

The Responsibilities of the Church: Preaching, Part 1

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-143

As we come together this morning for the study of the Word of God, I want to continue in discussing with you the anatomy of the church. We have been for months now looking at the church and what the church ought to be and what ought to be its life and its emphasis, its ministry. We started out looking at the church in the symbolism of the body of Christ, as the New Testament identifies the church as a body, we've extended that metaphor a little bit. We talked about the skeleton of the church, the doctrinal foundations of the church. Then we talked about the internal organs, or internal systems of the church which are the spiritual attitudes that carry the life of the church, things like faith and love and obedience and worship and forgiveness and things like that. We went through those attitudes week after week.

And now finally in our discussion of the church as the body of Christ, we've come to the muscles, or the function of the church. What the church actually does, the church in action. And in our last message we looked at the subject of fellowship. The action of the church initially is it is a common expression of shared life, shared spiritual life in which people mutually minister to one another. All of us having been gifted by the Spirit of God for such ministry, and all of us having been called to the responsibilities of discharging the "one anothers" of the New Testament have a responsibility to each other to minister in the life of the church. It is a mutually ministering group of folks who by the power of the Spirit of God serve one another. And we address the issue of fellowship, that was a wonderful, wonderful time.

I want to go to a second function of the church, and it really is one of the gifts, it really or maybe more than one of the gifts, it really can be identified as several of the gifts, it is that matter of proclaiming truth. We might just simply say preaching...preaching. It is a function of the church that the Word of God be preached. In fact, let me begin by saying something that I want to plant in your mind and then I'll repeat it as we go because I think it's so important. There's really only one primary reason to choose a church, only one primary reason to choose a church and that is the character of its preaching.

Now when people evaluate churches they might evaluate them on the basis of many things. But there's only one that really sets the tone. The single most important reason to choose a church is the nature and character of its preaching and teaching. Where you have strong biblical preaching and teaching, everything else tends toward strength. Where you do not have strong biblical teaching and preaching, everything else is weak and tends toward shallowness. Preaching sets the tone in the

church, proclaiming biblical truth is essential. Why? "Because man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

Preaching the Word of God, teaching the Word of God is a critical function in the life of the church. And, of course, we live in a time when preaching is being depreciated and it is being set aside in favor of other forms of communication. But the essential reality for the church, that which basically dictates its strength or weakness, is the character of its preaching and teaching. You show me a church where there is strong biblical preaching and teaching, and I will show you strong people and strong ministry. You show me a church where there is weak biblical preaching and I will show you a church with weak people and weak ministry. That's just how it goes because the Word of God is the food that makes believers mature and strong.

And the reality is that people in churches all across our country and all around the world are frankly starving. I hear it all the time, everywhere I go. It comes through the mail bags every day. People saying, "I can't find any place where I can be fed. I'm starving here or there or wherever it might be. Where do I find some food for my soul? Isn't anybody going to teach me the Word of God?" Cries from people all across the world, really. People are starving.

Some of them know what they're starving for. Some of them know they're starving for the knowledge of God which comes through His Word. And some of them don't know it. In fact, there are many people in churches who are starving and don't know what for. They really don't know that what they really need is the clear, penetrating Word of God proclaimed and taught. People are starving for the knowledge of God, whether they know it or not. Some do, some don't. They're starving to know their God deeply, to know Him broadly, to understand the world through His view. They're starving for a sound theology that they can live on, build their life on, be anchored by. They're starving for divine wisdom which comes through the knowledge of God in His revelation. People are starving for the knowledge of God. People live out their beliefs. We live according to our doctrinal standards, our doctrinal convictions. And where they're strong, you tend to have a strong life. Where they're weak, you tend to have a weak life. The Word is the foundation for everything and God has ordained that it be preached in His church. And that's what makes His church strong.

Turn to 1 Peter chapter 4, for a moment, I'm just going to introduce this, this morning, and then finish it tonight. I'm going to give you the introduction this morning, and the sermon tonight. In 1 Peter chapter 4 and verse 11, we read this, "Whoever speaks, let him speak as it were the utterances of God." That's simple enough. Whoever speaks, let him speak the utterances of God. Let him speak what God has spoken. Let him preach the Word. That's what it's saying. Let him tell us about God from God's own revelation. Whoever speaks, let him speak the utterances of God.

One of my heroes, now with the Lord, the great preachers of the church's history was Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a Welch man who preached with such great power in London. And looking at his life, one

friend said this, "He brought more of the sense of God than any other man." That's why he being dead, yet speaks. That's why his tapes continue to circulate though he's long gone. That's why his material is continually put into books and read across the face of the earth because he brings people to God. When he speaks, he speaks the oracles of God.

Back in Isaiah chapter 52 there's a wonderful testimony to the centrality of preaching, being the Word of God. In Isaiah 52 and verse 7, familiar words yet very important, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news." In other words, how wonderful it is when a messenger comes, running across the mountains with good news. "This messenger who comes brings good news, announces peace, brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation and says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'" How wonderful it is when a messenger comes and tells us about our sovereign God. How wonderful when the messenger stands up and says, "Your God is in charge. Your God is sovereign in the midst of everything." Good news of peace, good news of salvation, good news that God reigns. The preacher brings news about God. He brings news that God saves, that God wants peace with sinners. He brings news that God is in charge, no matter how bad things look. Your God reigns. He hasn't abdicated. That's good news.

We preach God...God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit...revealed through the Word of God. "If any man speaks, let him speak the utterances of God." Not his own opinion, not somebody else's opinion, not the collective opinion of any group, not the contemporary consensus. When you speak, you speak the utterances of God.

God has ordained then that people need to know Him and that the way in which they can know Him is when they are given His Word, which reveals Him. And God has chosen the means to be preaching. Let me show you this from Ephesians chapter 4...Ephesians chapter 4. Now this is a very, very important portion of Scripture, starting in verse 11 and running down to verse 16, important enough for me to read it to you and then I'll make some brief comments. Ephesians 4:11, "And He gave some as Apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers...or hyphenated, pastor/teachers...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, or ministry, to the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming, but speaking the truth in love we ought to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ from whom the whole body being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." Great passage, profound, far-reaching.

Let me give you the sense of it. You start at the end...the very end. That tells you the objective. The Lord wants a church that is whole, a whole body that is fitted and held together by that which every

joint supplies. In other words, He wants a fully functioning body where every factor is functioning appropriately, where everything is happening exactly the way it ought to happen. Further he describes that as according to the proper working of each individual part. The Lord wants every individual in His body to be fully functioning so that the body is whole and fully operative, because...the end of verse 16...this causes the growth of the body, for the building up of itself in love. The Lord wants to show love to the world. "God so loved the world that He gave His Son." The Lord wants to demonstrate love to the world, "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." The Lord wants us to radiate His love to the world, His saving love. In order to do that, we need to be built up and mature. In order to be built up and mature, every part of the body must be functioning.

How's that going to happen? How is it going to happen? Back to verse 11, "And He gave some as Apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastor/teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ."

How does it happen that the body is built up in love? How does it happen that the body is fully functioning? How does it happen to the churches, everything God wants it to be? It happens through the ministry of preachers and teachers, Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers. That's how He identifies it. He gave these to the church for the building up of the body so that...in verse 13...it all might attain to the unity of the faith. What does that mean? Sound faith, not the unity of faith subjective, but the unity of faith objective, doctrine.

The church needs to be built up in sound doctrine. Notice verse 13, it needs to come to the full knowledge of the Son of God. That is to say it needs to think broadly and deeply and highly about the person of Jesus Christ and being raptured with the fullness of His glory. It needs to be Christ-centered as well as having sound doctrine, then it can be a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. It's to be Christlike, and that is to have the full knowledge of Christ and a full foundation of sound doctrine.

Verse 14 suggests that the church is not to be like a little child that gets tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming. So many churches are infantile and immature and they are easily distracted and drawn away by error and deception and lies and false teaching. The Lord wants a full church, a whole church, a mature church, a fully functioning church, a church that is like Jesus Christ, a church where there's unity of doctrinal understanding, where there's a complete absorption in the knowledge of the person of the Son of God, where there is Christlikeness. He wants that church to stand up mature in its Christlikeness and radiate His love to a lost world. And in order to bring the church to that place, it says in verse 11, He gave some Apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastor/teachers...preachers.

Apostles and prophets were teachers. The Apostles were those unique ones called alongside Jesus, the Twelve, to whom Jesus gave a commission to go and preach. And, of course, it was there preaching that established the foundation of doctrine so that the early church in Acts 2:42 studied the Apostles' doctrine. And then once the church was established, the Lord ordained preachers in the churches called prophets early. And they were those who spoke for God in the local churches. They were the proclaimers of truth.

Now the Apostles and the prophets were the foundation. Ephesians 2:20 says, "He gave Apostles and prophets as the foundation of the church." After the foundation when the edifice began to go up, the Apostles and the prophets were replaced by the evangelists and the teaching pastors. The evangelists do what the Apostles did. The Apostles were messengers who took the gospel. Evangelists are those who preach the gospel to the unconverted. They win people to Christ. They plant churches, establish churches, reach lost people, bring them into the church. And pastor/teachers replaced the prophets who then took the church and nurtured and gave God's Word to the church.

But the point that I'm making is that all that God has designed for the fullness of the maturity of His church to the full stature of Christlikeness is achieved through the ministry of preaching and teaching by gifted men. That's the life of the church. Jesus established the model. Let's go back to the gospels.

In Matthew chapter 4...Matthew chapter 4, as we enter into this fourth chapter, Jesus has gone through the temptation in the wilderness. He has been baptized. He's been set apart for His ministry. And now after the baptism of Jesus, after His temptation in the wilderness, He begins His ministry. And I want you to notice it in verse 17. "From that time, at the very outset of His ministry, Jesus began to...what?...preach and say, 'Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" That's a summary of His sermon, not the whole thing. Jesus began to preach. God sent Jesus into the world to preach. Somebody said, "God had only one Son, He made Him a preacher." He came into the world to preach. That was God's ordained way to communicate His truth, to take His written Word, His revealed Word and give it to men to the proclamation of a gifted man, Jesus the preacher.

Look at Luke chapter 4 and I want you to see the flow here, Luke chapter 4 verses 43 and 44. He said to them, "I must preach the Kingdom of God." What is that? Everything about God, everything that fits in God's dominion, everything that fits in God's realm. "I must preach the Kingdom of God." And by the way, He did until His ascension, even after His resurrection He spoke to them of things concerning the Kingdom of God. "I must preach the Kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose. And He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea." I'm sure there might have been some people who would have quibbled with His methodology, who would have suggested that maybe preaching wasn't the best means. Maybe there were some more sophisticated ways to communicate truth to the Jewish culture, but Jesus was a preacher and thus by God's design.

Go back to Matthew chapter 10 and let's see how He passed on that responsibility to His disciples. Jesus called together the disciples, the 12 Apostles in verse 2, Simon and Andrew and James and John, and Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddaeus, Simon, Judas. Calls together His 12 Apostles and in verse 7 it says, "He said this to them, 'And as you go, preach...preach and say this, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Go preach, He said. God sent His Son into the world, He was a preacher. He chose 12 men to come alongside of Him and He made them preachers.

Look at Acts chapter 10. Here is one of those 12, namely Peter. And he's in the house of Cornelius preaching, doing what he was commissioned to do. And he preaches and identifies in verse 42 why he preaches. He says this, Acts 10:42, "And He ordered us to preach to the people and solemnly to testify that this is the one who has been appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." He said, "He told us to preach...to preach the gospel."

So, Jesus was a preacher and Jesus ordained 12 other preachers. After the 12 came another Apostle, namely Paul. Turn to Galatians chapter 1. Paul was not included among the Twelve but came later. He is sort of the third generation of preachers. And when he came to conversion, he came to know the Lord, and was saved, he immediately began to preach. Back in verse 11 of Galatians 1 he talks about the gospel which was preached by me.

But notice over in verse 23, when the Jews heard this former persecutor of Christians, this Christian killer now preaching, this is what they said. Verse 23, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy. And they were glorifying God because of me." Jesus was a preacher. The Apostles were preachers. Paul was a preacher. Paul had a protegee. Who was Paul's son in the faith? Timothy. And what did he say to Timothy as he was coming to the end of his life and ministry? In 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 2 he said, "Timothy, preach the Word." He made Timothy into a preacher. And he said, "Timothy, preach it in such a way to faithful men that they'll be able to preach it also and the chain has been unbroken." It's a long line of preachers. That's been God's ordained means, nothing's changed. This is God's design.

Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. I know there are people today who would like to substitute a music group or a drama team for the preacher. I know there are people who would like to take the Word of God out of the preacher's mouth and put something more quote/unquote "relevant" into it. I know there are people who think that the preacher who preaches the Word of God is out of touch with where people are and that the most important thing about communication is finding out exactly where people are and crossing the bridge of where they are. I know there are people like that today and there were people like that in Paul's day, too.

Paul went to Corinth. Corinth was a very sophisticated city. It wasn't a very old city, about 100 years old, had been rebuilt by the Romans about a hundred years before Paul got there. It was a fairly new city, it was a crossroad city on the sort of...on the peninsula between Greece and Macedonia. It was a crossroads of the world there. It was a dynamic city. It was a wicked, wicked city. In fact, a verb in the Greek to Corinthianize means to go to bed with a prostitute. The town was synonymous with prostitution. It was in every sense the worst and best of pagan culture...very sophisticated. Had the worship of all the reigning deities, had the trafficking of all the current philosophies and theories of life and time and eternity. It was all there, the Epicureans were there, the Stoics were there. Everybody was there. It was the crossroads of thought. Paul went into that city.

Now if you were living in modern times, somebody would want to sit down with him and tell him he needed to study the cultural bridges so he could figure out which one to cross to get to those people. And he needed to really be sensitive to how they thought and how they acted and how they responded and what their world was like and what it felt like to be a Corinthian. And certainly you're not in utter disregard of that. But I want you to notice how Paul approached this very sophisticated city. If there was one thing that they loved in Corinth, it was oratory. They were utterly enamored with fancy talkers. In fact, people used to stand on the shore and put smooth rocks in their mouth and practice speaking...speaking to increase their enunciation. Great stories exist about that. Oratory was revered. Complicated, difficult philosophies were held in high esteem. Somebody might have said, "Now, Paul, if you're going to go in there, you've got to be sharp, you've got to be smooth, you've got to be clever, you've got to be glib. You've really got to understand where they're at," and so forth.

But listen to what he says. First Corinthians 1:17, "Christ didn't send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech..." stop there a minute. He took him on at the very point of their cultural identity. He said, "The one thing I will not do is meet you on the ground of cleverness of speech. Whether that enamors you or not is immaterial. Christ didn't send me to baptize, Christ sent me to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech." Because that could make the cross of Christ void. I could cancel out the reality of my message if I get it garbled up in contemporary jargon. And he says in verse 18, "I know this, the word of the cross is to those who are perishing...what?...foolishness." That's how it is to people who are perishing, it is foolishness. It always will be foolishness. "But to those who are being saved, it is the power of God." That simple preaching of the gospel. He talks about it in chapter 2, "Preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified in weakness, fear and trembling. Not in persuasive words of wisdom." That's simple trembling humble preaching of the gospel caused people to criticize Paul mercilessly. They said his speech is contemptible, 2 Corinthians 10. They said his presence...his presence is inadequate, unimpressive. The man is too simplistic. There's nothing about him that charms us. He lacks oratorical ability. Where is the great wisdom coming out of this man's mouth? Where are the clever ditties? All it is is this simple cross business. "But to those who are perishing, that's foolishness. But to those who are being saved, it's the power of God." And since God is determining who is being saved, better to stick with

the power, right?

"It is written...verse 19, quoted out of Isaiah...I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." You know, God gets great pleasure in ignoring man's egotistical cultural thought patterns and just cutting to the core with the simplicity of the gospel. And that's because of verse 21, "Since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of preaching, literally in the Greek, through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe."

The point is simply this. Very, very profound point, for centuries since the Fall, man has been trying to come to God through human wisdom and never succeeded. So, since the world through its wisdom has never come to know God, God has been pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching.

It's not a question of how sophisticated can you be, or how clever can you be, or how culturally astute can you be, or how relevant can you be. It's a question of how clear can you be. How clear can you be in articulating the gospel, the good news? It is God's design through the foolishness of preaching. And I know in the eyes of many in the world, I'm a fool and any preacher is a fool. That's all right. That gives God all the glory when people hear fools and are powerfully transformed.

You see, God has so designed and it's because it's His choice to do so, from before the foundation of the world, certain men and women would come to know Him and be a part of His eternal Kingdom. Their names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life. And then God designed that they would come to faith through hearing the message preached. That's the plan. I really don't want to mess with the plan. My responsibility is to be faithful as a preacher, to preach the Word in season, out of season, when it's popular, when it's not. That's the plan that God through the foolishness of preaching saves those who believe. That's His purpose.

People say, "Why do you have such an emphasis in your church on preaching and teaching?" Now you know, right? I remember a man was asking me about our services some years back. And he said, "Tell me about your worship service." He was a pastor. And I said sure, we sing and pray and praise the Lord together as a congregation and then I preach.

"Well how long is your service?"

"Oh, long. About an hour and 30 minutes, an hour and 45 minutes sometimes."

"Well how much time do you take in that service?"

"Oh, about 50 minutes or so."

And he said this, "Well, you're really interrupting worship with all that talking."

Let me tell you something. Martin Luther said this, he was right. "The highest worship of God is the preaching of His Word." That's right. You as a congregation cannot honor God more than by listening reverently to His Word with an obedient heart. You can't honor Him more. You can't worship Him more than by listening to His Word with an obedient heart. That's the supreme act of worship. I'm not here to interrupt your worship. I'm here to focus your worship on the God who is being revealed in His Word. Preaching.

I'm telling you, it breaks my heart to see preaching being diminished as it is today, to see preachers being diminished. The preaching of the Word of God is God's plan, but it's being diminished in our time and a lot of young men who maybe 15 years ago, gifted young men, would have gone off to seminary and learned how to be expositors of the Word of God are now enamored by media kinds of things and enamored by the relevancy kind of New Wave preaching and they're turning away from the Word of God and we're losing men who would be gifted. And I'm sure it grieves the heart of God and that's one of the reasons why we're so excited to put this building up and to keep training men who are committed to teaching and preaching the Word of God, according to the way that God has laid out the plan. I mean, throughout the history of the church, basically the force, the power of the church with the great men who preached and taught the Word of God. Times have changed and we need to see God raise up some great preachers in the days ahead.

But that's what we do as a church. If you wonder why we do what we do here, this is why we do it, because this is what the Word of God tells us to do, to open the Scripture and to introduce you to the God who is revealed there, right? In all His fullness.

So I go right back to where I started. The primary purpose for choosing a church is the biblical preaching. That's why you choose a church because that's what makes every other area strong and conforms it all to the Word and to the God of the Word. And therein lies the power.

Well tonight I'm going to preach the sermon from 2 Timothy 4, I want to take you in to 3 and 4, preach the Word, what does that mean? What's the context of that great, great passage?

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