

CONTENTS

Introduction: My Preaching Crisis 9

Part 1: Preparation for Preaching

1. Preach the Word! 15
2. Theological Training 20
3. Finding Time to Study 24
4. Developing a Sermon Calendar 28
5. Sermon Preparation 35
6. Why I Pray before I Preach 40
7. What I Pray before I Preach 44

Part 2: The Practice of Preaching

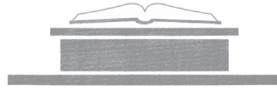
8. Using Scripture in Preaching 50
9. Selecting a Text to Preach 54
10. Consecutive Exposition 58
11. Becoming a Better Expositor 63
12. Sermon Outlines 68
13. Choosing Sermon Titles 73

14. Sermon Introductions	78
15. Sermon Transitions	83
16. Sermon Illustrations	86
17. Sermon Conclusions	91
18. Writing Sermon Manuscripts	95
19. Preaching without Notes	101

Part 3: Points of Wisdom for Preaching

20. Being Yourself in the Pulpit	108
21. Developing Your Style of Preaching	111
22. Pulpit Consistency	116
23. Indecent Exposure in the Pulpit	119
24. Pulpit Plagiarism	124
25. Protecting Your Voice for Preaching	128
26. Being a Guest Preacher	132
27. Being an Associate Minister	138
28. When You Lose Your Cutting Edge	144
29. Do You Want to Be Somebody?	148
30. The Bottom Line of Christian Ministry	152

Chapter 1



PREACH THE WORD!

What is preaching?

The term Paul used in 2 Timothy 4:2, where he charges Timothy to preach the Word, was originally a political term, not a religious one. It referred to the function of a herald. If the king had a message to get out, he couldn't just call a press conference and have all the news media publish or broadcast his remarks. He would dispatch his herald to deliver his message to his people. When the herald arrived at a city, he would cry out his message in a grave, formal, and authoritative voice. When he spoke, the people did well to listen and take heed. To ignore the herald's message was to reject the king's authority. And the herald would be careful to proclaim the king's message with clarity and accuracy. To misrepresent the king's message was just as dangerous as rejecting it.

This is the picture that naturally came to Timothy's mind when Paul charged him to be God's herald who faithfully proclaims the Word of God. And the assignment has not changed for those of us who preach today. We must preach the Word.

It is God's will to save the lost and sanctify the church through faithful, biblical, Christ-centered preaching. Unfortunately, biblical preaching is not a high priority for many people looking for a

church. Secondary things like music styles, ministry programs, and congregational prominence are often deemed more important than biblical preaching. In some instances, church shoppers consider a congregation's available parking spaces before they ever consider that congregation's doctrinal positions. Consequently, many pastors and churches—seeking either survival on one hand or success on the other—have compromised the centrality of preaching.

But preaching is and has always been the distinguishing mark of the true church of Jesus Christ. Faithful preaching is the essential mark of the true church, because if a church faithfully preaches the Word and allows its life to be shaped by it, everything will eventually fall into its proper place. Conversely, a church's apparent success is only incidental if it does not have a biblical standard of measuring, sustaining, or renewing its ministry. Biblical preaching is the central, primary, and decisive function of those God calls to shepherd the church.

Paul's charge to Timothy is the Lord's charge to every preacher: Preach the Word! This divine command obligates us to preach; moreover, it specifies what we are to preach: the Word. The importance of preaching rests in its content, not in its function. Our preaching is not the reason the Word works. The Word is the reason our preaching works. This is the biblical priority of pastoral ministry. We are charged to carry out a holy function—preaching. And we are charged to herald a holy message—the Word.

But what does it mean to preach the Word?

PREACH THE CONTENT OF THE WORD

The herald was on assignment to deliver the message of the king. It was not his message. And he did not have editorial authority over it. He could not change the message to suit the crowd. Neither

can we. The pulpit is not the place for personal testimonies, political speeches, group therapy sessions, motivational talks, self-help advice, worldly philosophies, or scientific theories. The pulpit is the throne of the Word of God. Therefore, the sacred text must be the priority of our preaching.

One noted scholar often says that those who preach should always be pointing to the text. Literally. If you are gesturing with your right hand, you should keep your left hand's finger on the text. If you reverse hands for gesturing, you should also reverse hands for holding your spot in the text. This is a practical way to remember that our preaching should always point to the text. We must preach "the sacred writings" (2 Timothy 3:15). And we must preach "all Scripture" (2 Timothy 3:16). Did you get that? Preach the Bible. But don't just preach your pet topics, hobbyhorses, or favorite doctrines. Preach it all. Strive to end your ministry with the words of Paul: "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26–27).

PREACH THE MEANING OF THE WORD

We must preach the content of Scripture. But biblical preaching involves more than reading, quoting, or mentioning Scripture in your sermon. The content of our messages must line up with the meaning of the text. Paul wisely counsels, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Scholars are not sure what particular nuance Paul intended when he speaks of "handling the word of truth." But the big idea is clear. The pastor-teacher who is approved by God and needs not be ashamed of his work must have an unwavering commitment to the

faithful exposition of the Word of truth. Ultimately, there are only two ways to preach—by exposition or by imposition. Either your preaching explains the God-intended meaning of the text or it sinfully imposes human speculation onto the text.

Think about it. When you go to the airport to catch a flight, you are clear about the destination, flight number, and time of departure. But there is another key piece of information you need before you travel. You may not think about it until you get to the airport. But when you arrive, the gate number becomes all-important. You don't just go to any gate and hop on a plane. You go to the specified gate, because going to the wrong gate, even if it's just the next one over, can lead you far from your intended destination. Likewise, a lack of precision in handling the Scriptures can lead people far away from God, rather than closer to Him.

PREACH THE FOCUS OF THE WORD

When Paul charged Timothy to preach the Word, he specifically had the Old Testament in mind. The writing of the New Testament canon was still in process, even as Paul wrote the words of 2 Timothy. The Old Testament was the collected body of Scripture from which the early church preached. Yet Timothy's preaching of the Old Testament was to be done as a minister of the new covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6). He was to read the Old Testament texts with New Testament eyes. His preaching was to focus on the divine person and redemptive work of Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ was the focus of Paul's preaching. "We preach Christ crucified," he declared (1 Corinthians 1:23). "For what we proclaim is not ourselves," he testified, "but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake (2 Corinthians 4:5). Paul preached Christ. And when he exhorted his protégé

to preach the Word, he clearly intended that the message of Christ should be the focus of his proclamation of Scripture.

On one occasion, someone complained to Charles Spurgeon that all his sermons sounded alike. “And so they should,” he replied. “First I take a text, and then I make a beeline for the cross.” Likewise, our preaching should unapologetically focus on the virgin birth, impeccable life, substitutionary death, glorious resurrection, and imminent return of Jesus Christ. “Him we proclaim,” the apostle boldly declares, “warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Colossians 1:28). It is not Christian preaching if the person and work of Christ is not the centerpiece of the message. We are to be heralds of the Word and witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ.

What are you preaching?