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Why Preach? 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Congregational Prayer:

Introduction: Please take your Bible and join me in 2 Timothy 4, 2 Timothy chapter 4.

In a January article for the Washington Post, David Haskell pronounced an astounding find. In light of the constant decline in attendance in Protestant Mainline Churches in North America, he and two colleagues had set out on a study to figure out why. The Pew Research Center put out study results in 2015 which showed that these Mainline Churches – Churches like the United Methodist and the PCUSA and the Episcopalian and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, among others – are losing around 1 million members per year.

Twenty years ago a bishop in the Episcopalian Church, named John Spong, published a book entitled *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*. He saw the crisis of decline looming large over the church 2 decades ago and his prescription was a change in the church's approach to the Scriptures. He prescribed abandoning a literal approach to interpreting the Bible, and rather he said that we should interpret the Scriptures in light of the increased academic and social constructs which dominate our culture. In other words – he was telling the church that in order to win the culture we needed to give the culture what they wanted. Well, David Haskell – now 20 years after that book discovered an amazing thing. Simply this – it didn't work! What he found is that churches in North America which have theologically liberal pastors are in pretty constant decline and those churches which are conservative theologically in that they take the Scriptures literally – they are steadily increasing in attendance. As Haskell concludes his article he says, "Spong and other liberals are right to claim that Christianity must change or die. They just get the direction of the change wrong."

There is hardly a week that goes by that I am not accosted by some email or some slick marketing mailing which gives me some new gimmick or ministry method which will supposedly help me to grow the church. The constant drumbeat is change – change this or change that and be constantly relevant and then people will come. Sometimes it is necessary to step back from what we are doing to evaluate if indeed it is what we should be doing. One of the things which drew me to want to come to Newton Bible several years ago was the desire I saw within you as a body to hear the Word. You expect your pastors, your elders, your Sunday School teachers, your Small Group leaders – you expect them to give you the Word of God. And while I rejoice in this, I must also confess to you that sometimes I question this. Don't get worried – I am not about to launch into some liberal assault on the Word. I am just being

transparent here. In the trenches of week in and week out ministry of the Word I have sometimes wondered – is this worth it? Am I doing the right thing? Is it effective? Are people even listening? In other words – the question I have asked at various dark moments in the last few months is – Why Preach? Why do this? Why give so much of my week to the preparation and delivery of God’s Word to God’s people?

Well, there is one text in all of Scripture that rises to the top when you consider that question and it is found in 2 Timothy 4. So, as we come to this text my desire is to bolster my confidence in this strange event we call preaching and to bolster your desire to see God use His preached Word to grow you in your faith and to grow our church family! Let’s read 2 Timothy 4, starting in verse 1. *Read 4:1-5.*

Why then should we preach? Why should preaching hold such a central role in the life of our church? Why should you find yourself often under the words of a preacher? This text gives us 3 unshakable and always relevant reasons. Each of these reasons is enough to compel our undying commitment to preaching, but all three together make an even more compelling case. We should preach because this is the solemn charge, because there is a suitable subject and because now is the suitable season.

I. Because this is the Solemn Charge – Vs. 1-2a

- a. Simply working our way through the text we will see these three reasons unfold. We are struck immediately with this solemn charge in verse 1 which leads to the overarching command in verse 2. So, Paul invokes the presence of the living God, even of Jesus Christ, who is to judge the living and the dead, and with that deadly serious audience he tells Timothy to Preach the Word! These are some of Paul’s final words ever recorded on parchment. He knows that he is about to give his life as a martyr and he must give Timothy this final and solemn charge – Preach. Preach the Word.
- b. *The Man of God must Preach*
 - i. This is simply what the man of God must do. I say man of God because that is how Paul referred to Timothy at the end of chapter 3. It is a technical term which is used only of Timothy in the New Testament and it links him to the office of God’s messenger or God’s prophet in the Old Testament where it is used some 70 times. This man of God was sent by God with God’s message to God’s people. By using this term Paul is raising Timothy’s awareness to the seriousness of this charge. He is a company of a long line of faithful men who have stood for God before God’s people and given them God’s Word. At this point Timothy is pastoring the church in Ephesus and Paul’s preeminent charge to this young pastor is to preach! As a man of God this is what he must do. This links us back to chapter 1 in this letter where Paul explains to Timothy

how he himself was appointed as a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. He describes how he has been given the good deposit of the gospel of Jesus Christ and now he has entrusted that to Timothy. Then he tells Timothy to guard that good deposit of sound words and to pass that on to faithful men who may teach others also. So, this deposit of sound doctrine – especially the sound doctrine of the Gospel – is not a deposit to be hidden deep away for none to see, but it is to be heralded and proclaimed and passed on for others to pass on as well. Timothy is simply one link in a long chain of faithful men who had proclaimed the Word of God. In other words – to be a man of God you must take the baton and run your lap, and then pass that baton on to the next runner when your lap is done. This is all so very necessary because God has withdrawn from our sight. Ever since the Garden of Eden and the sinful rebellion of Adam and Eve mankind has been forbidden from seeing God. Since that time it has been the age of the ear. I know that most people think that we live in a visual age, and obviously we do in so many ways – but when it comes to God, we live still in the age of the ear. The Old Testament has occasional instances of a small display of God’s manifest glory on Earth, but he forbids his people from making a carved image of Him. He is not a God to be seen, but a God to be heard. His Son did come to Earth in human form, but have you ever noticed that we know absolutely nothing about his human appearance? We know what it wasn’t – it wasn’t much to look at, he wasn’t superhuman in appearance and his visage wasn’t something great to look upon – but the Gospels never tell us the color of his hair or the length of his beard or the shape of his face – nothing! In fact, the New Testament refers to him as what – the Word made flesh. We will one day see God and we will then be like Him when He appears because we shall see Him as He is, but until then we must listen to Him. He speaks, he doesn’t appear. And He has spoken in His Word. The Man of God is charged with the solemn task of speaking for God as the lifeblood of the body of Christ. They need to hear from Him, and the man of God is tasked with being faithful to preach and proclaim and herald.

c. *The Man of God must Answer*

- i. This is also a solemn charge because the Man of God must answer. Not only is this what he must do because this is the summation of his ministry – the preaching of the Word – but he must also answer for his performance. He must give an account. There is really no way to make the charge any more serious than it is in verse 1. Paul is telling Timothy that he will one day stand before God – and particularly before the Second Person of the Triune Godhead – Jesus Christ Himself. And Timothy will have to give an account to this supreme Judge. This Judge – Jesus Christ –

has been raised from the dead by God because he was faithful to His ministry of reconciliation. His work of redemption was completed and his body was raised from the grave.

- ii. Because He was faithful in the flesh He is now raised to the highest of heights over all creation as the Eternal God and He is tasked with calling all things into account. On that Day of his appearing and the fulfillment of his kingdom He will call to account those who have been given this solemn charge to preach the Word. As King of this Kingdom He has tasked his servants with the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom. And like any good King He is going to one day inspect what he expects. The command given will be the basis for the judgment pronounced.
- iii. Paul has already called Timothy to serve our Lord in such a way as to present himself approved before God. Look back at 2:14-15.
- iv. The approved worker on that Day of Judgment before the Great King is the one who has rightly handled the word of truth. His judgment will be directly related to his obedience to the command. This is the very thing that Paul says he has finished well and is ready for the end of his life and his ministry. He is ready for the Day of Judgment before His Lord. Look at 4:6-8.
- v. What Paul primarily means when he says that he has fought the good fight and finished the race and kept the faith is that he has held fast to the word of life. He has not swerved from rightly handling the word of truth. He has not embraced another Gospel, but only the Gospel of grace through Jesus Christ. He has not mixed in any works for salvation. And he has not refused to preach the whole gospel of grace in which this grace now teaches us to renounce ungodliness as we are instructed in righteousness as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling before God. He has preached a faithful Gospel and a full Gospel, and this has been his constant theme. And now he is ready to depart and be with Christ. And he knows that he can love the appearing of Christ because he has been faithful. No preacher who has been unfaithful will love the day of the appearing of Christ. They have been unfaithful because they seized the day as their day of appearing. It became about them and the gospel became their platform for self-promotion and self-exaltation. Therefore, they do not look forward to the day of the return of their Lord because their day will be over and the Lord's full and final day will begin – and they will give an account. But the faithful preacher – the unremitting herald who has run his race fully and faithfully – he is ready and longing for His Lord to return.
- vi. We must preach because this is the solemn charge for the man of God. And this charge, by the way, does not just fall to the unique office of

pastors. It is preeminently applied to them as though who will be the most accountable to the Lord. But this charge applies to all who seek the salvation or the sanctification of another. The power of God to salvation is the Word, and the power of God for the sanctification of the follower of Christ is the Word of God. Therefore, any who seek another's salvation or sanctification – which we all as Christians should do – we ought to use the Word. And in using the Word we will one day answer to the Lord of the Word. This is a solemn reality, and it compels our faithfulness in preaching.

II. Because there is a Sufficient Subject – Vs. 2a

- a. We must also preach because there is a sufficient subject. So the charge given is not just to preach, but it is to preach the Word! Preaching is not honoring to Christ and it is not in line with its divine directive if its content is anything other than the Word of God. This Word which we are to preach is most closely linked with the Word described to Timothy at the end of chapter 3. So, in 14 Paul calls Timothy to continue in what he has learned and has firmly believed – in particular the sacred writings which he has been taught since childhood. Those sacred writings are described in verse 15 as being able to make Timothy wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Then in verses 16-17 Paul expands into a general statement about all Scripture being given by God, breathed out by Him, and therefore they are all profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. This is the Word that Timothy is now charged with preaching in 4:2.
- b. *The Word is Authoritative*
 - i. This Word is a sufficient subject for preaching because it is the authority. It is the authoritative Word because it comes directly from the ultimate Authority over all things – God himself. The Bible doesn't speak directly to all things, but it when and where God speaks to something it is always right and it is always relevant. God is never wrong; therefore God's Word is never wrong, therefore, the man of God should always have God's Word as the subject of his proclamation.
 - ii. The preacher is not to preach himself or his own wisdom or his own ideas. He is not to preach about the Bible or from the Bible. He is to preach the Word. As Al Mohler has written – “We are heralds, not originators. We are charged to preach a message we have received – not to invent a message that will be well received.”¹
 - iii. Preaching is not authoritative if it does not have the right content. I am not an authoritative voice on anything of any interest to most of you. My

¹ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Preaching: The Centrality of Scripture*, pg. 10.

only ground for declaration to you, my only hope of capturing your ear, my only authority over your life is found in this Word. I have nothing to say which should be submitted to or which should change your life apart from what this holy Word says. The man of God is to preach the Word because the Word is authoritative.

c. *The Word is Profitable*

- i. The man of God is also to preach the Word because the Word is profitable. Because the Word is breathed out by God it is authoritative. Because it is authoritative it is profitable. In other words, God's mind on any matter is the one thing you must know in order to be rightly equipped for every good work. Every trial and tribulation, every pain and anguish, every joy and triumph, every success and prosperity, every emotion and thought, every option and decision – they all need the clarifying light of the Word of God. Like God we have a lot to say. We are a people of words who like to spew out everything we think. We like to be right and to pass judgment. We like to chart a course and make plan. We like to use our words to create and critique. We are made in the image of God after all. But we quickly and prolifically fall into idolatry here. We replace God and God's Word with our word or with someone else's word because we think it is better or because we are lazy or because we are sinfully rebellious.
- ii. But this is foolish. The greatest need in any situation is the truth of the Word. The need of every age and of every generation and of every human heart is to hear and know and be transformed by the truth of the sound doctrine of the Word. It is indeed profitable to make us into the men and women that God desires us to be in His world. This is the pathway to Christian maturity and every good work – it is the pathway illumined by the Lamp of the Word of God.
- iii. This by the way was what Jesus did when he was confronted with great human need. He met that need with words of truth and sound doctrine. Just consider one of those moments in his ministry. In John 11 he is confronted by Martha who is in terrible grief over the premature death of her brother Lazarus. A death she is convinced Jesus could have stopped if he had only been there. God was absent and Martha was hurt – wow – have you ever been there? How does Jesus answer her? Here this woman is in the throes of grief, the upheaval of great sorrow, the depths of depression, the darkness of anger and bitterness – and probably a hundred other very real emotions and spiritually wrong responses. Does Jesus invite her to gush out all her emotions? Does He give her some pathway of psychological healing methods? Does He teach her some mystical method of transcendental meditation to clear her mind and calm

her soul? Does he point her to group therapy? No, he calmly and carefully and lovingly speaks truth to her about himself. He proclaims sound doctrine to her – I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. And then he asks her a penetrating and sanctifying question – do you believe this?

- iv. Not – do you mentally agree with these facts kind of belief. But rather, in the midst of your greatest pain and your worst moment – do you believe in me in such a way that you can look with faith through your grief and see in me the hope of resurrection and life?
- v. Do you see what Jesus is doing? He is being the faithful herald that Timothy was being called to be in 2 Timothy 4. He is proclaiming truth in that moment to her heart because that is what her heart needs and what this moment requires. The Word is sufficient to save and to sanctify; therefore it must be the content of the sermon preached from the pulpit of the church. That is why we are here isn't it – to see souls saved and sanctified? We want to see people born again to a new and living hope and we want to see them then conformed to the image of Jesus Christ so that they will be holy as indeed He is holy. Well – if that is our aim, then the Word is our path, our method, our tool, our proclamation, our sermon! Preach the Word because this Word is a sufficient subject.

III. Because now is the Suitable Season – vs. 2b-5

- a. Lastly, we must preach the Word because now is the suitable season. Verses 2-5 include 9 different commands to Timothy, but they are all contributing to and explaining the main command – to preach the Word. The imperatives which follow the main command in verse 2 are there to make known that now is the suitable season to do this. There is an urgency in the charge because now is the time when the preaching of the Word is needed. And I don't mean just today, I mean that every season, from the first writing of these words until the day Jesus returns for His Church – every day is the suitable season for the preaching of the Word.
- b. *God's Word is Always Needed* – vs. 2b
 - i. This is true because God's Word is always needed. We see this in the command – be ready in season and out of season. Paul uses a play of words here on the Greek word for seasons. He changes just a few letters to make the point that there is always a need for the preaching of the Word. It is never outdated or irrelevant or unnecessary. It will most certainly be unappreciated at times or even unattended to, but it is never unnecessary. When Paul says in season and out of season he is referring to when it is convenient and when it is not. When it is accepted and when it is not. When it is lauded as coming from God and when it is mocked as being

intolerant and abusive. When it is proclaimed over the national radio waves, and when it must be preached in private house churches under cover of secrecy. When it is celebrated by the great and mighty and when it is rejected and its preachers martyred. Whether thousands respond in obedience and faith or thousands rise up to lynch the messenger and everyone abandons you. In every season – this is what is needed – the preaching of the Word.

- ii. Paul serves once again as his own best illustration. Here he sits in a Roman jail cell – not a pretty place with nothing pretty to brag about. He has been lied about and maligned and imprisoned falsely, all because he has faithfully preached the Word. He is about to be martyred because of his faithfulness to the Word. If he would simply recant and refuse to preach the word then he could go free and live out his life in relative peace and prosperity. But he refuses to do anything different than preach the Word because every season is the right season for preaching the Word, even if it is the season of state-led persecution which will soon lead to your death. God's Word is always needed!

c. *God's People are Always Needy – vs. 2b*

- i. It is also the suitable season for the preaching of the Word because God's people are always needy. This is what he addresses in the rest of verse 2 with those three imperatives – reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. This authoritative and sufficient Word will constantly be reprovng, rebuking and exhorting our hearts. These commands mirror 3:16 and the way that the word is described as profitable. So, because the God-breathed Word is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, then the man of God is supposed to preach that Word and his preaching should reflect these things.
- ii. To reprove means to find fault with or to correct or admonish, call to account, or show someone their fault. The preacher is tasked with laying before all where they have been at fault. Where their thinking about God has been wrong and where their view of life has been misshapen by the world around them and by the lusts of their own flesh. He is not to shy away from calling people out – not individually in front of everyone, but he is to call sin sin and correct where it is found in each text.
- iii. To rebuke is a word that is used of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospel where it says that he rebuked evil spirit and the wind and even a fever. He also rebuked his disciples when they were opposing Him or they weren't thinking or acting in ways which were in line with His authority. Now the man of God is to speak on behalf of the Living Christ and he is to form a direct attack against those things which are refusing Christ's Lordship

in the lives of his hearers. He is to call them to action and especially to submission to Christ.

- iv. While those are both negative aspects of the preaching ministry of the man of God, now he is called to exhort. This Greek word is a compound word of para and kaleo – alongside or parallel and to call. So, the preacher is to call alongside – to call someone to be at one's side. This is the encouragement side of the teaching where the preacher is seeking to encourage faithfulness to the Lord. He is calling out to them and exhorting them to keep up the good work and to seek to attain to a higher plane of obedience and faithfulness.
- v. And all of this is to be done with complete patience and teaching. Though the reproofing and the rebuking and the exhortation of preaching are firm and somewhat confrontational, they are to be done with complete, or all, patience and teaching. The man of God is to be filled with passion for the ministry of the Word through preaching, but he is to be counterbalanced in his passion with a deep patience in the power of the Word to do its work. It is not dependent upon him to bring about the changes he sees as necessary in God's people. It will not even be brought to his account as to whether or not they change. He will answer for his faithfulness to the Word, and his hearers will answer for their attentiveness to the Spirit's work in them through the preached Word. Passion in preaching which is matched with impatience in the heart of the preacher is a recipe for disaster and pastoral malpractice. Many a preacher has torn up a church body by preaching the truth and demanding obedience while not being patient for the Spirit to do His work. This betrays by the way, a lack of trust or confidence in the Word and the Spirit in the heart of the preacher. If he is impatient and becomes demanding with the Word then it betrays a core trust in the power of self and the power of persuasion to bring about change, or it exposes a self-exalting motive which becomes irritable when others are not noticing the preacher's good points from his sermon which must be put into practice. Oh beloved, this has too often been this preacher's heart. He has too often assumed that a well-crafted presentation of truth would bring about change in God's people, but it is not the preacher of God who affects the change of sanctification. Rather, it is the Spirit of God who takes the Word of God and brings about conformity to the image of Christ. He is glad to use the faithful preaching of the Word, but that preaching and that preacher are but an instrument, not a cause. Therefore, the preacher must be patient.
- vi. He must also be filled with all teaching. This is concerned with the content and the activity. So, the preacher is also a teacher and the preacher is to use the sound doctrine of teaching the Word which will so

often be rejected as it is described in verse 3. This is the good deposit which is entrusted to every preacher – the sound doctrine passed on from faithful men. The exhortation and the rebuke and the reproof of preaching must be rooted in the sound doctrine of each text. To preach the Word the preacher must effectively teach the depth of that particular part of the Word by connecting it to the broader truths of Scripture and then calling for action based on that particular text's truth. Exhortation without sound teaching is nothing more than revivalism preaching which excites the emotions for a time and then quickly fades until the next event. And sound teaching without exhortation is like a surgeon without a scalpel. He knows what to do and he understands what is must be removed, but he is never given the tool or the charge to make it happen. So sound teaching and reproof, rebuke, and exhortation must combine in the proclamation of God's Word. Anything less is anemic preaching!

d. *God's Opponents are Always Ready* – vs. 3-4

- i. It is also a suitable season for the preaching of the Word because God's opponents are always ready. They will gladly steal away potential followers of Christ by tickling the ears with false teaching. And people in every age have been more in tune with those who will give them what they want rather than what they need. Verse 3 describes these people as unwilling to endure sound teaching, but rather as having itching ears which will compel them accumulate to themselves teachers who will suit their own passions, which will obviously result in them turning away from the truth and wandering off into myths and lies and the deceptions of Satan. When it says that they will not endure it is describing an unwillingness to listen to or to put up with or to be satisfied with this sound or healthy teaching. People won't even be able to sit through it and endure it. They will gladly endure a 2 hour movie or a 3 hour football game, but 40-50 minutes of teaching on sound doctrine will be too much.
- ii. Instead of this they will find someone who will tickle their fancy. They will pile up unto themselves teachers who will encourage their evil passions. They want to hear those things which are pleasant to their flesh, and when sound teaching is coupled with the moment of exhortational preaching, the fleshly heart simply cannot endure that. They will look for an exit strategy and they will seek out a teacher who will give them what they want. This by the way is how cults are filled. Religious people reject truth and seek after someone who will tell them something which tickles their religious fancy while also stoking their flesh. This is the Prosperity Gospel cult which dominates so much of so-called evangelicalism today. People are being told what they want to hear – that they can have their

highest hopes and dreams in this life if they will simply believe enough in a God who can give it to them.

iii. Notice how the one voice of God is crowded out in the life of the deceived by the many voices who will be accumulated to meet their own passions. This is what happens when we stop preaching the Word – we start appealing to the flesh. God's opponents are always ready to tickle the fleshly ears of the unredeemed and to do so in very deceptive ways which sound so close to the right thing, but sharply veer off from sound teaching into myths and deception.

e. *Therefore, God's Servant Must Always be Steady* – vs. 5

i. Therefore, the man of God must always be steady. The antidote to the perversion of truth from so many pulpits across the land is not to join in and follow suit, but to stand strong and remain steady. Now is the suitable season to preach the Word! That is what verse 5 is all about. These 4 commands to Timothy are 4 ways of saying – stick with the stuff. Be level headed and do the work and the ministry you have been given to do. Be a Gospel preacher and endure the suffering which will come with this. Be reminded that now is the suitable season for preaching because God's Word is always needed and God's people are always needy and God's opponents are always ready. So, you O man of God – be steady in your ministry of the Word. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching!

Conclusion: So, why should we preach? We should preach because this is the solemn charge – preach the Word. We should preach because there is a sufficient subject – the Word of God. And we should preach because now is the suitable season. May we always demand this from those who handle the Word in our body! May they always be men who are mighty in the Scriptures, and may God always use their passionate preaching to transform our hearts and exalt His name! Let's pray!