

Why do we listen to sermons?

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[0:00] Thank you so much. I'll be reading from 2 Timothy chapter 3 from verse 10 to chapter 4 verse 5.

I'll give you guys a second to get there. Okay.

Again, that's 2 Timothy chapter 3 from verse 10 to chapter 4 verse 5.

Thank you that it is a life-giving word. Thank you that, as we read in those verses, it is your God-breathed word and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work in following you.

[3:58] We'll please work in that way in our hearts this morning. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, why do we listen to sermons?

That's our question for this morning. I wonder how you think about sermons. Friends, what's your thoughts when it gets to the preaching bit in a church service?

Here's what one man said. Perhaps you like this. There is perhaps no greater hardship at present inflicted on mankind and in civilized and free countries than the necessity of listening to sermons.

The preaching clergyman, the preacher, is the bore of the age. Is it boring? With his imperfect sentences, repeated phrases, false pathos, drawings, and denouncings.

Is that how you think about sermons? It's just boring. Or is it for you the most exciting thing about coming to church?

[5:12] Do you come to church because you're going to hear a sermon? Or is it somewhere in the middle? You love the singing. You can cope with a sermon.

And you really look forward to seeing people afterwards. What do you think about sermons? Well, that's what we're going to help one another with this morning. We've been asking different questions, actually, the last few weeks, in case you've missed it or we need reminding, of why we do certain things as a church.

So we started, why do we gather? Why do we come in the first place? Why do we sing together?

Why do we pray? Last week, why do we give particularly money in church life?

And this week, why do we listen to the sermons? It strikes me that we're in a culture that does love to listen to things. I wonder, how many people have listened to a podcast this week?

There was a few. I wondered if there'd be a few more, actually. I feel like they're everywhere.

Everyone seems to have one. Can anybody guess how many podcast episodes in the whole wide world there might be?

[6:21] Any guesses? Several million. Billion, maybe. Yeah. Five million?

Billion. Billion, that's massive, isn't it? Actually, 190 million, according to a very quick Google search. So do come back to me if that's wrong.

About 190 million podcast episodes. And you can listen to all sorts of things, can't you? All sorts of people's voices speaking about history, sports, politics, entertainment, you name it, there will be a podcast about it.

At home, we've even been listening to one about, what do you do yesterday? Just simply people going on a podcast and saying what they did with their yesterdays.

How boring is that? Social media, you can listen to people's voices on there. Perhaps you love going on Instagram, Facebook, whatever the latest social media is nowadays, and hearing people's voices about different things that you're interested in.

[7:31] And once a year, many people in our country even go and put on our televisions at three o'clock in the afternoon on the 25th of December and listen to the king.

We listen to his voice speaking. It's a voice of influence in our country. And every week, people gather, like we are today, to sit and listen to God's voice.

As we open up the Bible, we come expectant to hear the voice, not of the king of England, but the king of the world, of all history.

And as we listen to his voice in this way, it is like, as we open the Bible, it is like we're picking up a megaphone.

Sorry, that's not a very mega megaphone, is it? But it's like we're picking up a megaphone and hearing the voice of God speaking out to us.

[8:36] And when the king of kings speaks, when he speaks loudly and clearly, as we believe he does in his words, we should stop and listen.

Let's consider for a moment the power of God's voice, okay? So, in the Bible, we see that God's words have power to create.

They have power to create. So, if I want to create something, perhaps I'll grab a pen and I'll draw something, a pretty picture of some sort.

Or you might grab something else and create something wonderful. We need things, don't we, to create stuff. But God simply, according to Genesis 1, speaks out words.

And there is nothing else but him and his voice. And the whole creation came to be. God said, didn't he, let there be light.

[9:43] And there was light. And there is still light in our worlds. God said, let the water teem with living creatures and birds fly in the sky.

God said it, and it was so. God said, let us make mankind in our own image. And it was so. God's voice has power to create.

God's voice also has power to curse, we see in Genesis, or judge. So, it wasn't very long, if you read Genesis, before Adam and Eve said no to God, the creator.

No to the God who has spoken everything into being. And so, God said, well, you're going to have to face the consequences. Have to face curses. Cursed is the serpent.

You'll crawl on your belly. Cursed is the woman. And childbirth will be painful. Cursed is the man. Working will be hard labor. And you will all return to dust.

[10:47] The dust of the ground, you'll die. But thankfully, God didn't stop speaking to the world there and then. Thankfully, he continues to speak into the worlds.

And we see that in the Bible, that God's words creates nations. In fact, one very specific nation in the Old Testament. Remember what God did with Abraham.

With his voice. He called Abraham, of all people, to come out of his homeland. And to follow him. And he gave him precious promises.

Promises. And through this man and his wife, a whole nation would come about. And we know that's the Jewish nation. Promises were given to them of land and blessing and descendants. And it was so. God's word creates nations. And God's word creates new life. Not only does God have power to create life out of nothing as he did with the world and the universe.

[12:01] But God's voice also has power to raise the dead. I'm sorry, I forgot to put this verse on the screen. But there's a man in the Old Testament, a prophet called Ezekiel.

He's got a big book in the Old Testament. And in chapter 37, you can read about how he was told this by the Lord. Prophecy or speak, really, to these bones.

Like bones of people who died. And say to them, dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the sovereign Lord says to these bones.

I will make breath enter you and you will come to life. Ezekiel probably felt a bit foolish speaking to bones. Dead things.

But that was an illustration to help him see that God creates new life through his words. Through the power of his voice. And then when we get into the New Testament, we see that God's word came to live amongst us.

[13:13] We read this in John chapter 1. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory.

The glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. The word, Jesus Christ, who was there at the beginning, there at the creation of the world, has now come to

live among us, the Bible says.

God's voice was seen and heard in person, walking amongst us. Isn't that amazing? And we see in the life of Jesus that by his voice, the seas were stilled, the dead were raised, sins were forgiven. And with a loud voice, towards the end of his life and on the cross, he declared, it is finished.

The work to save people, the debt we owe to God has been paid in full. And those are words of great hope for us who follow the Lord Jesus.

[14:28] And if we're not following Jesus yet, those are words of great hope for you. That in the Lord Jesus, your sins have been paid for and you can also know life in him.

So the voice of God is powerful. It brings life. Powerful to announce judgment. Powerful to bring new nations. Powerful to even raise the dead.

Powerful to bring new nations.

We're best with you. We're best hearing your words. Words speaking to us. God's voice is powerful. It has words of eternal life. And so that's where our reading comes in this morning that Valerie read for us. To Timothy.

[15:47] And there's this wonderful thing that Paul says to Timothy in verse 15. How from infancy you have known the holy scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through Jesus Christ.

Paul is writing to Timothy. Paul is writing to Timothy. Timothy is a young pastor of a church in a place called Ephesus. And Paul says these words to him because there's lots of people around him who are departing away from the Bible or trying to change its message.

And Paul says if you're going to keep following the Bible as I've explained it to you, you will face opposition for following it.

But Timothy, keep going. Keep going and following the scriptures. Keep going and preaching the scriptures because you know that from it you have salvation from God.

From it you know eternal life. From it you know the one, the Lord Jesus Christ who says it is finished. Your sins are paid for. So keep looking to the scriptures.

[17:08] Paul says. And that's what he says to us too. We've got those words recorded for us in the Bible. God's word is powerful.

It brings us to salvation. And is able to continue working in us. Verse 16. All scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

So that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Reading the Bible is like going to the gym. It's like a training ground. To strengthen us and equip us for continuing to live life in a good, strong way.

Following the Lord Jesus Christ. God's word is great. So that's what we needed to hear before we actually answer the question, why do we listen to sermons?

About God's word. We're going to pause there though. We will answer that question hopefully in a moment. But we're going to pause there. We're going to sing. We've heard how wonderful God's word is.

[18:11] And so we're going to sing and help each other understand that in this song. How sure the scriptures are. God's vital, urgent word is true as still and far more sharp than any sort.

When the music begins, we'll stand and sing together. This is a tune. And God's word has come to live amongst us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But why then do we sit and listen to sermons? Couldn't we just be sitting at home and reading the Bible ourselves? Couldn't we just read out the Bible when we meet together and not bother with a sermon if God's word is that powerful?

Could we just sit around in sort of little groups as we do sometimes and discuss the Bible, our own views about what God is saying? Could we just watch preaching on the internet?

Because there's much better preachers than I am out there online. Could we just do that? Why is it a local church meets together and the central part of our meeting involves the public preaching of God's word?

[19:33] That's what we need to try and answer together. I'm going to play, hopefully it works, I didn't test this before, a video from a chap called Mike Reeves who leads a Bible college in Wales.

And he's going to speak far clearer than I will about what preaching is. Now there's a word that I want you to spot that he describes it as. It begins with H.

So have a listen out for that word beginning with H and I'll test you. Particularly younger ones, we'd love to hear if you get that word. We'll help each other in a moment.

What is preaching? I think it's important to distinguish preaching from teaching. Now, I both preach and teach in my ministry and the two are close but not exactly the same.

So let me put it this way. At Union, I teach heresy. What I mean by that is I teach my students about Pelagianism and Nestorianism and various heresies that I want them to understand.

[20:43] I don't want them to believe those things and love them. I do want them to be clear on what they mean and how they work. That's teaching. In preaching, I'm conveying content as clearly as I can so that you understand something.

In preaching, I'm doing something more than that. In preaching, I'm not merely opening up scripture so that you can say, yes, I understand that.

It's not merely an English comprehension exercise so you can go away and rattle off the passage yourself and say, I understood what was said. In preaching, I am heralding the word of God so that not only is your mind renewed, but your heart is affected so that you love God more.

Moses said that he taught the law to the people of Israel and that the law was to be taught so that they might fear the Lord, that they might love God as God, that they might rejoice in him, tremble in wonder, in fearful wonder at who he is.

And that is the goal of preaching. We convey who Christ is, revealed through his word, not so that people may merely know about him, but so that they may enjoy him and love him.

[22:17] And that is preaching, heralding Christ. Anyone spot? There was a few words beginning with H.

Anyone spot it, Gracie? Herald, yes. Do people agree, herald? Yeah. That's the word we're thinking about, heralding.

That's the word that's used, really, in chapter 4, verse 2, that we've read of 2 Timothy. Preach the word. That word preach is herald the words.

It's to publicly, with authority, proclaim God's words to God's people. That's what we understand by preaching.

It's a bit like what these sort of people do. This chap is a town crier. I'm just going to play this video as well.

[23:23] We're gathered here on Gloucester Cross today to welcome the Olympic torch, which is on its way. Three cheers for the torch. Hep, hep! Hooray!

Hep, hep! Hooray! Hep, hep! Hooray! It could only happen in Gloucester, couldn't it? Yeah. That chap is a town crier.

You might not have come across one before. That might seem strange to you. I don't know if we have one in Brighton. But their job is to dress up in a way that stands out and shout things.

Shout, announce information. Herald. Publicly proclaim it to people. That's essentially what preaching is. To announce things that are true about the Lord and to help us with that.

So let's see what Paul says to Timothy about the preaching. So it's heralding. Verse 2. We're going to just consider that verse together for our remaining time.

[24:36] So Paul says, do it in the presence of God. The call to preach, the call to herald God's word is done in the presence of God.

That's what verse 1 says. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, he will judge the living and the dead. If you're at school, this would be a bit like you sitting in a lesson and your teacher's teaching away.

And then suddenly the head teacher stands in the room and stands at the back and they're listening to every word your teacher is saying. They're making notes. They're making sure what your teacher says is good, is true, is helping you to learn.

Every time the Bible is opened and a preacher opens their mouth, they are doing it in the presence, not of the head teacher of your school, but of God Almighty.

The one who we heard at the beginning has the whole earth belonging to him for he created it. The one who is king over everything. We are doing it in his presence.

[25:52] Every time the Bible speaks, God is there. So what is being done in the sermons, what is being done as we listen to sermons should not be done carelessly or thoughtlessly.

Or by any old person. It's a sobering thing. It's a thing to be done with great care for the preacher. It's a thing to think about carefully, isn't it?

As I stand here and speak words out, God is with us in the room. He knows the thoughts of my heart.

He knows all our thoughts as we stand and sit here and hear his words. It's done in the presence of God. And secondly, it's a command.

That verse 2 says, preach the word. It's a command. And it's a command to preach, not just teach.

[27:02] As the video helped us to see, preaching and teaching, they're slightly different. Teaching helps us to understand things. And we want people to understand what the Bible says.

But it's even more than that. If we just came along to be taught the Bible, we could just sort of rename ourselves Calvary School of the Bible, couldn't we?

And there would be classes to help people understand what the Bible says. It would fill our brains with lots of information. And we can be sent on our way.

And perhaps some of us might be seen as sort of know-it-alls. They go to that Calvary School on a Sunday. Some of them go to school in the week. And they still go to school on a Sunday. They don't need to do that. But actually, there's even more going on.

When we gather and hear the Bible preached, it's not just helping us to understand things. We remembered earlier, as we were going through, thinking, how does God speak out his word?

[28:09] That they spoke those curses, those words of judgment on Adam and Eve. Because they sinned against God. They rebelled against their creator.

And ever since then, all human hearts have not been right before God. In fact, really, naturally, all of us before God are a bit like those dry bones that Ezekiel had to speak to.

All of us before God, on our own, are dead before him spiritually. We have no life until God speaks to us and convinces us of the Lord Jesus and brings us to trust in him.

And then we're filled with new life from God. And that new life, we want that new life to be growing in us. And we understand from the Bible that that's what God does in the believer.

By his spirit, he's working to create in us his new life to make us more like the Lord Jesus. And as we hear the word preached, it should do far more than fill our brains with knowledge.

[29:26] It should help us to have our hearts changed, to be renewed, to be made more like our great savior. And that connects with our next point.

We hear the word so that we're changed. Verse 2 continues. It says, Preach the word, be prepared in season, out of season. Correct, rebuke, and encourage.

So three words that Paul uses that should be going on when we're preaching. Correcting, rebuking, and encouraging. Correct and rebuke, they're very similar. I'm not sure they're the same, but they're very similar.

So what's going on in that? Well, as God's word is opened and the preacher proclaims it, it should confront us with truth that we're not always living rightly before God.

Perhaps there's a sin which we're struggling with, which we're not really dealing with properly or not even seeing is serious. And so as we hear God's words, it's sort of like a mirror.

[30:33] We see ourselves in it. We see our sin in it. And we see that we need to take some action. We need to see that we need to deal with it very seriously.

Perhaps we view God in a wrong way. Haven't seen him rightly. And as we read the Bible, we can have our understanding of him corrected.

So that we see more of what he really is like. In preaching, we also believe, don't we, that it brings people to salvation as God's word is proclaimed.

Like Timothy, the scriptures make people wise for salvation. And so perhaps the way that God may use preaching sometimes is to correct and rebuke someone who's not following the Lord at all, to bring them to salvation.

That's what is going on there as Paul says. Preach it so that it can correct and rebuke us, but also encourage us. It's not all about trying to beat us all up.

[31:39] It can encourage us to, encourage us to move urgently to tell others the gospel. Encourage us to have compassion on others.

Encourage us to forgive others as the Lord has forgiven us. It can encourage us to see the privilege and the need to pray together. It can encourage us to, as our hearts are comforted with the knowledge that God loves us.

Sometimes that's all we just need to come and hear on a Sunday to hear and be reminded that God loves us. So preaching, it should be to the head, should fill our minds with knowledge as we're taught, but also to the heart as well, should be changing us.

And finally, it should be done with patience and with care. That's what Paul says at the end of verse 2. Do it with great patience and careful instruction.

It can be very easy as a preacher, confession time. It can be very easy for me to write a sermon and assume that this sermon will change someone's life or will bring about some big revival.

[32:54] That that sentence that I've worked on all week will just cause a wonderful, amazing effect in people. And then I get to the Monday and think, that didn't look like that was happening.

In fact, someone was asleep on the back row. It feels like nothing's happened. We do preaching. We do preaching. We listen to sermons with great patience.

Because though God can use sermons to bring about great revivals, sudden and transformative, usually God's thoughts are not our thoughts or his ways are not our ways.

And usually change in the Christian life in a church is very slow. And oftentimes we may not even know it's really going on.

But we trust that God is at work through his word. And can you imagine over the course of 5, 10, 15, 20, 30 years of people coming to hear God's word, what a wonderful change can happen in people's lives.

[34:08] Imagine as a church keeps on proclaiming God's word. And from time to time, people who are not Christians yet may sit and hear it.

And it may just be a seed that is sown that in five years' time in another church, they may come to new life. But it began here. You imagine how God's work can work over a long period of time.

So we need to do it patiently. And we need to trust if we're not preachers that God's word will be at work and changing our lives and others' lives over a long period of time.

And care is needed. Do it carefully, Paul says. Remember whose presence preaching is done in. It's in the presence of the Lord God Almighty.

And so preachers, myself included, and others here who preach the word from time to time, we need to do it with great care. This is God's word that we're handling.

[35:13] We need to read it carefully. We need to see it in context. We must pray over the bits we don't understand and ask that the Lord will make clear to others the things we do understand.

It's not a light thing for those that preach to be preaching God's words. It is a task done with the almighty God in view.

The one who we sang earlier, who is the king reigning on his throne. He's with us and he's here as the preaching is going on. And it's not a small thing to sit and listen to the word of God either.

And we should all remember that. The Lord Almighty is present. So why do we listen to sermons? We could just sit and read the Bible at home, couldn't we?

We could just have Bible study and discussion groups. In place of a sermon, we could just abandon it altogether, couldn't we? But as far as I can tell, Scripture has commanded those who are elders in a church, those who are preachers, not to be running a Bible study.

[36:37] I don't think that's commanded in the Bible. Please correct me if I'm wrong. But preachers are commanded to preach the words. And so it's a primary task for the preacher.

Whether it feels like people want to hear it or not hear it. Be prepared in season or out of season, he says. So we could just listen to sermons online.

But we're missing out on a lot, says the Bible, because the way God has designed local churches is to have elders over them to speak God's words out.

That seems to be what God has designed for his people. After all, you can listen to great sermons online. I'm thankful so much that I can access wonderful teaching by wonderful preachers. I can also access all sorts of strange teaching online. But none of them know what it is to live life as a Christian in Brighton in 2026.

[37:50] And it's very unlikely we'll have met any of the big name preachers ourselves. They don't know us. And I think that's one thing that's important when we're thinking about local church preaching.

We're being preached to by pastors who know us and care about us and who want to help us to not only understand the Scriptures, but want to see it at work in us, to change us, to help us to live the Christian life in Brighton and Hove in 2026 and beyond.

And so I think there's a real importance for local churches to be gathering and hearing preaching. So we listen to sermons each week.

And as we do, we come expecting that God, one way or another, will speak to us and is with us as we open his words.

And as we hear it, we should think, how should we respond? How's this going to change my heart? How's this going to help me to live the Christian life this time tomorrow?

[39:07] Let's pray. Father God, we thank you so much for your words. Thank you that it is a life-giving word.

Thank you. And thank you that you've given it to us in such an accessible way. And thank you that you've given us all sorts of helps to understand it.

Thank you for the resources that we have at home, the books, the preaching online. Thank you that you've given us one another to help one another understand the word of God.

And thank you that in your mercy, you've given us local churches to be in and preachers amongst us who can help us to continue to understand the word together.

Thank you as well for those who help to teach and preach to our children in Sunday Club many weeks of the year as well.

[40:09] Thank you for that. Thank you that you are speaking to us in all sorts of ways through all sorts of means. And we ask that you would continue to do that for us as a church. And we ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.