

Title: Preach the Word
Text: 2 Timothy 3.16-4.5/Hebrews 4:12-13
Theme: The Word of God
Occasion: Ordination of Chris Dilley
Prop Stmt. I am going to convince and encourage my audience about the authority and effectiveness of the Word of God.

When the Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, he was in prison, but he had a sense, and rightfully so, that he was going to be released and be able to resume ministry outside of that context. However, when Paul writes this second letter to Timothy, he is not only in prison again, but he realizes that the end of his life is near. He said, "The time of my departure has come." The letter of 2 Timothy is the last recorded words of this champion of the gospel. The letter has an urgency about it. Paul has planted fledgling, struggling churches throughout the Roman Empire and now he has to leave them. He has also trained and mentored men to take his place and now he has to leave them as well. Of all the things that he could say, what would he chose to say?

Read Text: 2 Timothy 3.16 – 4.5

Chris, in the spirit of Paul to Timothy, I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and his church to "Preach the Word." Declare, expose, explain, exalt, and apply the Scriptures. Study them in private. Read them in public. Counsel with them. Consult them. Champion them. There are many commendable things to mark your life and ministry, but the one thing that is foundational to them all is to be a faithful preacher of God's Word. To preach anything less is arrogant and foolish and will starve your people and will not provide your people with a healthy and balanced diet. To preach anything more is arrogant and foolish and will fatten your people with the junk food of opinion that will bloat your people but not nourish them. Your authority as a minister of the gospel and a preacher of the Word is not inherent within you, it is vested in you practically by the elders and this flock and is given to you with the assumption that you will use your position of authority to declare the faith that has once and for all been delivered to the saints and which alone has true authority, and that is the Word of God. If you abandon the Word, you will abandon your authority and will have nothing worthwhile to say.

In many churches today, the Bible is mentioned, but the Bible is not used. It is like an icon, a throw-back to nostalgia when people actually carried it to church because they knew they would open it and study it because the preacher knew that apart from the Word of God, the preacher had no Word. And the people knew that unless they heard from God, there was nothing else worth listening to. David Wells said it so well. "The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is not inadequate technique, insufficient organization, or antiquated music, and those who want to squander the church's resources. Bandaging these scratches will do nothing to staunch the flow of blood that is spilling from its true wounds. The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace too ordinary, his judgment is too benign, his gospel is too easy, and his Christ is too common." Chris you are being set apart and recognized by this congregation as a minister of

the gospel because you believe the Bible. Therefore, you must preach the Bible. You must teach the Bible. To preach a sermon without the Bible is like surgery without a knife. You can anesthetize the patient - but unless you use the knife, you have not operated on the patient. Apart from the Word of God, true, life change will not take place.

That is exactly what our text is saying. If you want to go to surgery where the doctor will not use a scalpel and will not cut you and will not help you, then go to a church that does not teach the Word of God. But if you want God to work in you and change you and heal you and infuse you and strengthen you and challenge you and deepen you and fill you, and fire you and motivate you, and grasp you with a grip of grace that does not let go then immerse yourself into the Word of God and put yourself under the clear and forthright teaching and preaching of the Word. Christ you must preach the Bible because:

1. Because God's Word Lives (3.16)

God's Word is life. God's Word is exhaled by God. God's word is living. It is the life-giving, truth-revealing, reality-forming, standard-establishing, joy-infusing, law-making, judgement-warning, grace-amazing, Christ-exalting, Spirit-breathing, universe-explaining, heart-exposing, motive-uncovering, history-making, mountain-moving, kingdom establishing, church-birthing, believer-keeping Word of God! It cannot be frustrated or stopped in accomplishing the reason for which it has been sent. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning, God spoke. When God speaks, things happen! When God breathes out, life comes into existence. Things that were not, become! When God exhales universes unfold, angels appear, stars blaze, galaxies whirl, and planets orbit. When God speaks mountain ranges assemble at attention, thunder rocks, oceans roll and rivers run. Birds fly, lions pounce, ants crawl and flowers blossom. Then God, out the dust of the earth, formed man. He designed his circulatory system, nervous system, respiratory system, skeletal system, endocrine system, muscular structure, his digestive process with such incredible detail that thousands of years later, scientists looking at the intricate nature of our DNA are left with no other logical choice but to acknowledge that behind it all is a designer. Oh, yes there is a Designer, and this designer did more than form the parts, he then breathed into Adam's nostrils and Adam became a living being!

One of the evidences of life is the ability to propagate. Life begets life. Life gives birth to life. Dead things do not bring forth life. These pews cannot have more pews. These bricks will not populate more bricks. The Word of God is life because God is life. Therefore, when the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed - it brings forth life. Dead people come to life. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. You who were dead in your trespasses and sins have been made alive, by the living, eternal Word of God. Teachers, when you teach the Word of God, you are handling the source of life for those students. Fathers when you read the Bible to your children, you are giving them the very thing that can produce life in them. It is living because it is from the true and the eternal, immutable and infinitely, living God. God alone is the author of life. Therefore, His word is alive and is active. "All Scripture is breathed out by God."

Ezekiel 37 is one of the most amazing chapters in the Bible. The prophet Ezekiel is given a vision of a valley that is full of bones. I read this and think of the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. You can walk in fields where the evidences of genocide are seen in the long mounds, punctuated by protruding bones that hauntingly bear testimony to the evil that reigned in that land. These are fields of death. It is hallowed ground. Visitors do not laugh and jest. The specter of death causes the thoughtful guest to feel as an intruder in an outdoor cathedral. One can only speak in hushed tones. Ezekiel is not in a field. He is in a valley. He stands on the ground where great death and devastation took place. He is surrounded by the bones and they are not even partially covered by dirt. These are the bones of his countrymen. These are those of his own nation who die at the hands of their enemies. As far as he can see, he sees death. And as much as he wants to be quiet, God tells him to preach. Preach to the bones. Preach God's Word to the bones. Tell the bones to hear the Word of the Lord. Ezekiel learned long ago not to argue with God. And so, Ezekiel does exactly that, and as he does, there is a rattling of the bones as the graveyard is turned into a boot-camp. Chris, this is exactly what happens in church Sunday after Sunday. When you preach the Word of God, dead people are raised to life to become soldiers in the army of God. That is how powerful God's Word is.

Chris, you are going to leave here in the next few months. You are going to be called to a church that may look more like a cemetery than a celebration. Church renewal strategists will have all sorts of programs, gimmicks and formulas for situations like this. You will be tempted to think that the situation is hopeless and that you are not up for the task. Part of that is true. You are not up for the task, but it is not up to you to create life. Preach the Word and watch what happens.

In John 11, Jesus went to the place where Lazarus was buried and Jesus spoke. Because He is the author of life, his word has authority. He said, "Lazarus, come forth!" Had he not said Lazarus, the entire cemetery would have come back to life. Now, you and I can go to a cemetery today and we can yell and scream all that we want, but it will not open up graves. We can get slick power point presentations, special lights, fog machines and cool music. We can get stained glass windows, gothic cathedrals and large pipe organs, but none of those things will bring dead people to life. Only the Word of God can do that. Chris, as a pastor, you have to preach, and as a fellow-pastor, I charge you before God and these witnesses, to only preach the only thing that can give your people life – Preach the Word.

When you preach the Word, there is something awesome that occurs when the Sovereign God confronts an individual through the preaching of the Word and seizes his soul by the throat. This living Word grabs people by the heart and it will not let go. Preaching is at once an awesome and terrifying event, for we are presuming to speak on behalf of the Almighty God who is infinitely careful and protective and jealous for His Word. Because God's Word lives and...

2. Because God's Word is Profitable (3.16b-17)

a. All Scripture is profitable for belief and behavior.

- i. The Word tells you what to believe (teaching).
- ii. The Word tells you what not to believe (reproof).
- iii. The Word tells you what not to do (correction).
- iv. The Word tells you what to do (training in righteousness).

I want you to see the connection between “all Scripture” and the four ways in which it is profitable. In other words, your people need to know what to believe, what not to believe, what not to do and what to do. In order for them to know all of those things, they need to know all of the Scripture. Chris, here is why is absolutely imperative that your ministry be marked by the faithful exposition of the Word of God. In other words, your preaching ministry must be marked by a faithful exposing, explaining and applying the entire counsel of God’s Word. That is done as you go through a text, a chapter, and a book from beginning to end. Let the text determine what the series is about. Do not let the series determine the text. When you spend the bulk of your preaching on topics, you will only select texts that pertain to that topic. Your people need more than the texts that pertain to the topic. They need the entire counsel of God. However, when you preach the entire counsel of God you will have to say some things that are not popular.

People do not mind it so much when you say what you believe, but they can get angry and offended when you tell them what not to believe. But a faithful preacher will say it all. It is not enough to say that we are declared righteous in the eyes of God by grace through faith in Christ. You must teach and preach that we are only declared righteous in the eyes of God by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone and that there is no salvation anywhere else and by no other means than through Christ and you must warn that all those who do not trust in Christ have no hope. The OT prophets were loved by all when they told of God’s promises of deliverance, but were hated by most when they spoke of God’s promises of judgment. This sword has is double-edged. You must explain what we are to believe as well as explain what we must not believe.

b. All Scripture is profitable for spiritual maturity.

If the people of God are going to be competent and equipped for every good work, then you have preach the Word to them. Your task as a minister of the gospel is not only to preach the gospel so that people come to faith in Christ, but you preach the gospel so that people will grow in the gospel and produce gospel fruit.

3. Because God’s Word is the Rule of Law (4.1)

Paul points out the obvious. God, through Christ judges the living and the dead. That means that everyone who is alive and has ever lived is under the authority of God. Everyone is accountable to God. The Bible is what God has revealed so that we might now on what basis we are going to be judged. God has not left us in the dark. The Bible is an amazing gift to us from God. God’s Word is a witness to us of the reality of God.

God has chosen to communicate to us through His word, which is the only way in which we can understand His General Revelation. In the deepest sense we cannot judge the Word, the Word judges us. “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Heb 4:12). The Bible tells us that the Word of God is the light that enables us to walk in the ways of God. God has not left us in the dark. He has given to us His Word! However, if you do not preach God’s Word, you will leave people in the dark.

William Willimon, theologian from Duke University said, *“I’m a mainline-liberal-Protestant-Methodist-type Christian. I know we’re soft on Scripture. Norman Vincent Peale has exercised a more powerful effect on our preaching than St. Paul. Listen to us on Sunday, and Leo Buscaglia or Mr. Rogers Neighborhood may come to mind before you think of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. I know we play fast and loose with Scripture. But I’ve always had this fantasy that somewhere, like in Texas, there were preachers who preached it all, Genesis to Revelation, without blinking an eye. . . . Do you know how disillusioning it has been for me to realize that many of these self-proclaimed biblical preachers now sound more like liberal mainliners than liberal mainliners?”*

He is right. In a sad and misguided attempt to get the world to like us and to think that we are relevant, conservative, evangelical Christians have dumbed down God to the point that we now talk about a God without judgment who is bringing people who aren’t sinners to a kingdom without a king to live a life without holiness through a Christ without a cross. Church is now evaluated on the basis of many standards such as its entertainment value, visitor appeal, worship experience, relevance factor, public approval or economic return. What is woefully absent from much of contemporary evaluation of church effectiveness is whether or not the church practices and values a high view of the Word of God and the preaching of the Word of God. But all of these things that churches have attempted to do as replacements of the Scripture and the faithful exposition of it are nothing less than cotton candy. They may taste good in the moment and may even give the consumer a buzz, but there is no substance, no grit, no meat, no sustenance, and no nourishment of the soul apart from Word-immersed, Word-expositing, Jesus-declaring preaching. Christianity is based upon revelation. If we are going to know anything with certainty, it is only going to be by Divine Revelation. Therefore, in order to know what to affirm, what to reject, we have to have an objective basis that comes from outside of us. That objective basis is the Bible. The Bible alone is our ultimate authority for what we believe and how we live. So, because God's Word lives, and is profitable and is the rule of law...

4. Preach God’s Word!

a. At all times

Be ready! Preaching has to be a priority in your ministry. Guard your time to study. Guard your time to prepare. Guard time in your service to preach. There are many things that will seek to replace this, but faithful preaching is always in season. It is always needed.

b. For all purposes

Reprove, rebuke, exhort are descriptions of what happens when you preach all of the Scripture. Your people will need both rebuke and exhortation. They will need to be lovingly corrected and lovingly encouraged. It is not one or the other, it is both/and.

c. With confidence

Dever and Gilbert said, *“Think of it like this: if preaching is simply a way – one way among many – of ascertaining new knowledge about God and the Bible, then there are myriad ways for a person to do that. Reading books, watching videos, listening to podcasts, and having conversations with other Christians all fill that bill. Similarly, if preaching is nothing more than one man doing a bit of public meditation on spiritual truths, then there are countless ways for people to get that benefit... But if preaching really is the proclamation of God’s life-giving, ex nihilo creating Word, then the stakes are raised considerably, and its no longer a matter of preference whether we do it or not. It’s literally a matter of life and death. The Bible presents the act of preaching as having just that sort of power and authority. It is the preached Word, it seems, which the Holy Spirit uses in a unique way to give life and ignite faith in a person’s soul.”*¹

d. With endurance

Chris, faithful preaching is much like meal preparation. Your family will not remember every meal that Stephanie makes, every side dish, every combination, and certainly not every ingredient. But, your kids will know and show that they were fed. In the same way, your congregation will not remember every sermon. In fact sometimes they won’t even remember an entire series. I had a dear member of the church call me the other day because he was reading through the book of Hebrews and was so blessed by it, he thought that I ought to preach through it sometime. I awkwardly mentioned that I had not too long ago. He felt bad. Years ago, I would have cut my wrists. But the truth is, we don’t remember everything that we hear, but I can look at a congregation and say, they are well fed. They have an appetite for good food. They know the difference between spiritual filet mignon, and elephant ears and cotton candy. Faithful preaching over the long haul will help cultivate an atmosphere of respect and joy in the Word of God.

e. In spite of controversy

There are so many things in the Scriptures that are offensive to our world. There are so many issues that are the occasion for people to get stirred up. Do not treat theses as traffic cones to avoid. Let the Scriptures speak. Be gracious, but clear. Be humble, but bold. Be hopeful, but truthful. God is, and so are we when we speak his words after him.

¹ Preach (Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert) pp.30-31.

Chris, the implications of this charge are clear: You must prepare to preach. You must make time to study, and as an integral part of that process you must keep your heart tender before God. In order to speak God's Word to others you must hear God's Word. Study well, but study on your knees. Study in humility and dependency and in submission to the text. Help your church love good preaching by preaching well. As elders and the under-shepherds that Christ has raised up to shepherd his flock, we stand in the line of faithful men who, dating back from the apostles and New Testament writers recognized that the preaching of the Word stands as the event and activity through which God works in his church.

Chris, the time will come when people will not endure clear preaching and sound doctrine, but you can make it clear, that time is not yet. Chris, the time will come when the shepherds of God's flock will abuse their positions and manipulate people for their own ends, but you can make it clear, that there remain some who will not bow down to that idol. Chris, the time will come and is already around us, when people are dying because there is a famine of the preaching of the Word. You cannot control other pulpits, but you will yours. And at that one, may you be that preacher who preaches it all. And may God give you a people who want to hear it all and believe it all and obey it all. Before God, and these witnesses, I charge you – Preach the Word!