

Preach the Word

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[0 : 00] I wonder if you've ever thought about the elements of our church service.

What do we do when we gather on a Sunday? Obviously, one of the things we do is we sing. Human beings everywhere know that song is powerful. It can lift our souls and calm our troubled hearts, expressing emotions in ways that speech cannot.

And when it's married with biblical truth, as it should be and as it was this morning, a song is a great gift from God in which we can praise him and encourage one another.

Now what else do we do? We pray. Our service leader, Dr. Kenny, today began with prayer. And over the last couple of years, we've also tried to make sure that somewhere in the service, we have a more focused time where somebody like Dr. Kenny today leads us in calling on the Lord for various things in the life of our church and in the life of the world.

And of course, once a month in our church, we take the Lord's Supper so that we can remember visually what the Lord has done for us. But what is it that takes the most time?

[1 : 22] The answer, of course, is what I am doing right now. Our services are around 90 minutes long, and we take up about 45 minutes of that with the reading and preaching of the word.

So that's half the service. And that has always been the case with Protestant churches everywhere. During the time of the Reformation, the sermon could occupy close to three quarters of a typical church service.

But why should this be the case? Why shouldn't the singing or the taking of the Lord's Supper or something else dominate our meeting? Well, one answer is simply because that's the pattern we find when we turn to the scriptures.

Whenever God's people gather, the word takes center stage. Let me just take two examples from the Old Testament. Come with me first of all to Deuteronomy 4 verse 10.

It will also be on the screen. When Moses is speaking to the gathered people of Israel, and he says to them, Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, Assemble the people before me to do what?

[2 : 36] To hear my words, so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land, and may teach them to their children. And so Moses is asking the people to recall what happened to them at Mount Sinai back in the book of Exodus.

Horeb is just another name for Sinai. And there they had an amazing encounter with God as they saw a blazing fire. But when they encountered God, they didn't actually see him.

They only heard his words. And that's what Moses is interested in. Not so much the visuals, but the audio. And in verse 12, he goes on to say, Then the Lord spoke to you out of fire.

You heard the sound of words, but saw no form. There was only a voice. And so it is God's word that matters when the people gather.

And God's word is to be heard, and it leads to obedience. Then come with me a few centuries later to Nehemiah chapter 8. Now the people of God at this point have long been established as a nation.

[3 : 49] And in fact, at this point, they have a very long history behind them. They have settled in Canaan, the land God has promised them. And they've actually been exiled from it because they worship other gods.

And then now here in the book of Nehemiah, God has brought them back. And as they gather together for the very first time after exile as one, what happens?

Well, this is what happens in verse 3. Ezra reads the law aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the water gate in the presence of the men, women, and others who could understand.

And all the people listened attentively to the book of the law, that is, the very words that God had left them with. And then we jump down to verse 7.

And there we find the Levites instructing the people in the law. And in verse 8, they make it clear and give the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

[4 : 57] And once again, you see that it is God's word that is being given priority in the gathering of God's people. And that remains the case as we go into the New Testament.

You see, in Acts chapter 6, the apostles make clear where their priority lies. There are widows that are being neglected, but the apostles remain clear what should remain center stage.

And you might remember we talked about this earlier in the year. Look at chapter 6, verse 3 and 4. And indeed, they practice what they preach.

Notice, for example, what happens whenever an apostle enters the synagogue in the book of Acts. To just take one random example, just look at Acts chapter 17, verses 1 to 3.

When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.

[6 : 29] These, Jesus, I am proclaiming to you, is the Messiah, he said. But this isn't just for the apostles, and it isn't just for the synagogue.

For in 1 Timothy, Paul makes the word central again in his descriptions of pastoral leadership. So look, just for instance, at 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 17.

The elders who direct the affairs of the church are well worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. And so the work of preaching the word to the church, that is the gathered people of God, is seen as honorable.

And so when we come to today's passage, well, it's no surprise, isn't it, when we look at the charge that Paul gives Timothy.

Preach the word. Preach the word. Remember, this letter is Paul's final words. And he doesn't want to waste a single syllable.

[7 : 38] And so when it comes for him to say the one thing that Timothy must not give up on, well, we find these three words. Preach the word.

That is your solemn responsibility, Timothy. I understand the gravity of the situation. As we've been seeing over the past few weeks, people are living ungodly lives and indulging in false, empty, godless words.

So Timothy, here are my three words to you. Just lay low. No, it's not that. It's preach the word.

Now, why is this the case? Why does Paul make this particular charge? Now, you could answer this question by simply answering the way we have so far.

You could say, oh, it's because God wants to make the word center stage. But that doesn't quite answer the question. Why does God want to make the word in particular center stage?

[8 : 55] And why does he want to make it center stage in particular? By preaching. Why is it that every time we gather on a Sunday, we must preach the word?

Now, let's try to answer that question one by one. Why does God want to make the word center stage? The answer lies, first of all, in the immediate context.

The word takes center stage because of what the word does. The word takes center stage because of what the word does.

Now, remember the verses immediately before our passage. Today, Joshua took us through it last week. But let me just remind you of them again. Look at 2 Timothy 3, verse 15.

Remember, Timothy, how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

[10 : 00] And so what does the word do? Well, it can save you by bringing you into a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. This word can raise the dead.

You see, dead people can take no initiative to move towards God. They are dead. They can't lift a finger or even take one step forward. And we are dead.

And if I say to a dead person, come alive, nothing will happen. My words have no power to bring anybody to life.

But the words of God, as found in the scriptures, are different. They expose us, first of all, to our condition because we didn't even realize we are dead after all our arms and legs are working.

But God's word revealed to us that our spiritual capacity was zero. We are spiritually dead. And then these very words of God exposed us to the living word of God, Jesus Christ.

[11 : 14] They gave us information about Jesus, but more than that, they constituted an invitation. God's word called on us to make a personal connection, to put our faith in Jesus Christ.

And when that happened, a remarkable transformation took place. You were raised from the dead, all because of God's word. That's what God's word does.

And I'm sure for many of you, you can think of that's how you became a Christian. But the word doesn't just save you. It equips you.

Look at 2 Timothy 3, verse 16 to 17. All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So just as that word save you, so now that same word enables you to do every good work as you are taught and rebuked, corrected, and trained.

[12 : 29] You see, the word doesn't just give us information. It doesn't even just give out an invitation. The word also begins a work of renovation. Every time we open the Bible and we listen to it, we are being renovated for service and worship to God.

As Jesus himself prays for his disciples, sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth. Now, why can this word have such an impact?

Why is it so powerful? Why is it so transformative? Why is it so active? Well, the answer is right there.

These very words of scripture are God-breathed. And if everything I just said is true, then that fundamentally changes how we should think and do ministry.

For why rely on my own important words which cannot give life to anybody, which cannot renovate anybody, when this very word is at hand.

[13 : 49] And so when I do weddings, when I do funerals, when I make hospital visits, when I have a conversation about a hard situation, what do I need to speak? What do I need to hold out?

It is these very God-breathed words come to us now in the form of the Bible. For if this is the very nature of God's word, then the logic becomes what the type, doesn't it?

This is how it works. 2 Timothy 3.16, All scripture is God-breathed. Therefore, 4 verse 2, preach the word.

Preach the word. And so that's why we are to be relentlessly focused on the Bible. I know from time to time, people might ask, Oh, pastor, I'm very glad that you expound the Bible.

But don't you also forget the Holy Spirit? But look closely at Paul's emphasis here. He makes clear that the word is God-breathed, which is simply another way of saying that the word of God belongs and originates from the Spirit of God.

[15 : 13] And that phrase, God-breathed, can actually be translated God-spirited because that word breathe is actually the Greek word pneuma, which is the same word for Spirit.

And so you never divorce the two. To preach the word is to exercise the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And Paul makes clear that this word inspired by the Holy Spirit is all we need for effective ministry.

But now comes the next question. Why does God want to make the word center stage in our gatherings by preaching? From what I understand, experts in educational theory will tell you nowadays that a person standing up front here and delivering a monologue is not the most effective way of teaching.

Well, let's examine first of all what preaching is not. Preaching is not lecturing. That is, preaching does overlap a lot with teaching, but it isn't about me just standing up here and presenting to you cultural facts about Ephesus or something like that.

And preaching is not sharing. I know that in Malaysia we often talk about the sermon as someone sharing the word.

[16 : 42] And I don't take offense at that because that's just how we in Malaysia have learned to talk. But actually, it's not the best way to describe what is happening now.

You see, when you look at the book of Acts, you see that the apostles proclaim God's word, declare God's word, preach God's word, persuade and reason from God's word, but not once does the writer ever use the word share.

And I think that's deliberate once we realize what preaching is. You see, the word preaching translated here in the Greek is the word keruso. And it means to declare, to make an announcement, to herald.

It's to make a message from the king known. It's to say something with the intention of advancing the cause of God to press home its necessity.

In other words, there is an authority present in preaching, not because the preacher himself carries any special authority, but because of whose words he carries.

[18 : 02] The king of kings, the lord of lords, the judge of the living and the dead. And that may be why we don't hear of the apostles simply sharing the word.

If we just say we're sharing the word, it can suggest that the word can be refused without any consequences. But if this word is that of God himself, breathed out by him, spoken by him, and it has been declared to you, then it has wake and authority and rejection of that word carries consequences.

And that's why whenever God gathers his people, the word is to be preached. Preach the word, for this word will have effects and consequences.

If you look at verse 2 again, it can correct you, rebuke you, or encourage you. Because it's not just a word written by a random stranger, it's a word spoken by the God who made you and knows you.

So he knows when you're going the wrong way and needs your steps to be redirected. He knows when you're getting comfortable with sin and need a strong warning.

[19 : 32] He knows when you're losing heart and your resolve is weakening and you need strengthening. And so that's why the preacher is not free to just give some of his random thoughts and opinions.

He's not free to trivialize the pulpit. He needs to say what God says, for in the end that's how we are encouraged, rebuke, and corrected.

And he needs to be ever ready. Be prepared in season and out of season, Paul says in verse 2. And so he needs to be like a doctor on call.

He has to be ready for the phone ringing or the pager beeping at a moment's notice. He can't choose a time that's convenient to him, like when everybody is feeling ready and attentive.

It's in season and out of season, not at a season most convenient. You see, wonderfully, there are times when we as God's people are remarkably receptive to God's word.

[20 : 38] You know, we hear something from God's word, we say amen, but we don't just say amen, we take it to heart and then we live it out. Our hearts are soft and tender and that's wonderful when that happens.

But there are other times when we as God's people are remarkably slow to God's word. think of the disciples of Jesus and how slow they were to understand all that Jesus was saying.

Peter heard Jesus teaching him clearly three times that he must die and yet Peter could not allow Jesus to go to the cross. And yes, there will be times when we are dull of hearing, we are a little bit stubborn, we are slow to get onto God's program.

But even in those times, the preacher cannot stop preaching God's word, even when the response is not the most encouraging, he cannot decide to change the message.

There is an urgency to the message that he cannot ignore, he has to keep on. But what he needs to do though, is to exercise great patience and careful instruction.

[21 : 55] That's the end of verse 2. The preacher himself needs to remember that he too is often a very slow learner, and that in turn will help him to have compassion on his listeners.

He has been a stubborn sheep himself. And then he needs to exercise careful instruction. Earlier in 2 Timothy chapter 2, he has to handle the word of truth well.

We saw that a few weeks ago. But now he also needs to instruct the people from the word of truth well. He needs to slowly and patiently do the best that he can to bring out and teach what is in the scriptures to make it clear for people what God is saying.

So preach the word. Keep declaring God's truth in Jesus to the glory of his name. And as the word takes center stage, then Jesus himself should take center stage.

For as Jesus himself says, all the scriptures testify about me. Now, what is the application then for the congregation?

[23 : 16] Well, let me begin with a broad application before moving to the narrower application. broadly speaking, although not all of us are preachers in the sense meant here, we don't declare God's truth in Jesus amongst the gathering of God's people, but all of us do in some sense speak God's word, both to unbelievers and to other Christians.

We all have opportunities from time to time to tell a non-Christian about Jesus or to encourage or correct another Christian from the scriptures. And so in a sense this is for all of us.

We must be ready in season and out of season when the opportunity comes. One of the young adults was telling me recently that one of his non-Christians actually asked him what is the gospel?

Now, that opportunity doesn't come every day and we have no idea when that will come. And so we must be ready to state the gospel clearly, carefully, patiently.

And I'm sure that there are times when another Christian approaches you and says, I'm worried about this situation or I don't know what to do in that situation or brother, what does the Bible say about how I should handle this?

[24 : 48] Well, prepare yourselves for that day. Learn where to go in the scriptures for encouragement or correction when someone is anxious or struggling with some particular sin or needs wisdom about how to handle his money or family or whatever it is.

And that's why we have things like the TNT seminar happening tonight to equip you. But verse 2 is still meant directly for those who are in the same position as Timothy.

And so that's a narrower application. And so how should we apply these words as a congregation member if we are not people who occupy the pulpit on a Sunday?

Well, the implication is this for the congregation. Don't despise the preaching of God's word. Don't push it off center stage in our main gatherings.

If God thinks that that's the main thing, then let's keep it the main thing. It's fantastic whenever we have brothers and sisters in Christ come and they share updates about their ministries or their mission work.

[26 : 03] It's heartwarming to hear a good testimony. But those are updates and testimonies. That's not the preaching of the word.

Brothers and sisters, the word must be preached. And for the congregation member, it also means being ready to be an active listener to the preaching of God's word.

Now, on the part of the preacher, the preacher must of course try his best to carefully instruct the congregation and sometimes he will have off days. But it's not just one way, the listener also has to try his best.

Although, of course, like the preacher, they will also sometimes have off days. There will be some days where it's more difficult for you to concentrate. But that is exactly what we should be trying to do, to do our best to concentrate during this part of the service rather than making it our default setting to switch off as soon as we come to the reading of God's word and the preaching of God's word.

Because it is at this time that God is present, ready to teach, encourage, correct, and rebuke us for our good.

[27 : 21] So do whatever it takes. Maybe for some of you it means turning off the notifications on your phone. For others of you it might mean that you actually don't use your phone Bible.

Altogether you turn to a physical Bible because your phone is just too distracting. Well, whatever it is, do whatever it takes. For the charge is clear. Timothy, preach the word.

But Paul doesn't just stop that. He needs to encourage Timothy because he knows there's also going to be a challenge. Itching ears.

Itching ears. verse 3. For the time will come when people 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.

[28 : 30] Paul is now setting the expectation for how God's word will be received. And it won't be met with universal acclaim. From the rest of this letter, we know that there are already teachers leading people astray as he speaks.

And so Paul is not speaking about something holy future. He is speaking of something that is already a present reality. But notice, the stress here in verse 3 is not so much on the speaking but on the hearing.

Paul is not here focusing on the false teachers but the listeners. And he says, don't be surprised. Even if the teaching is sound and biblical, that doesn't mean that everyone wants to listen.

the message will be rejected by some, perhaps even many. I spent time once explaining to a long-time church leader why I thought something was wrong biblically speaking.

And then I waited for some pushback. I was trying to keep an open mind, thinking that since he was very keen on this particular thing, that maybe he would also have a biblical argument and perhaps he would show me something from the scriptures that I had not considered.

[29 : 53] But to my surprise, he had no argument. All he did was just kept insisting to me that he was right. He didn't even bother to argue with the points I raised from the Bible.

I believe they were sound and biblical, but he simply didn't want to listen. But what is even more confronting in verse three, it's not just that there will be people who don't want to listen to sound doctrine.

They also actively want to listen to those who don't teach sound doctrine. You see, look at verse three again and notice who takes the initiative.

They will gather around them a great number of teachers. And so it's the listeners themselves. They will be people who will invite teachers to tell them the things that they want to hear and even call such things biblical.

They will want to listen to these teachers who will tell them that there's no such thing as suffering for the gospel. people. Or perhaps that since Jesus did miracles on earth as a man, not as God, so we should do the exact same miracles that he did.

[31 : 17] Or perhaps that God's ultimate purpose for you in life is success in your careers or to find a sense of self-fulfillment. You see, there is no shortage of such people who will tell you such things.

And sadly, there is no shortage of such teachers coming to Sarawak. I state this as a matter of great sadness. You see, one of the most upsetting things that I experienced this year was when I was seated right at the front at a Christian rally and listened with my very own ears as the visiting preacher for nearly 90 minutes proclaim a pure prosperity gospel from the story of David and Goliath.

the people all around me were clapping and cheering. I had never seen verses three and four demonstrated so blatantly. They would turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to me.

It made me literally sick to my stomach. And so that's a lesson for us to realize. You see, big crowds and popularity doesn't necessarily mean that they are doing God's work.

it doesn't equate to faithfulness. It could just be itching ears. But in the face of such a situation, what does Paul counsel Timothy to do?

[32 : 48] Verse five. ■■■■ Hmmm du Roz!'o I dzie■ through meetings, look when man irgendwie will be in it, who will be in it.

or is that an advocate of spirit, the Lord of Today! all the duties of your ministry. Keep calm and carry on. And indeed, here's the logic.

Paul says, because there will be people who will not put up with sound doctrine, well, Timothy, keep preaching the word. You will have expected him to say, since there are all these people who don't want to listen to you, just give up.

But no, he says, discharge the duties of your ministry. Actually, it literally says, fulfill your ministry. Keep bringing the gospel to bear on people's lives.

And that's what he means when he says, do the work of an evangelist. You know, we hear that phrase, do the work of an evangelist, and we immediately have a picture of us having to visit longhouses in the interior.

[33 : 53] But Paul is simply saying, be a gospel-proclaiming person. That's what an evangelist is. He proclaims Jesus to non-Christians, but also to Christians, so that we can be reminded of what he has done and is doing in us, so that we remember that Jesus is both the saviour and renovator of our lives.

So that's what the preacher of God's word is called to do. But what about the congregation member? Well, the application is this.

Don't be like one who has itching ears. Don't be like one who has itching ears. You see, if you look at verse 3 again, the ultimate reason for why we might reject sound teaching is almost never purely intellectual or rational.

It has to do with our desires. That's what verse 3 says. People who have rejected sound teaching want to suit their own desires, which is why they gather the wrong kind of teachers around them.

And so we need to be aware of our own hearts and how it can deceive us. After all, we naturally want to hear things that make us the hero, the king, the centre of our own lives.

[35 : 20] Who doesn't like to hear about constant financial breakthroughs in our lives or prophecies about success and achievement on our own terms? But my brothers and sisters, I plead with you.

Let's have humble ears. For when we do, we will truly hear the voice of the one who loves us more than we could ever imagine.

Who cares for us in every circumstance. Who leads us through the fog of life. And that person is not us.

It's God. You see, if we listen to preaching and we never hear something that challenges us or even upsets us, maybe it's not God's word that is being preached.

We're just listening to an echo of ourselves. We're listening to our own desires. For we will never disagree with ourselves. But God can disagree with us.

[36 : 20] And when that happens, that's always a good thing. Because he knows better. But let me just end with what I shall call the catalyst.

The king who crowns you. We've just heard the charge. Preach the word. It must be preached. And we've just seen the challenge.

Itching ears that reject God's message. And so we need motivation. We just need a catalyst to keep running the race.

And so Paul gives us that catalyst. Preach the word, Timothy, he says, because Christ Jesus, the king, will one day judge.

And that's in verse 1. So for the preacher, be careful how you handle the word. And how you announce the word. Because the king whom you represent is listening in.

[37 : 24] And listener, consider how you would respond to God's word. Because the king who is speaking to you is also watching.

One day, every preacher and every listener will have to give an account for what they said and how they listen. Were you faithful to the charge?

Were you faithful in your response? And when Christ appears and his kingdom fully established, well, there will be nowhere to hide. All will be revealed.

And so that's the first part. The king is coming. But that's not all. For now, Paul switches the focus to himself. Look at verse 6.

Now, why does he choose to switch the focus to himself at this point?

[38 : 29] Because he wants Timothy to know what lies in store for him. Look at verses 7 and 8. Paul has been a faithful apostle.

He has been a faithful preacher. He has been a faithful herald. He has preached the word in season and out of season. He saw people welcome his message and wonderfully saved from the wrath of God.

And he saw people reject his message and chase him out of town. He endured hardship but kept his head and fulfilled his ministry.

He is about to stand trial before Nero to be found guilty and he is going to be executed. But then he will stand in a different courtroom and before Jesus the judge, he will be found righteous because the righteous judge is also his righteous advocate.

And this crown is not for him only. Paul says to Timothy, if you fulfill your ministry, if you fight the good fight, you run the race, you keep the faith, you will receive the crown too.

[39 : 57] For look at the end of verse 8. This crown is not only for Paul but to all who have longed for his appearing. It is for all who have heard the word of truth.

And the word of truth says in this present age, there will be a need to suffer for the gospel. There will be a need to persevere in the gospel. There will be a need to turn away from false gospels.

That's what we've been hearing all throughout 2 Timothy. And that's going to be hard, especially when people say, oh, why are you being so nitpicky? But here's the truth.

At the end of it all, it will be worth it. The king will crown you. Your hope in Christ is not a vain hope.

False teaching will give you a hope that is ultimately in vain, promising you anything from perfect wealth to perfect health to perfect satisfaction now. But they will not give you a crown of righteousness.

[41 : 03] And that's what matters. Because it is only when you wear the crown, a gift of pure grace from the king, that you will actually get perfect health and perfect wealth and perfect satisfaction.

Because you have Jesus. And so my brothers and sisters, the application is clear. Keep running the race.

Fight the good fight. Fight the good fight. Keep the faith. If you're a preacher, keep preaching the word as in verses 2 and 5.

If you're a listener, avoid listening to the word like those in verses 3 and 4. Instead, keep taking Christ at his word and then watch him keep his word on that final day.

And that's what I leave you with this morning. Let's pray to the King of Kings. Heavenly Father, as we come this morning, we pray that indeed we have heard your declaration, your announcement.

[42 : 26] Help us to recognize that it is you speaking, the God of this universe. And will you help us to constantly have this outlook not to be people who will gather around us, teachers who simply say what we want to hear, but instead we will be willing to hear the word of God that is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that we can run the race and finish the race and look forward to that crown of righteousness which you have kept for us on that final day.

So please keep us persevering. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.