

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

5 Reasons to Preach the Word

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:1 - 4:4

Code: 80-180

There is a text of Scripture that attracts me today irresistibly. Whenever I talk to Dr. Dick Mayhue, the dean of our seminary, or anybody else about what I ought to preach on on this day, they directed me toward this particular text. It is a text that is familiar to us and, beloved, to me and one upon which I have preached numerous times through the years. It is the text of Scripture that my father first wrote inside the flyleaf of a Bible that he gave to me when I told him I felt called to preach. The text is 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 2...2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 2, a familiar verse but it is the verse for this occasion. And it is really the motto of this occasion..."Preach the Word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction."

That brief verse defines biblical ministry in one central command...Preach the Word. Along with that you could add 1 Timothy 3 where pastors and overseers and elders are to be *didaktikos* the Greek, skilled in teaching and preaching. We are to preach the Word skillfully. That is our calling. And this verse is definitive as few others of that calling because it speaks so concisely and precisely...Preach the Word.

Now you will notice that the Apostle Paul adds the time and the tone here. The time, "in season and out of season." We could debate what that means but if I can lead you to a very simple conclusion, whatever he may have had in mind specifically about in season and out of season it is only possible to be in season or out of season, therefore it means all the time. Preach the Word all the time. There is no time when we change that commission, no time when that method of ministry is set aside for something else. Preaching the Word is to be done all the time.

The tone is given also in the verse, there is a negative aspect of reproof and rebuking, and that is we take the truth of the Word of God and we confront error and sin. And then there is the positive side, we take the truth of God and we exhort with great patience and we instruct. Negatively we confront error and sin. Positively we teach sound doctrine and godly living. We exhort people to be obedient to the Word and we have great patience in allowing them the time to develop maturity in their obedience.

Very simple verse...Preach the Word all the time both with a negative and confrontive aspect by which we confront error and sin and a positive one by which we instruct in sound doctrine and call people to holy obedience. Proclaiming biblical truth is what the Master's Seminary is all about and

behind me are 260 men who are being trained to do just that. They know what Jesus said is true that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. And that calls them to an expository ministry in order that they might deal with every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. If every word of God is true and every word of God is pure as Scripture says and every word of God is food, then every word of God is to be proclaimed.

People today are starving for God's Word but they don't know it. They're starving, they're hungry, they're reaching out, they're grasping. They realize the vacancies in their life, the hollow places, the shallow places, the lack of insight, the lack of understanding. They cannot solve the problems and dilemmas of life. They are starving for God's Word and they do not know it and are being offered a lot of substitutes that don't help. God has ordained that His Word be brought to them, that His Word alone can feed them and the delivery method is through preaching. How shall they hear...Paul said...without a preacher. Martin Luther said, "The highest worship of God is the preaching of the Word." That's true because God is revealed through His Word therefore preaching His Word is preaching His character and His will and that defines Him in true terms and exalts Him as He is to be exalted.

Our mandate then comes not from the culture, it comes from heaven. It is the God of heaven who has mandated us through the pages of Scripture to preach the Word, to preach every word and to bring to starving souls the only food that feeds, and that is the truth of God.

Now I know that's not new and it's certainly not new to our men here. They're here at the Master's Seminary because they know this and they believe it. They believe that the Bible is the inerrant, infallible Word of the living God. They believe that the Bible is sharper than any two-edged sword. They believe that every Word of God is pure and true. They believe that they are to become preachers, that they are to become expository preachers. That they are to unfold the truth of God's Word. And that's why they're here. We understand that command.

But I don't want to just leave it at that because surrounding this verse is a potent portion of Scripture that gives us five compelling reasons why we must obey this divine mandate, five compelling reasons why we must obey this divine mandate. Let's go back to chapter 3 verse 1 and identify the first of these five. The concise and clear, unmistakable, unequivocal command to preach the Word is supported by five compelling realities that become for us strong motivation. And each of these five is very potent, each of them could stand alone in being enough motivation for a man to preach the Word of God. Together they provide a formidable set of motivations like no other text of Scripture.

Number one, we are to preach the Word because of the danger of the seasons...because of the danger of the seasons. Chapter 3 verse 1, "But realize this...Paul tells Timothy...that in the last days," and the last days began when the Messiah came the first time, "My little children," John said, "it is the last time." Christ appeared once in the end of the age. It is the end of the age, it is the last days, they

began when Jesus came. "And in the last days difficult times will come." Difficult times is the phrase that I want you to grasp for a moment. Actually could be translated "seasons" rather than times. It's not clock time and it's not calendar time, it's the Greek word *kairos* which means seasons or epochs or movements. And the word "difficult" is really the word dangerous. It could even be translated and is "savage," savage seasons will come, dangerous times will come, perilous times, as some translations have translated it.

They threaten the truth. They threaten the gospel. They threaten the Church. And according to verse 13, if you'll drop down to verse 13, they will increase in severity because evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. From the beginning of the last days until Jesus comes there will be an escalating severity and an escalating frequency of these dangerous epochs.

We're talking about movements here, epochs. They began when Jesus came and started the church in relation to the preaching of the gospel and they have continued and continued cumulatively. They don't come and go, they come and stay and then more come and stay and more come and more come and so there is greater danger now than there's ever been in the sense of having accumulated these damnable epochs.

They define for us the danger that threatens the life of the church and threatens the truth. Let me just suggest some of these to you. The first and most prominent great epoch of danger that was thrust upon the church began in the fourth century, began with the development of the Holy Roman Empire and Constantine and all of that and eventually developed into the danger called sacramentalism. Sacramentalism was the development of the Roman Catholic system. Salvation was by automatic ritual. The church became a surrogate Christ and you connected to the church and the system rather than a personal relationship with Christ. And sacramentalism became the enemy of the true gospel and the enemy of grace and faith and was the instrument of persecution and execution of true believers. It wasn't really until the Reformation in the sixteenth century that the back of sacramentalism began to be broken, but it wasn't long after the Reformation you come into the eighteenth century and you have the development of the second great epoch in the church and that's the epoch of rationalism. Out of the Renaissance and out of the Industrial Revolution and even out of the Reformation, once the back of this great monolithic institution was broken and man got his own identity back and his own life and began to think for himself and as he began to discover things and invent things and develop things and feel his freedom, he began to worship his own mind and human reason became God. And Thomas Paine wrote, "The Age of Reason," in which he debunked the Bible and affirmed that the human mind is God and so the Bible became a slave to rationalism. And rationalists assaulted Scripture and denied its miracles and denied its inspiration and denied the deity of Christ and denied the gospel of grace in the name of scholarship and human reason.

That didn't go away either. We still have sacramental religions in the world. We still have rationalism. It destroyed every seminary in Europe. All the educational institutions of any history across the world have been infested with rationalism which discredits the Bible.

I'll never forget being in St. Andrews, Scotland and going to the St. Salvador's(?) chapel at the University of St. Andrews and standing in the pulpit where John Knox launched the Scottish Reformation. Rome was in power, John Knox came and preached the gospel of grace and faith in the midst of that works system. He really took his stand against this massive, powerful system. He stood in this wooden pulpit, I stood in the very pulpit from which he launched the Scottish Reformation. He preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. Nearby that pulpit outside that little chapel in the cobblestone streets there are some initials, three sets of initials are there. They're the names of three young students who were in their late teens who heard the preaching of John Knox and believed the gospel and turned to Jesus Christ by faith and embraced Christ and were burned at the stake on that spot by the church, burned there for their faith in Christ. And as a tribute to them there was a great martyr's memorial placed right down by the St. Andrews Golf Course, right by the first tee, by the clubhouse, you can see it in the background, but on that spot where they actually were burned, their initials are in the street. Right across from that, across the street, is the theological college of the St. Andrews University where there's not one person who believes the Bible is the Word of God or believes the gospel. And every day the theological faculty walk from there to the pub across the street, stepping across the initials of the martyrs who died for the truth that they reject. That's rationalism. That's worshipping the God of human intellect and denying the veracity of Scripture. That's a dangerous season. That's a formidable foe.

And then that was followed by orthodoxism even in Europe, the dead, cold, indifferent orthodoxy. In the nineteenth century mass printing came in and Bibles were massed printed and people got the Bible in their hands but it didn't seem to matter, their orthodoxy was dead and cold, they lacked zeal. Their spirituality was either non-existent or shallow. We still have that. We still have dead orthodoxy.

Then came politicism where the church became preoccupied with political power. The church became politicized. It developed the social gospel and reconstruction and liberation theology.

And then we come into the nineteenth, the twentieth century and we come to the 1950's and the next dangerous season was ecumenism. And that was really big when I was a student and they were talking about unity and let's set aside dogma and let's all be one and let's not divide over these doctrinal issues and let's get sentimental, sentimentality became the issue. There was a new hermeneutic for interpreting Scripture called "The Jesus Ethic" and they determined Jesus was a nice guy and never would have said anything that was bad so we'll take all the bad part out, all the judgment, all the retribution. They began to tolerate evil, disdain doctrine and the legacy of that was the lack of discernment.

In the 1960's came the dangerous season of experientialism. Truth comes from feeling, truth comes from intuition, truth comes from visions or prophecies, or special revelations and you no longer look to the objective Word of God but you look to some subjective intuition to determine truth and that has posed an immense danger to the church and drawn people away from the Word of God.

And then in the 1980's came subjectivism when psychology captured the church and we all got into narcissistic navel watching and we were all concerned about whether we could bump ourselves up the comfort ladder a little bit and get more successful and make more money. And we developed a man-centered theology and needs-based theology and personal comfort became the goal.

Then in the nineties came mysticism where you could believe in absolutely anything, didn't really matter. You could believe whatever you wanted to believe. Also in the nineties came pragmatism and pragmatism basically says appropriate means for ministry are defined by the people, give them what they want, do a survey, they'll tell you what they want, you give them what they want. Truth is the servant of what works.

And preaching was then viewed, expository preacher, was then viewed, of course, as a Pony-Express method of delivery in a computer age to a lot of folks who didn't want it in the first place. The church decided that the key to effective ministry was image or style rather than content.

And then later in the nineties came syncretism, all religions that are monotheistic all worship the same God and all monotheists are going to heaven. And one man wrote a book about it. He took a trip to heaven and he met Confucius there and he met Buddha there and he met Mohammed there and he met orthodox Jews there and he met atheists who were seeking truth there cause truth is God and they didn't know they were seeking God but they were seeking God and all monotheists are there and that's syncretism.

And paganism has invaded the church in the form of feminism. And so it goes, just one dangerous epoch after another and they never go and...they never come and leave, they just come and stay and come and stay and we accumulate and accumulate and accumulate.

Let me tell you something, folks. This is a formidable war out there, a formidable set of fortresses, according to the terminology of 2 Corinthians 10, wherefore the destruction of fortresses, these are very, very well- designed, strong fortifications, ideological fortifications that must come smashing down.

In order to do that it takes some very skilled men. It's not easy to be discerning in our time. It's not easy to understand the issues that face us. It's not easy to bring the appropriate portion of Scripture to bear upon these imminent dangers all around us. And most of Christianity really doesn't care but

we do. All of these dangers accumulating, worsening, and with it a lack of discernment in the church and a disdain for discernment and a growing disdain for doctrine.

Now Paul starting in verse 2 defines a little bit more about these dangerous seasons in general descriptions of the people that are behind them and the people that are involved in them. They are lovers of self, they are lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Now if you stood up and applied that list to anybody today, it would be seriously politically incorrect...wouldn't it? I mean, way beyond that. Can you imagine someone confronting someone in error and just going through that list? It reminds me of Jesus' approach. How well would it work today? He went up to the religious leaders of His day who were in error and He said, "You snakes, you vipers, you dogs, you filthy, stinking, wretched tombs painted white," pretty direct stuff.

These dangerous people are described here as to the absence of any virtue or character. They are the instruments of Satan that produce these great dangers. Verse 5 sort of sums up, they have a form of godliness. The outward form, the face that they want to portray is of godliness. But what is absent is power. They don't have the power of God because they don't know God. You avoid those kinds of people. They come into households and they get in there today through media means as well as personally and they target women who are designed by God to be protected by faithful men. They captivate those weak women weighed down with sins led on by various impulses and they teach them and they're always learning but they never come to know...what?...the truth. Just like Jannes and Jambres, two of the magicians in Egypt opposed Moses, these men opposed the truth. They are men of depraved minds and they should be rejected.

There's Paul's description of the people who are behind these dangerous seasons and the people who get caught up in them. Dangerous seasons, men of corrupt minds, opposers of the truth. Beloved, we need men who can go into the fray, men who can go into the battle who understand the Word of God clearly. Let me tell you something, Satan's deceptions are not without subtlety. Do you understand that? It's not always obvious on the surface what's really going on. It takes formidable men. It takes men who understand the Word of God clearly, carefully. It takes men who understand the issues of their time and it takes men who have a holy courage who are willing to step into the battle and identify the enemy and assault the enemy graciously but assault the enemy relentlessly with the truth. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10, our job is to smash fortresses, ideological fortresses and to bring everybody captive there into obedience to Christ. We want to set free the captives held in the fortresses that these dangerous epochs have erected. We're called to guard the truth. We're called to preach the truth. We can't do either if we don't understand the truth. And against the subtleties and nuances of Satan's devices, it takes well-trained skilled men and we're committed to that and that's why these men are here preparing for this.

There's a second reason why they must preach the Word, not only because of the danger of the season and the Word is the only thing that cuts through the error, but secondly because of the devotion of the saints...because of the devotion of the saints. Go down to verse 10, "But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions and sufferings." Timothy, you followed me, you were my disciple and I went through the patterns of ministry for you. You saw my ministry duty. And what was my ministry duty? Teaching and living, proclaim the truth and live the truth in Jesus' name, just what was sung. You saw how I taught it and I lived it, that's integrity. And then he says in verse 10, "And you saw my purpose, my focus." The man was focused relentlessly focused on the responsibility he had to proclaim the truth. "And you saw my faith better faithfulness, faithful to that purpose, and patient to see it fulfilled, and loving toward the people and toward God and persevering in the face of persecution and suffering." You saw how I ministered, Paul said, you saw the way I did it. I did it with love. I did it with focus. I did it relentlessly. I did it patiently. I did it lovingly. I took the flack. I took the pain. I took the suffering. I took the imprisonments. I took the beatings, the whippings, the stonings. You saw it. You were there at Antioch and Iconium and Lystra, you saw it. Lystra was where he was stoned and left for dead. You saw it.

Then verse 14, "You, however, continue in the things you've learned and become convinced of knowing from whom you've learned them." Who? From me. What is he saying to Timothy? Timothy, you just do exactly what I told you to do, just do exactly what I told you to do. You know, that's so important. Everybody today wants to reinvent ministry, have you noticed? Paul just says will you do it just exactly the way I told you to do it?

Down in verse 17 he calls Timothy the man of God. That's a technical term used only twice in the New Testament, both times of Timothy, used over 70 times in the Old Testament, every time it means a preacher...every time it's used it means a preacher. Timothy, look, you're just another man of God. There's a long, long line of these men of God, series of men called by God, gifted by God to proclaim His truth, you're just one in the long line. You can't get out of step. You can't go your way, invent your own approach. You're just one in the long line of men who are called to preach the Word. That's what you do.

That's how I look my own life. When I was a little guy, something before my tenth birthday, my grandfather who was a faithful preacher of the Word of God all through his ministry right up until his death, was on his deathbed at his home. My father was there and I was there and my father said to him, "Dad, is there anything you want?" He was dying of cancer at a few years older than I am now. And he said, "Is there anything you want, Dad?" And he said to him, "Yes, I want to preach one more time...I want to preach one more time." He's on his deathbed, all racked with cancer and he wanted to preach one more time.

Well what had happened was he had prepared a sermon he hadn't preached. That's hard to handle, folks, that's fire in your bones. You need to get rid of it. And the interesting...he had prepared a sermon on heaven and never preached it, he died without ever preaching. So my Dad took his notes which he had written out on the sermon, printed them all up and passed it out to everybody at the funeral so my grandfather preached on heaven from heaven.

That had a tremendous effect on me as a young boy. What a faithful man, right down to the last breath, all he wanted to do was preach the Word one more time. I don't...I don't want to be any different than that. I don't want to do anything differently than that. And the same was true with my father. He was an example to my father who all through his ministry life did nothing but preach the Word, that's all he did...preached the Word. And as I said earlier, when he gave me my first Bible after I was called to the ministry and I went off to begin to my studies, he wrote in the flyleaf...Preach the Word.

Eventually I went away to seminary and I went to Talbot Seminary because I wanted to study with Dr. Charles Feinberg. And Dr. Feinberg was the most brilliant Bible scholar I ever knew anything about. He had an incredible mind. I don't think I ever really understood how incredible. I remember he told me he taught himself Dutch in two weeks one time so he could read a Dutch theology. He studied fourteen years to be a rabbi and was converted to Christ, went to Dallas Seminary, got his doctorate there and Dr. Chafer who was the president of Dallas at the time said he was the only student who came there who knew more when he got there than he did when he left. I'm sure that's not true of any of you, is it? I don't know what that means but that's what he said. And he went from there to get a Ph.D. in archaeology from John Hopkins University and studied under William Foxwell Albright who was the greatest archaeologist of that time. An immense mind, I mean, just a very brilliant mind and he loved the Word of God and he read through it four times a year and he was just absolutely fanatical about every word of God and about inerrancy and about inspiration and about the Word being true and preach the Word. And he's the man I wanted to have influence my life. I don't want to do it differently, I want to do it like he did it. I wanted to learn how to preach the Word.

Well, I remember my first year in seminary, it was the first class I ever attended was an Old Testament introduction class. It's a lot of material, really hard to absorb for a young guy coming out of an athletic career in college getting exposed to all this academia. And I sat in the class...the first day a student asked the question, and Dr. Feinberg dropped his head, never looked up and said, "If you don't have a more intelligent question than that, don't ask any more questions, you're taking up valuable time." Oh.....no more questions that semester. He had all the time to himself, believe me. But he was so dead serious about things of God, so dead serious about the Scripture. He assigned me to preach a text in my first...I had to preach as a first-year seminary student before the student body and the faculty, he assigned me a text and all I wanted to do was please him cause he was the man...and I worked about fifty hours on this thing and I got up and preached it. And I thought I had done fine and he had...they had criticism papers that they filled out while you're preaching, they sat behind you and

criticized you while you were preaching and then he have you their criticisms. He just handed me a paper with red across the front..."You missed the whole point of the passage." I thought...that's pretty clever, you know, to spend fifty hours and get around the point, you know. How could I do that? How could I miss the whole point? That is the greatest lesson I ever had in seminary.

And then he called me into his office, and boy, he was really upset because, you know, he wanted to make an investment in me and he didn't appreciate me missing the whole point of the passage since that's the whole point of the ministry. And I got a lecture that I've never forgotten. And from then on, you know, the man still sits on my shoulder and whispers, "Don't miss the point of the passage, MacArthur," even though he's been in heaven for a few years.

When I graduated from seminary he called me into the office on graduation day. He said, "I have a gift for you." He picked up a big box, he had 35 volumes of Keil and Delitzsch which is a Hebrew Old Testament commentary and he said, "This is the one I've used for years and years, I have all my notes in the margins, I want to give it to you as a gift." It was an expression of his love to me but it was also another way to say, "Now you have no excuse for missing the point of the passage." And one of the highlights of my life, I think, was when his family asked me to speak at his funeral. So somewhere along the line he must have told them that he thought I had finally got to the place where I could figure out the point of the passage. He's with the Lord but I don't want to do any different, I just want to do what faithful men have done. I want to do what godly prophets did. I want to do what godly apostles did. I want to do what godly preachers and evangelists and pastors and missionaries have done through the years. And I'm telling you something, folks, I am astonished at the boldness of people today, people in ministry who will discard the God-ordained, scripturally mandated pattern and invent their own. What audacity. Who do you think you are? What astonishing pride that is.

So, preach the Word because of the danger of the season and because of the devotion of the saints who came before you. Just get in line, take the baton and run your lap. Thirdly, we preach the Word because of the dynamic of the Scripture...we preach the Word because of the dynamic of the Scripture. Verse 15, "Timothy, you know from childhood," from *brephos*, from infancy, when you were a baby in your mother's arms, "From infancy you have known the sacred writing," that's a Greek-Jewish term referring to the Old Testament, *hierogrammaton*, you've known the Old Testament which is able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Timothy was raised under Jewish influence in his family, though his parents were Jew and Gentile. One was Jew and one was Gentile, he had still the influence of Jew in his family and of the Old Testament law. And he says, "You know from a child the law prepared you for the gospel." That was the point. The Jews used to claim that their children drank in the law of God with their mother's milk and it was so imprinted on their hearts and minds that they would sooner forget their names than forget God's law. The law was the tutor that led to Christ and Timothy had been raised on the sacred writings of the Old Testament and he had been given the wisdom so that when the gospel was

preached it unfolded and he understood it because the understanding of the Old Testament law prepared him for it. Bottom line he's saying you know that the Word of God has the power to save, it has the power to lead you to salvation. What else would you preach? It's sharper than any two-edged sword. First Peter 1:23, what does Peter say? It couldn't be more clear. "You've been born again through the living and abiding Word of God." It is the power of the Word that produces salvation. It is the Word of God which converts the soul, Psalm 19:7 says.

When you understand that the Word is the power that converts the soul, you preach the Word. If you don't preach the Word you don't believe that no matter what you say. It is not only the source of salvation, it is the source of sanctification. Look at verses 16 and 17. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, training in righteousness that the man of God and everyone who follows His pattern may be perfect or complete, equipped for every good work." It is the power of the Word that saves. It is the power of the Word that sanctifies. It provides doctrine. It reproves error and sin. It sets upright and then trains in the path of righteousness. That's the sequence. You lay a foundation of doctrine, it reproves error and sin, then you correct that. It literally means in the Greek to make someone upright who has fallen down, you pick him back up, correct their error and their iniquity and then put them in the path of righteousness, train them to live an obedient life. The Word does that. The Word makes the man of God and everybody who follows His pattern complete. It prepares them spiritually. This is what we call the sufficiency of the Scripture. It completely saves, completely sanctifies. It sanctifies and saves those at the highest level of calling, that is the preacher, the man of God, and makes it possible for him to be an example of godliness that everybody else can follow. It is sufficient to save and sanctify all.

And what else would you use? I can't fathom why anyone would use anything other than the Word that saves and the Word that sanctifies, and only the Word.

Well, for the sake of time, let me give you the fourth. We preach the Word because of the danger of the seasons, the devotion of the saints, the dynamic of the Scripture and the demand of the sovereign...the demand of the sovereign. Look at chapter 4 verse 1. This is a frightening verse. This verse strikes me with holy fear, I confess. It is a terrifying verse. This verse helps me to understand why John Knox before he ascended the pulpit to preach fell on his face and burst forth, his biographer says, in abundant tears out of fear, the fear of preaching and misrepresenting the truth, the fear of divine scrutiny. Listen to verse 1. "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God even of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and by His appearing in His Kingdom, preach the Word." Pretty serious. "I solemnly charge you" means a dead, serious command. Paul is dead serious here. I command you with all solemnity, with all seriousness.

My friend, he says, you are under the scrutiny of the God who is Jesus Christ who is the judge and He will judge all who are alive and all who have died. And I think it's best to see the Greek as "even the Lord Jesus Christ," since He is introduced as the judge in the verse. We're preaching under the

scrutiny of the omniscient, holy judge. I agree with Paul in 1 Corinthians 4 who said, "It's a small thing what you think of me," and I say that with all love to you, I can't build my sense of faithfulness on whether you like my sermon. I can't built it on whether you don't like my sermon. I appreciate your commendations. I cherish them. I appreciate your criticisms, I cherish them. But in the end I want to preach to honor the One who is the judge, right? And in the end He's going to reveal the secret things of the heart. He's going to give the reward to those who are worthy of it and only His judgment really matters.

A reporter said to me one time, "For whom do you prepare your sermons?" Newspapers are written for the eighth-grade level. "For whom do you prepare sermons?"

And I said, "To be truthful with you, I prepare them for God, He's the judge that I have to stand before, He's the one that really matters. I just want to get it right before Him. I don't want to take the Word of the living God and somehow corrupt it, or somehow replace it with foolish musings of my own manufacture."

Stop being so many teachers, James said, theirs is a greater condemnation. Hebrews 13:17 says we have to give an account some day before the Lord. And I want my life to be gold, silver, precious stones, I want to receive that reward that evidences my love for Him, and that reward which I can cast at His feet in honor and praise. And some day we will all stand before that judgment seat for that time of reward.

It's a very serious thing for me, this matter of preaching. Sometimes people say to me, "You spend so much time in preparation, why?" Not because I think you need it, I think God's Word deserves it. I could get by with you because you're such loving folks. And, frankly, with most people a few good stories will do it. But with God it's a different matter. Sometimes if you'll just be kind enough to indulge me when I get down so deep you're drowning, I really do have Him in mind and the honor of His truth.

Lastly, this whole matter of preaching the Word not only because of the danger of the seasons, the devotion of the saints, the dynamic of the Scripture, the demand of the sovereign, but lastly, this is really important, because of the deceptiveness of the sensual...because of the deceptiveness of the sensual. The great enemy of the Word of God is anything outside the Word of God...the word of Satan, the word of demons, the word of man. And we are living in very dangerous seasons concocted by seducing spirits and hypocritical liars propagated by false teachers. And here's what makes them successful...look at verses 3 and 4. "The time will come, and it does, it cycles through all of church history, when they will not endure sound doctrine." People don't want to hear sound doctrine. "Sound" means healthy, whole, wholesome. They don't want wholesome teaching. They don't want the sound, solid Word. They just want to have their ears tickled. That's all they want. They're driven by the sensual, not the cognitive. They're not interested in truth. They're not interested in theology. All they want is ear-tickling sensations. That's what they want. They refuse to hear the great truth that saves

and the great truth that sanctifies. And according to chapter 2 verse 16, they would rather hear worldly empty chatter that produces ungodliness and spreads like gangrene.

We're in such a season now. They tell us that being doctrinal, being clear about the Word of God is divisive, unloving, prideful. The prevailing word...the prevailing mood, I should say, in the world of post-modern western culture is that everybody determines truth for himself and everyone's opinion is as valid as everybody else's opinion, and there's no room for absolute authoritative doctrine. And, folks, that's one other "ism" you can add to the list of dangerous seasons, relativism.

And, you know, you look at the evangelical church and you can see a perfect illustration of how the church has fallen victim to this. Christians all over the place are all whipped up to fight abortion and they're all exercised to fight homosexuality and the influence of homosexuals in places of influence and power. And we want to fight the Lesbian trends and we want to fight for religious freedoms in America and we want to preserve prayer in the schools and we want to fight against euthanasia and that all has a place. But I want to tell you something, and you need to understand this...the worst form of wickedness in existence consists of the perversion of God's truth. That is the worst form of wickedness. And the church today is utterly indifferent to that. It doesn't care about that. It treats that with indifference as if it was harmless, as if a right interpretation of Scripture somehow was unnecessary if not intrusive into an otherwise superficial tranquility. Here we are fighting all of this peripheral stuff and given away everything at the heart that defines our whole faith. This is suicide. There's not going to be any church to fight anything if we don't preserve the truth.

The ability to distinguish between false and truth is absolutely critical. You can't speak truth, you can guard truth if you can't understand truth. We raised up a seminary in order to train men who can do that. And you know what's wonderful? They go everywhere, twenty-three countries of the world, all these various cultures, and you know what? They don't have to figure out what is culturally relevant, they just go in there with the Word of God, sort through the issues and bring the Word of God to bear upon that society. And you know what? Whatever language you speak and wherever you live, your heart before God is in the same needy condition and the truth of God transcends all cultures.

But we live in a time when people want to depreciate sound doctrine. We want a sort of a...well, we want to be more loving. Let me tell you something, we were talking about this down at the Legionnaire Conference, R.C. Sproul and I were talking about this a little bit and the idea that I don't want to tell you the truth, I don't want to call error error, I don't want to confront your sin or your error because I love you is just not true. It's not because I love you. If I love you I would seek your best and highest good, wouldn't I? And that's completely connected to your understanding of and obedience to divine truth. So if I don't...if I say...Well, I want this superficial tranquility...I don't think it's loving to do that. Truth is, you don't love them, you love yourself, that's the issue, and what you really do is love yourself so much you don't want them not to like you. Self-love, that's sin. You're afraid if you confront something they won't like you so you'd rather love yourself and have them like you than to love them

enough to confront their error, show them the truth which can lead them to the blessing and well-being that produces God's greatest good in their lives. Loss of truth, loss of conviction, loss of discernment, loss of holiness, loss of divine power, loss of blessing...all they want is to get their ears tickled. Tell me a little about success. Tell me a little about prosperity. Give me some excitement. Elevate my feelings of well-being, self-esteem, and give me a bunch of emotional thrills.

And you know what? When they want that, it says in verse 3, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires. The market creates the demand. And as Marvin Vincent said in His Vincent Word Studies, "In periods of unsettled faith, skepticism and curious speculation in matters of religion, teachers of all kinds swarm like flies in Egypt. The demand creates the supply. The hearers invite and shape their own preachers. If the people desire a calf to worship, a ministerial calf maker can always be found."

I was down in Florida and people are being rocked down there by this Pensacola craziness that's going on in the name of revival and people flipping and flopping and diving on the floor and gyrating and speaking in bizarre and unintelligible fashion and all of this kind of wild thing is going on. And they keep saying this is God, this is of God. Can I be very straightforward with you? It is an offense to our rational, truth-revealing God, it is an offense to the true work of His Son, it is an offense to the true work of the Holy Spirit to use the names of God or of Christ or of the Holy Spirit in any mindless, emotional orgy marked by irrational, sensual and fleshly behavior produced by altered states of consciousness, peer pressure, heightened expectation or suggestibility. That is socio-psycho manipulation and mesmerism and it is a prostitution of the glorious revelation of God taught clearly and powerfully to an eager, attentive and controlled mind. What feeds sensual desires pragmatically or ecstatically cannot honor God. You have to preach the truth to the mind. That's where the real battle is fought. So we bring God to people through His Word. That's the only way we can do it. People are starving for the knowledge of God, as I said, they just don't know it. But when we start delivering, they find out. It was said of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, I think by Jim Packer, "He brought more of the sense of God than any other man." What a commendation. And that's why this seminary exists. This behind me is a force of men who are committed to preach the Word.

Join me in prayer. Father, what a glorious, wonderful occasion this is and we thank You for it. We thank You that we don't need to wander in some fog about the direction of life in ministry. We thank You that You have clarified it to us. We thank You that You are raising up these men, 350 already out proclaiming the truth and more to come, these precious men behind us and even those who will come next fall and beyond. We thank You, Father, for their devotion and commitment to the fulfillment of this command. O Lord, grant them power and faithfulness and integrity of life and effectiveness and they endeavor to serve You to carry out this commission. We thank You from the bottom of our hearts for providing this facility which can train them to the very best to face the dangerous seasons, to maintain the devotion to the saints who went before them and were faithful, to express the dynamic of the Word, to discharge their responsibility before You as their sovereign and to confront the desires of

the sensual with the powerful rational truth of Scripture. You come to Your people through Your Word and that takes a faithful preacher and teacher. Continue, Father, to raise them up and we'll give you all the glory in Christ's name. Amen.

Now as we bring this great service to a conclusion, I want to share something with you, so just relax, this is a very important thing that I want to share with you. I have a letter here from one of our graduates, I want to read it to you just briefly. Listen carefully to what he says. "I count myself extremely fortunate to have been trained and educated at a school where educational excellence is not without its due emphasis on personal piety and pastoral training. The Master's Seminary gave me a biblically sound world view from which I could make sense of the ministry by unravelling some of its great mysteries, enabling me to have an educated approach to developing strategies for our day. Every day of sermon preparation and delivery owe their success to the Master's Seminary which gave me the tools both to exegete the text and package for dynamic and practical delivery. My training there has enabled me to step right out of seminary at 26 years old right in to a full-time senior pastorate with the tools necessary for success. Rather than being perplexed by the demands of studying, preaching, counseling, relating to church boards and other nuts and bolts of the ministry, I have a real sense of hope and adventure. Master's Seminary has kept me from making hasty mistakes in handling pre-existing conditions at the church, making many of the foolish mistakes of youth, being a scolding preacher, from making unnecessary enemies, from losing sight of loving people, from preaching proof texts and from straying into fallacious methods of ministry."

Quite a testimony. That's from Buddy Stride, and Buddy--two weeks ago Wednesday, along with his dear friend, Don Saunders, both from our seminary-- were just called to be pastors. Buddy, senior pastor, and Don, associate pastor, of Bethany Baptist Church in Foxchase in Philadelphia, a church which many years ago my Dad pastored in when he was a student, a church which I visited many times as a young boy. Buddy and Don were called on a Wednesday to become pastors, but on Friday they both went to heaven in a car accident.

After all these years of preparation...and I want to read you the tribute... "Together they grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska, high school classmates bound by their faith a determination to spread God's Word. Together they went to seminary in California, here, and then last summer headed to Philadelphia to find a congregation to lead together. At Bethany Baptist Church in Foxchase, Stride became pastor and Saunders assistant pastor. Together they lived in a small stone house on Dallas Road in Willow Grove. Stride, his wife and four children took the upstairs, Saunders, his wife, the basement. Together they dreamed of some day training ministers in France. Together they died last Friday night when the car in which they were riding collided with only...with another only two blocks from their home. Together they were laid yesterday in identical bronze coffins topped by identical bouquets and set end-to-end in front of the pulpit of their church. Their wives, Lois and Dixie, eulogized them as men of character, integrity and faith who shared passion was to touch people with God's message. 'I don't know,' said Dixie, 'if anyone could be more close friends than they. They had

a relationship unlike any I've ever seen." Well their habit was to spend Friday nights together and they did and they were off to get some doughnuts just two blocks away and they were both immediately taken to glory. Their little two-year-old boy in the car was fine. And in the report, Buddy was dying holding Don in his arms. He said to his little boy, "You go with the men," firemen had arrived, "I'm going to go see Jesus." And that was the end. At the funeral Lois said she was overwhelmed by the response of the people. The small church was packed with people sitting in the choir loft and balcony and standing in the aisles. He had a passion to be a minister since he was twelve and being here finally was a dream come true for him. He would want us to be happy, she said, even though it's sad. Don's wife said he would say...Be strong, be confident, stand for the truth. Isn't that great? Be strong, be confident and stand for the truth. And then Lois said, "We're grateful the Lord took them together to glory. As much as we would like to have them back, it was utterly fitting and proper and very good of God to take them together." It was as if they couldn't have survived without each other so the Lord took them both.

I just tell you that to say...you know, somebody is going to have to step into the gap, that church is already saying...Well, can Master's Seminary send us some more?" It's...from a human standpoint it's a tragic thing when someone is so well prepared. But from God's standpoint, He doesn't make mistakes. And somehow the testimony of these men may draw into ministry somebody that maybe wouldn't have been if it weren't for their testimony to sort of take their place, step in for them.

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