothy knew that pressure, but what does Paul say?

He says to Timothy, keep your head. Commit to preaching and teaching the Bible in our evangelism and in our discipleship.

Just as we close, one question perhaps to help us to reflect. Since this is true, how do I, how do we approach God's word?

[39 : 32] And maybe especially the preaching of God's word. Let me give you three very simple T's to take away.

First, we turn up. never underestimate the value of long, steady character formation if we commit ourselves to sitting under the preaching of God's word.

But it requires us, doesn't it, to tune in, to be engaged. Perhaps to think, what is it that helps me to listen and learn the best?

Some of us, it's note taking. I'm definitely a note taker. I find that really helpful for concentration and memorization. But come tuned in to be engaged, ready to hear and to receive.

And the third one, take it to heart. Consider the truth of God's word, not for others, but for me. And consider the truth of God's word, not just for me, but for us.

[40 : 42] as a congregation. Turn up, tune in, take it to heart. A healthy church is a church that's committed to the preaching and teaching of God's word.

May that always be true of us as a local church. Let's pray together. Lord, we remember the apostles declared that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

Help each one of us to believe the gospel and give us courage and confidence and wisdom and help to proclaim the gospel.

people. We pray that you would protect us individually and as a church from a low view of your word and a low view of preaching. But rather you would make us a church that is committed to preaching and teaching the Bible as your word, your word of revelation, your word that speaks of your salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus.

Because our world needs to hear that message more than anything else. Please give us that conviction and please give us opportunities this week to speak and to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

[42 : 23] Amen. Now, in just a few moments, we will be sharing the Lord's Supper as the people of God receiving these elements.

I want to read a verse from 1 Corinthians 1, verse 21. It says, and it's up on our screen, For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached, to save those who believe.

The Lord's Supper was a gift that Jesus gave to the church, and the Lord's Supper preaches the gospel to us. What message does the Lord's Supper preach to us?

Well, it's a visible reminder, isn't it, of the cross of the Lord Jesus, that by his wounds we are healed, that in his sacrifice we know forgiveness, that the Lord's Supper reminds us that we enter into the new covenant by his blood.

God's plan for you and me to have fellowship with him now and for eternity rests in Jesus shedding his precious blood. receiving the elements of the Lord's Supper also reminds us in a way that we need a salvation from outside of ourselves.

[44 : 09] It is a gift of grace that we receive by faith. The Lord's Supper, as we share it together, also reminds us that God has made us a new community, a new body, He has called us together, different backgrounds, different experiences, but all one in Christ Jesus, and we share this meal together for those of us who are members of God's church, those who have faith in the Lord Jesus.

And so this supper that we share is for all who have put their faith in Jesus, who are members of God's church, and who know that we have an ongoing need for His grace.

And so in just a moment we'll be directed to collect the bread and the wine, and while that's happening, we'll also stand and we will sing the hymn Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery to help us reflect on the gospel.

So let's stand and let's sing and folks will be directed to collect the elements at the appropriate time. Amen.

Amen. Amen.