

Preach the Word – 2 Tim 3:16-4:5

“O ‘Twas a Joyful Sound” – The Way We Worship #5

Introduction – One of the gifts of the Reformation was a return to preaching the Word of God, to sermons full of biblical truth, instruction, exhortation, and application. The reformers of the 16th Century were committed to exegetical preaching, staying close to the text, while bringing forth the truth in a devotional style with an aim of the majesty of God in it all. Biblically understood, there is a particular authority in the pulpit which has been decimated in our day. We live in a day that likes “sharing,” inspirational talks and stories, skits, and special music. Speakers (not preachers, ick) are encouraged to be something of a blend of a stand-up comic, Ted-talk lecturer, and empathetic therapist. Even a church with a higher view of preaching (like ours) needs to recover a biblical view of the pulpit, lest we simply consider this time a lecture from a Bible teacher.

The Call of the Preacher (2 Tim 3:16-4:5) – In this letter to Timothy, Paul reminds him to stir up the gift of God which was in him (1:6), to not be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord (1:8), to hold fast the pattern of sound words which were being rejected (1:13), to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2:1), to commit to other faithful men these faithful teachings (2:2), to remind them of these things, charging them to stay on message (2:14). He warns Timothy of the perilous times which will soon come (3:1ff) and this all leads up to his climactic charge: Preach the Word (4:2).

We are generally familiar with 2 Tim 3:16 as the verse where Paul says that all Scripture is inspired. But that is not his main point. He is addressing the “*man of God*”, the preacher, who is assigned by God to preach the Word. And while it is true that the Word is profitable for all, his main point in vv16-17 is to declare that Word, all of it, sufficient to make Timothy complete. His life is to be an overflowing example, equipped by the Word and Spirit, to equip others. He is to avoid tickling itching ears. He is to preach when they want to hear and when they don’t. He is to preach the Lord’s agenda, not the felt needs of the seeker. *Keruxon*, “*preach*,” is to herald – to declare what you have been sent to declare by an authority you are under in submission and service. He is to be an instrument of God to convince, rebuke, and exhort. Why? Back to 3:16 – because the Word is efficacious. And the main emphasis here is the Word-preached.

The Power of the Preached Word – The “*man of God*” is to trust only in the Word of God as sufficient to instruct his flock in all righteousness. It brings life and sustains life (1 Pet 1:23, Deut 32:46-47). But this is not simply the Word read – it is the Word preached. In God’s economy, He intends to use fallible men preaching fallible messages from His infallible Word to perfectly accomplish His purposes.

Hearing the Voice of Christ – We have been talking about the corporate worship service on the Lord’s Day, something which the writer of Hebrews describes as an encounter with God in the heavenlies (Heb 12:22-24). He continues, “*See that you do not refuse Him who speaks*” (v25). Hearing is something more than listening when a sermon is preached. Hearing is not passive, for this hearing produces faith (Rom 10:14-17). And that hearing comes from the Word of God preached by Christ’s ambassadors.

Hearing Christ – Romans 10:14 does not actually contain the word, “*of*,” in the Greek. Other verses contain the same grammatical structure, but are not translated this way, for instance, in Rev 11:12 (they heard *of* a loud voice....) or John 10:8 (the sheep did not hear *of* them). Therefore, many argue, “*of*” should not be in verse 14. Paul is not saying that we must hear about Christ, but that we must hear Christ Himself. And this is what Jesus taught as well (John 5:24-25; 10:2-3, 16, 27; 18:37)

When Do We Hear Christ? – Jesus taught that when they heard His commissioned disciples, they heard Him (Luke 10:16) and when they received these preachers, they received Christ (Matt 10:40). Jesus closely identifies himself with His faithful servants. Paul understands this to be the case in his preaching as well (Gal 4:13-14, Eph 4:21, 1 Thess 2:13).

The Sermon and the Word of God – We are not saying that these two are identical. We are not giving the gift of prophecy to the preacher. We must always examine what is heard, measured against the scripture, for which the Bereans were commended (Acts 17:10-11). Nevertheless, when the Word is faithfully preached (and not simply read), the voice of Christ is heard.

Preaching Like a Sledgehammer (Jer 23:28-29) – Modern man thinks the problem in the pulpit is that we need to make God acceptable to man. But the truth is actually quite the opposite. The point of preaching is never to make Christ acceptable. The point is to make sinful man acceptable to God. You cannot break up concrete with feather dusters. Preaching hard words produces soft hearts, breaking down the walls of unbelief, stubborn pride and stiff-necked rebellion. The concrete hearts do not need to be caressed; they need to be offended. If you want a tender heart, you have to call for the sledgehammer. Preaching is not supposed to tickle itching ears with soft words. In his book, *“The Church Impotent,”* Leon Podles wrote, *“The Protestant clergy will be a characteristically female occupation within a generation.”* With all kinds of scripture twisting, much of the evangelical church has determined that women can be preachers (1 Tim 2:12 clearly prohibits this). But the problem is worse because the kind of preaching that our modern ears want is the kind of preaching that women (and soft men) can do far better. Consuming fires and sledgehammers left the pulpits a long time ago, and soft words have made harder and harder hearts. And so, we pray for a reformation of preaching.

Trembling in our Voice – This gives no room for arrogance or pride for the preacher. Rightly understood, it humbles him and leaves him with no expectation for spiritual birth or nurture to occur outside of the work of God in his preaching (and sometimes in spite of it). On behalf of Christ he will proclaim, *“be reconciled with God!”* (2 Cor 5:20). He must preach with faith in God Who has delegated this authority to him, and this should leave him in some manner trembling.

Our Approach to Mt. Zion – And for those who assemble at this mount on the Lord’s Day in order to hear the Word and the voice of Christ, you must come to this service of worship with greater expectancy, preparation, and trembling as well. You have a solemn obligation to sit under the preaching of the Word, with one eye on the text, and hearts ready to receive. Christ will have His way with you. And it is a good way.

Dave Hatcher – May 9, 2021