

The Preaching of the Word

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[0:00] 2 Timothy 3, and we'll begin our reading in verse 16 and read through verse 8 of chapter 4. And even as we have the scriptures in our hand, we're told, I give you this charge. Preach the word. Be prepared in season and out of season. Correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction.

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around 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. For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Come, Brother Robert, and preach to us. Well, good evening. I would like to take as our text the first five verses of chapter four, but we read from chapter three because as Paul is coming to the end of his life, he's aware that this young man, Timothy, whom he loves and whom he has had the opportunity and privilege of training in the gospel ministry, he's aware that he's going to be left on his own because Paul is about to be offered up as a drink offering, as he puts it. In other words, he knows his death is imminent. And this is literally his last words to his young friend, Timothy. And he wants him to know that he has got the scriptures. He's not going to have Paul.

He's not going to have the ability to counsel, to receive counsel from Paul and direction, but he knows that he's going to have to point Timothy to the word of God. You've got the word, Timothy. Be assured it's reliable. It's breathed out by God. It's his word. He used men and he used their gifts and their abilities and their experiences, but he put his words, as it were, there on the paper. And he also wants Timothy to know what he needs to do with that word.

[3:18] And that is he's to preach it. He's to take God's word confidently and boldly to the world and declare that word. And just last week, it was Reformation Sunday, the 500th anniversary. And as I was thinking about our own church in Riverside, to encourage us in the history of the Reformation, but also to exhort us to go forward in the days ahead. It was those thoughts that came to my mind.

So a couple of weeks ago, and then last week, I preached on chapter three, then the beginning of chapter four. And I wanted to share with you some of the thoughts from last week in Riverside, and even found here in chapter four, verses one through five. We were thinking about the fact that a couple of hundreds years before Luther nailed his thesis to the door at Wittenberg Cathedral, there was a man born in England by the name of John Wycliffe. And he was born into a situation that was desperately dark, terribly dark. He was born into an England where the word of God was first of all, not in the English language, and it had never been in the English language.

So even though Christianity had been in England for around, perhaps over a thousand years, think about that a thousand years, the English people had never had a Bible in their own language. It was the Latin Vulgate that was taken by the priests, and then they gave the people what they thought the people needed to hear. But the fact of the matter is, the priests were not giving the people anything from the word of God. The priests in the church in England at that time had given up entirely preaching or teaching the word. They were pure, mere sacerdotalists. In other words, they simply administered the sacraments. And having done that, they thought that was good enough. They don't have to hear from God. So they didn't even hear the word read, let alone preached from the priests. But there was another class, and they were the friars, the Dominicans, the Augustinians, and the Franciscans. And the friars would take the word of God in its Latin form to the people. But what did they do with it? They would perhaps cite a little passage of scripture. And then they would just flow into myths and fables and superstitions and just stories that they were making up right there and then and presenting to the people as if it was truth. And so the people would maybe get a little beginning of a story, perhaps the story of Noah or the story of Moses or some event that took place in John the Baptist's life or something

Jesus said or something an apostle said. They would get a little snippet and then they would get this concocted, convoluted, fabricated story that surrounds the little snippet of truth. And the people were left utterly clueless as to what was true and what was made up, what was myth and what was actually really in the word of God. They had no way of discovering that for themselves. And it had been like that for hundreds of years. So no scripture ever in the English language. And now the Latin Vulgate is in the hands of the priests. They're not reading it. The guys that are reading it are just utterly deceiving the people. Because you see every story that the friars told somehow ended in the need is for you therefore to give me money. That's how it ended. And Chaucer, you've maybe heard of Chaucer, the old ancient English poet and writer. He wrote many poems and many stories, Canterbury Tales for example, to mock the friars and to expose them for who they really were. And England was in a dire place until John

Wycliffe, long before Martin Luther, in the midst of that inky darkness that was all around, John Wycliffe, who could read the Latin, realized that the people of England need the word of God. And so he took the Latin Vulgate and he translated it into English. So by 1384, the English people for the first time ever got the Bible in their own language. But here's something else that John Wycliffe knew. He knew not only do they need the Bible. Remember Paul at the end of chapter three, he says, you have the Bible, you've got the word of God. And then he says in chapter four, now preach it. And Wycliffe knew they don't just need the Bible, they need preachers. They need men that are going to declare the truth.

[8:25] And so he called a bunch of young guys together, started small, and then it became huge, huge. And they were called Lollards. And it's thought that their name comes from an ancient German word for to chant. And it's very possible that these young guys came to Luther and many of them had the priestly robes and the monk type style garments. And they would go barefooted and they would receive a scroll from Wycliffe with a portion of the scriptures. And he would write out sermons and give it to them. Because they weren't, most of them trained, they weren't educated, they weren't theologians. But they would get sermons and they would scatter throughout England and chant the sermons.

And for the first time, this is now us at the end of the 14th century, England has the word of God, and there's guys that are preaching it. And then of course, Wycliffe died shortly thereafter.

And the young guys continued to do what they were doing. And many of them became real preachers, as in they really began to understand and study, and they were growing in their faith and their understanding of scripture. And there was a mighty move of God, a mighty move of God, right through England, right up until the Reformation. So much so that when the Reformation came to England, there were already tens of thousands of people in England that were holding fast to scripture and the preaching of the word of God. And so that was one of the things that made England very fertile for the great revival that we call the Reformation. It's a glorious thing.

But Wycliffe caught on to what Paul believed, the word of God, you need the word of God, confidence in the word of God, but you also need to preach it. You need to declare it. You need to make it known. And so in the 16th century, when a young Martin Luther got into the word of God and realized, this is the message, the gospel, the news of justification by faith alone and Christ alone, is what everybody needs to know. What did he do? The same thing Wycliffe did, exactly the same thing.

He took the scriptures, but in his case, the Greek and the Hebrew, starting with the Greek and then the Hebrew. And he was more educated in that way than Wycliffe was, but he took the Greek and the Hebrew and he translated the scriptures there in the Wartburg, that castle in Germany, in a little dark room, a little musty room. I've been in it and it's awesome to be in that little maybe 10 by 8 or 10 by 6 square foot room and a wee light and it's all the glasses all kind of, you know, hazy and old and you just know that it must have been bad for his eyes, but he labored and he translated the scriptures.

[11:18] And then what did he do? He went out and he preached them. He preached them and he trained others to preach them so that they would hear the word of God. Martin Luther was committed to preaching.

And one thing about both Luther and Wycliffe is they were committed to simple preaching. Lechler, a German incidentally, but he wrote the best biography ever of John Wycliffe.

He says about Wycliffe that at no time was it his aim to give his addresses, sermons, an artistic shape or to polish them or to bring them to a certain perfection of form, but rather to promote the glory of God, the kingdom of Christ and the salvation of souls. What's he saying? He's saying Wycliffe, who was an Oxford scholar, who was under pressure to produce sermons that would have been lauded by the the intellects of his day and applauded by those who were into oratory and wonderful skills and communication. Wycliffe shoved that aside and he was not out in any way to polish up his sermons, to please the academics, but rather to communicate the word of God through the preaching of the word of God plainly and simply to the people who would listen to him. And Luther was exactly the same.

Luther was a man who who wanted the word of God preached in simple, plain terms. Hughes Oliphant Old, an old Presbyterian who studied Luther well, he said this of Luther, he made no attempt to be a great orator. He had none of the rhetorical culture that Basil, Chrysostom or Augustine had. Luther was a popular preacher with a natural mastery of language and he taught preachers of the Reformation to preach in the language of the people. And old doesn't mean there he taught the Germans to preach in German and the English to preach in English. He means in the language of the people in a way that the people could hear, understand and appreciate. In fact, Luther, he used a form in his translation of German that was a very common down to earth form of

German. I don't know much about German linguistics, but I do know that there is low German and high German. And what Luther sought to do was bring the high German down a little bit and elevate somewhat the low German. And so his copy of the Bible actually became influential in bringing a united dialect throughout the land of Germany. It was the Bible that did that for the German people and Luther's copy. You see, in Luther's day, classical rhetoric was very fashionable in Europe.

[14:21] You probably know that the Reformation providentially coincided with the Renaissance. God was working in different ways and he was stirring up people throughout Europe to have an interest in literature, in reading, in learning, in advancing. There was a new spirit, as it were, came to Europe. And of course, that was a work of God. It was causing people in that context to have a hunger for the word as it was now being released and set free and sent throughout the whole of Europe. And there was a sense in which when the Renaissance came, it influenced the communication of speech as it did the communication of literature, as it did art, as it did music. It had very many different influences. And yet, Luther resisted getting into high oratory. He resisted that pressure. In fact, he actually said, and this is his word, not mine, he said that he hated, he hated preaching such as Ulrich Zwingli's preaching. Why would he hate a fellow reformer's preaching? It was because Zwingli would bring in lengthy parts and sections of Greek and Hebrew and Latin into his sermons. And Luther says,

I hate it when they do that. It speaks so that people can understand. In his very graphic way, Luther being very forthright and sometimes, you know, not just on the edge, but over the edge.

He said this, in the pulpit, we're to lay bare the breasts and nourish the people with milk. Complicated thoughts and issues we should discuss in private with the eggheads.

I don't think Dr. Pomeranus, Jonas or Philip, that would be Melanchthon, Philip Melanchthon, I don't think of them in my sermon. They know more about it than I do. So I don't preach to them. I just preach to Hansi and Betsy. In other words, Luther, he wanted the word of God that was God breathed to be preached. And he wanted it preached in a way that people could understand. Why? Because he knew that was the source of life. That was the source of spiritual vitality and energy that the people of God would receive. What about John Calvin? Exactly the same view as Wycliffe and Luther. He said, preaching ought not to be lifeless, but lively. It should teach, exhort, reprove, as Paul said to Timothy, our text tonight. So indeed, that if an unbeliever enters, he may so effectually be arrested and convinced as to give glory to God. Paul taught, Calvin says, of the lively power and energy which the preacher ought to speak with. Who would approve himself a good and faithful minister to God? Who must not parade and make a parade of rhetoric only to gain esteem for himself, but that the spirit of God should sound forth by his voice so as to work with mighty energy. Same thing, right? None of this rhetoric, none of this polished fancy sermons. Take the word of God, preach it, and do so in a way that people understand. Listen, if there's one thing that Luther was, that Calvin was, that John Knox was, and that John Wycliffe was, that William Tyndale was, if there's one thing that these men were, it was they were preachers of the word of God. So what is this reformation thing all about? Ultimately, yes, it's about the five solas which we love and treasure. Sure, it includes the five points, the tulip that we esteem and that we just delight in. Of course, but really the heart of the reformation is about making sure God's word is in the hands of people, communicated through the preaching of the word to the hearts of people, and that it's done in an effective, simple, plain, and clear way. That's what reformation is about. Now, we live in a day when suddenly to be reformed is kind of cool. Who would have thought that? When I came to the States 20 years, 22 years ago,

I used to get phone calls, and it would be people calling our church to say, are you a cult? You know, because I heard that you don't believe Jesus died for everybody, you know, and then people get mad because we were reformed. We don't get called a cult anymore, and in some ways that's kind of good, you know, if you, you know, we'll get rid of that. But in another sense, it indicates that, yeah, to be reformed is pretty cool. You're the young, restless, and reformed. And there's all these internet warriors, and they sit in their mother's basements, I think, and they think that to be reformed is to grow a big beard, and to be sarcastic, and to be hammering people in a very negative way, and to drink dark beer, and that makes you reformed. And I just want to say, to be reformed, the heart of it is to love and esteem and value the word of God and its message, and to want that word to be preached, and if you're reformed, to hunger for and to desire to receive the word of God, and to desire most of all that God speak through his truth. That's the heart of the

[20:10] Reformation. In practical terms, that's what it looked like. It didn't look like a bunch of theologians scratching their chins and wondering how many angels could sit on the head of a needle.

That wasn't what the Reformation was about. It was about God's word being preached, and God's truth being unleashed. And that's what the Apostle Paul is nailing Timothy on as well. That's what he's saying, you need to get this young man. This is what the work of God looks like. Have confidence in the word, and preach the word. And so as he's about to die, Paul gives to Timothy this charge, and it's a solemn charge. Look at the solemnity of the charge. He says, I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and at his kingdom.

I charge you before God, before Christ who's coming, Christ who's coming to judge. In light of this, you should know you need to preach the word. I charge you. That's like a religio-legal term.

It's indicating that he is, as it were, bearing solemn witness. It's a verb, actually, that denotes a testifying under oath. And Paul's saying, I'm writing this to you knowing God is watching, knowing that Christ who's coming is going to hold you accountable for this. And he mentions the Lord Jesus is going to judge the living and the dead at his appearing. The indication here is that the great God of heaven will summon all men on the day of judgment, and Christ will judge them. And one of the things he's going to judge Timothy on is how he responds to this charge. Timothy, you have to live as a Christian. Timothy, you have to walk with the Lord. You've got all the normal, ordinary, regular responsibilities that every Christian in every age has. But Timothy, I'm giving you this extra thing that God is going to hold you accountable on. And it's relating to the preaching of the word of God. Preach the word. And that's the heart of the charge, a solemn charge. Preach the word.

To preach here literally means to herald out the word of God. Don't just be an orator or a repetition. Don't be someone who's just a wonderful, marvelous, smooth, attractive public speaker.

[23:03] But rather, Timothy, be a preacher of the truth of God. Be a vessel through whom the Lord is heard. The word here, to preach the verb, it literally can be rendered, as I said, a herald. And it's taken from that ancient office when a king or an emperor would send out men into the public square, and they would arrive in various locations with a little scroll, and they would stand and they would lift up their voice, hear ye, hear ye the word of the king. They would not arrive in a square and say, excuse me, everybody, excuse me, excuse me, oh, if you don't mind, excuse me, oh, nobody's listening, I'll just give up. No, they knew, they were commissioned to go there and go yonder and declare the word of the king.

They had a duty, there was no compromise on it. How did you do when you arrived in Bremen, Indiana? How did you do? Well, there was really nobody wanting to listen, so I just kind of went to the next town.

No, you are the herald, and your job is to stand and to declare the word of God. And it doesn't matter if the people are going to listen or not, you have to declare it, and you have to discharge your duty to say what God wants to be said. Kenneth Vest said this, he said, the English word preach brings to our mind the picture of the ordained clergyman ascending the pulpit on the Lord's day.

Isn't that true? We think in that term, we're now going to ask the preacher to come, and we picture a church. We picture the Lord's day. But, he says, the Greek word here would have left a very different impression on Timothy.

It at once would bring to his mind the herald, the spokesman of the emperor, who proclaiming in a formal grave manner the message that must be listened to, which the emperor gave him to announce. A herald. The word is a construction which makes it a summary command to be obeyed at once. It's a sharp command. This should be the pattern, he says, for preachers today. His preaching should be characterized by dignity that comes from the fact that he is an official herald of the king of kings. It should be accompanied by that note of authority, which will command the respect of careful attention and proper reaction from the listeners.

[25 : 48] There is no place for clowning, he says, in the pulpit of Jesus Christ. So, Timothy, he's not thinking, first of all, when he hears this, preach the word. He's not thinking about a church service. He's thinking about a herald declaring the word of God. This word suggests several things about preaching. It suggests that it should involve a loud declaration. A herald doesn't whisper. A herald doesn't apologize for disturbing the peace. Instead, he makes sure that people will hear the word. So, there's a sense in which it conveys, it has the connotation of a loud declaration. But it also suggests an authoritative declaration. Not just loud, not just like a football fan or someone at the baseball world series being loud. No, this is authoritative. It's an authoritative declaration. The herald comes with the message that isn't his message, but the message of the king. The message that the emperor perhaps wants the people to hear, knows the people need to hear. If the people don't hear it, then they'll be ignorant of a law, for example, and their ignorance is not going to be an excuse. They need to make sure they know the law so that they don't transgress, so that they don't end up in prison. And so, it's a loud declaration. There's an element of authority in that declaration. And thirdly, it further suggests a sense of the importance of the message. It's an important message that needs to be heard. They were not sent out with royal chit-chat. It wasn't like the People magazine or Vogue or something like that, whereby the emperor would say, hey, go out and tell everybody about my new love life or my new, you know, clothes that I got or this new chariot, the latest chariot. Go and tell everybody. It wasn't that kind of idle nonsense that captivates the people of the Western world in 2017. It was important stuff, vital stuff. And so, as Timothy hears preach the word, all of this would have flooded into his consciousness. Something that's loud, something that's authoritative, something that's important.

Yes, I see how that word relates to the word that is breathed out by God, inspired by God, given to aid us and help us in all things necessary for our salvation and for our walk with God and seeing us safely from here to heaven. I see how that word is very, very appropriate. Timothy would have been greatly helped by this.

One old commentator said, it's impossible to exaggerate the dignity and the importance given to preaching by its being made the subject of such a solemn and awful adjuration, as is found in this passage.

Timothy, before God, before the Lord Jesus Christ is coming again, you preach the word. Now, I saw a YouTube video not so long ago of a pastor and a worship leader who apparently play practical jokes on each other. The word of God is about to be preached and the worship leader's playing a practical joke on the pastor. And he's playing his guitar and, you know, the way they kind of play the guitar and they're right into the microphone, you know, that kind of, you know, kind of hot and heavy kind of sound that comes in. And the guy starts praying nonsense, nonsensical stuff. You know, things like, Lord, we don't pray for, you know, you. We pray for us and we're more important than everything and you, you know, just garbage. And nobody catches on in the congregation. Everybody's heads are bowed and eyes are closed. And I think people are obviously not listening because the guy's talking gibberish nonsense and nobody seems to notice. But the pastor notices and he realizes, oh, this is the practical joke. And just to watch it, you're just thinking, what is going on?

What is going on? Like the biggest lot of cartoon Disney nonsense you've ever seen in your life. And it's in the pulpit and it's the preparation for the preaching of the word of God. You're thinking, is this the church? Maybe it's not. I don't know much about that particular church, to be honest.

[30:28] Don't know anything other than the video. But from what I saw, it's just baloney. It's just foolishness. And here we compare that, which the church today is manifesting, where the pulpit's all about being cool and all about being crass at times and a comedian stand-up routine. And you think, well, what was Paul wanting? He was wanting God's word declared, preached. And he says to Timothy, Timothy, be ready. Be ready. And that has a military overtone. Be posted. Stay at your position.

In this case, it's a challenge to Timothy to remain at the task that he's been given and not to get intimidated. He's to be in a state of constant preparation to preach the word of God in season and out of season, which is simply whether the time seems opportune or inopportune, whether it seems a conducive moment or an awkward moment, whether it seems like it's going to be very appropriate in this time, in this season, or whether it feels like it's going to be difficult and tricky.

Doesn't matter, Timothy. Whether it seems it's a reception that you're receiving or opposition that you're receiving. Doesn't matter, Timothy. In season and out of season. The idea is that whatever the circumstances are, whenever it may be, however the world is going, regardless of how well the church is doing, let the word of God be preached. Don't be put off.

Don't think, well, culture really wants something else other than the preaching of the word of God today. So we're going to have to change things up so that culture receives us and admires us and loves us. Don't think, well, the church has moved on and people are expecting a more sophisticated manner of communication today. So let's go and meet those felt needs and drop the preaching and let's forget about the preacher and just have a facilitator. That's a new term, apparently. And the facilitators, they are just to conduct the people as we all move along together, rather than someone who says, stop, hear what God says. And he's saying, look, in season, out of season, preach the word.

And my plea to you folks is that not only will your pastors be committed to the ongoing preaching of the word, but that you will be committed to the reception of the preaching of the word and that you'll have confidence in the fact that no matter how dark the day is, God's word preached and declared plainly to people is the appointed means, the way ahead, the plan that God has to take this church, his church forward in the days ahead. The preaching of the word of God, while others are freaking out and changing things up so that God's word is not as central and therefore not as offensive.

[33:32] May it be that we're committed to what Wycliffe saw, what Luther saw, what Calvin saw, not, oh, it's a dark day, spiritually dark day, so we need something other than the preaching. Rather, they said, it's a dark day.

We need the preaching of the word of God. You've maybe seen those little, that little saying, keep calm and carry on, right? It comes apparently from England. All good things come from England, the brother, right? It comes from England, I think, Second World War, and it was like a watchword, you know, keep calm and carry on. I can just picture Winston Churchill saying it with that rich, gruffy voice of his, you know, keep calm and carry on. And nowadays, we've got that in t-shirts, mugs, everything, but there's all kinds of variations now, isn't there? You know, and certainly, you know, modern Western Americans love the whole thing that makes them feel special, keep calm and be unique, you know.

I saw a t-shirt like that. I saw a mug that said, keep calm and pretend it's not Monday. I quite like that one, I must admit. This was my favourite one, though. Keep calm and let me sleep. And then another one was, don't tell me to keep calm. I like that one too. But here's one that I've got for you.

In a world where the word of God's been abandoned, where the preaching of the word of God is being undermined, where churches feel insecure, well, the word of God, people don't like it today, and preaching it. Oh, they don't like to be preached to. Keep calm and preach on. Just keep calm and preach on. It's God's appointed means. In season, out of season. Whether it be 2017, it's not a case that in 1944 people were more receptive to the word of God than they are today, or in 1384 people were more receptive to the word of God than they are today. Men have never inherently and naturally been receptive to the word of God. It's never been fashionable. It's never been the cool thing to preach the word of God. But it's always been the right thing. It's always been that which God has ordained. And it's always been the primary means that God has established to bless this world, the preaching of the word of God. So keep calm and carry on. In season. Out of season. Fashionable. Unfashionable. It matters not. And he says, Paul. Paul says to Timothy Rar, Timothy, convince, rebuke, and exhort. Or encourage. Convince, rebuke, and encourage. And there's a sense in which he's appealing here to three elements of the human soul. The reason, the conscience, and the will. Convince, deal with the rationale, deal with the mind. Rebuke, deal with the conscience. Present God's word to the conscience. And the will, exhort or encourage, stir up the heart, the will of the individuals to convince. Well, that's the appeal to reason. Timothy's to refute error. He's to persuade of truth so that men are convinced.

Needless to say, we know that the Holy Spirit alone can change the heart. But the preacher should still be the means through which the mind of man is challenged, that truth is presented to the mind of man through the preaching. And he is persuaded and convinced. God's word is enough for that.

[37:04] We don't need to enter into the realm of human philosophy and human wisdom. God's word is enough. When applied by the Spirit of God, presented by the preacher, and taken by the Holy Spirit, we can have confidence that the smartest, biggest-headed egghead, as Luther would have said, who opposes the things of God, when the Spirit's at work, it's the word of God that will be used to convince them. We should have confidence in that. I know that we do. And may God increase that.

To rebuke, obviously, what would be rebuked would be the sin of the people. Some preachers, of course, have decided that they'll not preach on sin, and they'll not tell people what God thinks of their lives, and they'll not criticize anything. You've probably all heard Joel Osteen be questioned about things like that. Well, would you say this is wrong, or would you say that is wrong? And he can never say anything's wrong. It's always, well, well, that's not what I would think would be the best thing. And he's always terrified to say wrong. He's petrified of moral or biblical or spiritual absolutes, as so many are that name the name of Christ today. Paul says, Timothy, preach, and in your preaching, convince, present truth, but also rebuke. And to those who would say, well, I prefer not to focus on those things, attacking people and their sins, but rather just meeting their needs, Paul would shake his head without a doubt. And then he says, exhort or encourage, as it, I believe, is rightfully translated, I think, in the NIV, Timothy is not only to tackle sin head-on, but he's to positively point those who repent of their sin in the right way. He's to encourage them.

He's to exhort them. He's to show them what blessings God has in store for them as they grow, as they know him, as they obey, and so on. Exhort. All of this convincing, rebuking, and encouraging is to be done with long-suffering and with teaching. And that's Paul's ministerial philosophy.

It's clear that his charge is completely biblo-centric rather than anthro-centric. In other words, he's more concerned that Timothy be faithful to the scriptures than he is interested in the wants and the needs and the preferences of men and women. Now, that doesn't make Timothy into a hard-hearted preacher or a hard-hearted pastor. It makes him into the most caring of all pastors and preachers because he's telling people the truth. He's giving them God's thoughts, God's view on life and on man and on human nature and man's sinful practices and how a man may be right with God. That is the most loving and kind thing. And truly, this ministerial philosophy is one that will stand Timothy in good stead. There's no room in Paul's ministry for the give the people what they want philosophy. He seems actually totally uninterested in doing surveys to find out what the people would want. Paul doesn't even suggest it in the pastoral epistles. That the people should be asked what kind of service they would like and what kind of content they would most appreciate. He in no way even touches that. He's on a different wavelength from those who would study demographic data and do research into felt needs and then act accordingly. Rather, Timothy is told to preach the word of God. Use the scripture.

to convince and to rebuke and to encourage. It's interesting that throughout the pastoral epistles, Paul gives literally no instruction on how to grow a church. I find that fascinating in light of the fact that there's often a whole lot of conferences on in various circles, not our circle, but in various circles, there's conferences every year on church growth and how to grow churches.

[41 : 34] And when pastors get together in certain circles, all they talk about is how to grow the church and what tactics, techniques, expectations, vision, and so on. And I usually hold up a blank piece of paper when somebody asks me, you know, it's usually somebody that's visiting our church and they want to know, well, what's your church growth policy? And I hold up a blank piece of paper and I go, that's it there.

We actually don't have one. Except for the fact that we know someone who has a church growth policy and his name is Jesus. And he is the head of the church and he is building his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against her. But other than him having his policy and doing his work, our job is to receive you and welcome you and seek to encourage you and teach you, etc. But we don't have a church growth policy. And of course, that blows a lot of people away today because that's the thing. That's what it's all about. In his book, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, John MacArthur writes, recently I spent some time reading a dozen or so of the latest books on ministry and church growth.

Most of those books had long sections devoted to defining a philosophy of ministry. Not one of them referred to the instructions that Paul outlined so carefully for Timothy.

In fact, none of them drew any element of their ministry philosophy from the New Testament pastoral epistles. Most drew their principles from modern business marketing techniques, management theory, psychology, and other similar sources. Some tried to illustrate their principles using biblical anecdotes. But not one of them drew their philosophy from scripture, although much of the New Testament was written explicitly to instruct churches and pastors in these matters. Isn't it sad? Churches all over wanting to grow. And I'm sure with good motivation, wanting to have an influence in the community, wanting to see their communities changing. And out of that perhaps genuine desire, instead of turning to the Word of God and saying, what is God's ministerial philosophy?

The idea is, what do the marketers do? What are the PR guys doing? How do we present ourselves in this day and age? Now, don't get me wrong, I don't think that we should go back a hundred years and present ourselves the way that our grandparents would expect the church to be. I'm not saying that in the slightest.

[44 : 03] But nevertheless, we must go to the scriptures and God's very clear. It's about the preaching of the Word of God. That's how the church grows. And my appeal to you is, be confident in that. Be sure about that. Pray that God would bless his ordained means and method of communicating the truth of God.

And again, Paul dives into the whole issue of, well, what about the day in which we live? Because that's the big argument. And he describes the rough days in verses 3 and 4. Familiar verses, familiar words to us all. The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they'll be itching ears, they'll heap up for themselves teachers.

And they'll turn their ears away from truth and be turned aside to fables. Paul is aware of how the people around are going to be reacting. He's not naive. He's not foolish. He's not thinking, well, you just have to catch on to this preaching thing, Timothy, and everybody's going to love you. He knows, look, people are going to hate this. People are going to resist this. He says in 1 Timothy 4 and verse 1 that in the latter days, many will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits, doctrines of demons, speaking lies and hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron. He says in 2 Timothy 3 and 1, in the last days, perilous times will come. Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy. And over and over again, Paul shows that he's a realist. He's got his finger on the pulse of contemporary society, both then and now. Nothing's changed. And he gives this last prediction here in the text that we've just read our text for this evening. It's interesting that he's thinking in the exact opposite way that pervades today. The exact opposite. We live in a generation, we're told, where people just don't want to hear. They're so sophisticated. Isn't that interesting? Sophisticated that they don't want to be preached at. They've got so many other things to listen to. They've got so much they can tune into.

We've got to stop this preaching business and figure out clever ways of attracting them. We need innovation if we want their attention. Things have changed from the past. We need to be savvy to the market.

we need to try to get a hearing in some other way other than preaching. But Paul, he says that since all these things are so, since these things are true that people will not endure sound doctrine, since they will want teachers that will please them and say what they want to hear and tickle their itchy ears. Since that is so, preach the word. Not because it's the case. Stop preaching. Whatever you do, don't preach. Because people don't like it and they want something that's going to be more pleasing.

[47:27] No, his reasoning is the exact opposite. Preach the word. Preach. So therefore, in a sense, fearless preaching is all the more necessary in days when people are more prone to be a law to themselves. Fearless preaching is the answer to the problems of our day where we're told that folks won't listen to preaching. We need to be more committed and more faithful. They're not going to endure sound doctrine. Well, that certainly sounds like the day in which we're living. There's no question about it. They're going to heap teachers having itching ears and be turned from the truth to fables. Indeed. I love that in the NIV, which I believe a lot of you have. In verse 5, he says, keep your head in all situations. That kind of reminds me of the we keep calm and preach on slogan, doesn't it? Keep your head in all situations. Keep on going on. And he says to him, and be faithful in all things, endure afflictions and be watchful. So to the church, we need to be committed to the knowledge that God wants preaching. We need to be committed then to pray for the preaching of the word of God. The world doesn't want it. Many Christians, professing Christians, are looking for something other than the preaching. So keep preaching the word of God. Pray that you'll take heed to the preaching. Pray that not only will the preacher be faithful to the word, but that you will take heed to it and that your children and that your spouse and that your brothers and sisters will be receptive.

Pray for these things. Train your children to listen to the preaching. Value the preaching. Not so long ago, I was talking to a pastor whose congregation has really dwindled to the point that it's almost non-existent. It may actually fold and go away from the community in which he lives.

And the reason is because many of his people over the last number of years have been more attracted to the cool church down the road where there's all kinds of programs, where there's all kinds of activities. And rather than putting up with huffy teenagers on a Sunday because they don't want to be in this boring church where there's preaching, they've opted to take their kids to a church where there's not really preaching. There's kind of, you know, there's communication of sorts, but it's not the preaching of the word. But it's easier and it's happier and it makes Sunday more, you know, fluid for them all and just a better experience. And they're abandoning the church where the preaching is. And as I was hearing this, I was thinking how sad that community could actually soon have the voice of God, as it were, go silent. And it's because Christians are opting for something other than the preaching. You know, the preaching is good. They'll say, Pastor, we love you. But the teenagers, the kids, the activities, the programs, the good stuff, you know, the much better music, you know, but we love the preaching. And they're kind of doing that again, what we described this morning, the scales, and they've put the preaching there and all these other things here on the scale. And now it's everything else is more weighty, more valuable.

And wouldn't it be sad if in that community, the word of God was no longer heard? That little community no longer having the preaching of the word of God. And who would be to blame? The Christians, the actual Christians, not the world, not the world. We're not going to blame the atheists. We're not going to blame the secularists. And I'm just giving this as a illustration. We would blame the Christians. We'd say it's your fault because you did not value the preaching. You did not encourage the preaching. You did not support the preaching.

You withdrew your presence and you withdrew your tithes and your offerings and you withdrew your family. And this church died. And it's your fault because you did not value the preaching of the word of God. And if anything tonight, I just want to encourage you. You guys are committed to the preaching of the word of God. Treasure it. Don't just think of it as your tradition. Oh, this is the tradition that we're in. This is deeper than that. It's infinitely more important and significant than that. It is God's ordained method for communicating his breathed out words. And it's to be delivered in the midst of seasons when it's popular or unpopular, when it's being received or not received. It doesn't matter. And we are called upon to support that, to pray for that, to receive it, to encourage it, to give ourselves to the promotion of it, because that's how God wants his word preached. There's never been a revival of religion that has not involved the fresh understanding and appreciation of scripture and the preaching of that scripture. There's never been a move of God, a real move of God, where those two things have not been, as it were, foundational. There's no such thing as God moving in

[53 : 03] Bremen, Indiana, or Riverside, California. There's no such thing as God moving in our towns and our cities, other than through the word of God preached. That's what God does. That's how God works. That's why I introduced this sermon tonight by showing you that before the Reformation, there was a mighty move of God, and it was the scriptures and the scriptures preached during the Reformation. If they were anything, the reformers were preachers. They loved the scriptures and the scriptures preached. If we would ever see God work again and do a new work, a great work, a stirring work, a new Reformation, it will come through God's people marveling at the word of God and encouraging the preaching of the word of God. That's how it's going to look.

And I know that because that's how it has always been. And that's what Paul has shown Timothy, even back in these days when he's appealing, when he's thinking, okay, now I don't know how it worked, but let's imagine he had a piece of paper and he knows he's down near the bottom. You ever do that in a letter? You go, right, I'm going to write one page and you start writing it. I know nowadays we do a lot of typing, but occasionally a wee letter and you go, oh no, I'm running out of paper. And you maybe start going up the side or something like that. You know, and you're thinking, I don't want you to get a whole new piece of paper because I'm going to have to put more than a couple of sentences on it. It would look ridiculous, you know, and then end in here. So you're trying to cram it on a page. I can just picture Paul, and I know I'm conjecturing here, I get that, but just see it. He's writing his letter to Timothy. He's getting near the bottom and he's thinking, this is my last letter to my good friend. What am I going to tell him? I need to cram in the most important things. And what does he do? What is going up here, as it were? What is he sticking in at the end? Oh, he needs to know this. Timothy, God's word is God breathed. It's reliable.

It's dependable. Don't panic. I'm not going to be here, but God's word is in your hand and in your heart. Timothy, be sure of that. Now, Timothy, take the word. You need to know this. Oh, I'm running out of space. You need to know this. Preach the word and don't be intimidated. Don't be put off.

Preach on and keep calm. Let's pray. Our gracious God, we thank you that you have told us what we should do. You have given us a clear declaration of the way the church should be engaging in worship and engaging in evangelism on a weekly, daily, even basis. Lord, we thank you that we don't have to rely upon the books that men produce. We thank you that many have said good things that we can enjoy and benefit from. But Lord, ultimately, we have your word and your word tells us about your word and tells us what we should do with your word. Give us confidence in that. May there be another generation, even here in this church, young men who are committed to the preaching of the word, who aspire to be preachers, who want to declare the truths of God, even in the days ahead. And Lord, we ask that the

Lord Jesus would be glorified and exalted and that his truth would be heard far and wide in his name. Amen.