

**Turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 4. This morning we come to both a familiar passage as well as a familiar practice. As we look at those things which the Lord has commanded to be done in worship we come now to the most prominent and most important element of worship, the preaching of the Word. So hear now the Word of our Lord in 2 Timothy chapter 4 beginning at verse 1.**

**\*Read 2 Timothy 4:1-4\***

**\*Pray\***

**One of the hallmarks of the Protestant Reformation was the recovery of the Word of God given to the people. Until this period the Scriptures were only translated into Latin which only the clergy could read. This also meant that the services of the church were all conducted in Latin. They did not have translators like we have here for Spanish. If you did not know Latin, which virtually no one did know, you would not understand what was happening during worship. This turned the worship of God into mere formalism. Then at the Reformation the Bible was being translated into the language of the people and church services were being conducted in the common language. No longer was worship mere formalism, it was true heartfelt devotion. And at the center of all of this was the Word of God. Even the architecture of the buildings reflected this. In the papist churches the altar upon which the blasphemous mass was offered was the focal point, being front and center of the building. When the Reformation began to take hold the buildings began to change along with the theology. The altar was removed and replaced with the pulpit. The proclamation of the Word of God was recognized to be the most important aspect of worship and should be the central focal point within the church. Yet if you were to look at many churches today you would see that pulpits are off to one side and a table like the papist altar is placed front and center. In most broad evangelical churches the pulpit has been removed altogether and replaced with a music stand or tiny lectern or even just a small table. In many of these church the preaching of the**

**Word is nonexistent. It's been replaced by motivation speeches or religious TED Talks that tend to last only about 15 to 20 minutes and are designed to make you feel good. This diminishing of the importance of preaching has infected Reformed churches as well. I remember being at a church once that replaced the sermon one week with a time for people to give their testimonies. I know of one Presbyterian church that had their two pastors sit down at a table and have a conversational style of teaching instead of a sermon. Friends, this is a clear violation of what God has prescribed in His Word and makes a mockery of what preaching is. This morning we will consider this vital element of worship by considering the theme that preaching is the proclamation of the Word of God to His people by His minister. We will consider this under three heads: first, the power of preaching; next, the parts of preaching; and finally, the purpose of preaching.**

**In order to rightly understand what preaching is we must understand the power of it. Look with me in verse 1 and the beginning of verse 2, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word." The power of preaching does not come from the man who is proclaiming the Word, but from the Word that is being proclaimed. This is something that is missing in many churches, even Reformed churches, today. There's this notion that if a church has a brilliant man who is a great public speaker then he will be able to deliver powerful messages. Friends, this is absurd. This is nothing more than trusting in the wisdom of man, the cunning of man, the power of man to bring forth power in preaching. I see all the time videos posted and shared of men standing before a congregation in their designer clothes and \$2,000 shoes and they're giving this impassioned motivational talk that oftentimes has absolutely nothing to do with the God of the Bible. Very often these same men stand there and in their cunning and smooth-talking ways spout off some of the grossest heresies ever thought of. And people are eating it up. That's why you have one prominent mega-church pastor who**

**has a net worth of \$55 million. Brothers and sisters, hear me clearly when I say this, that is not a pastor, it's a charlatan. It doesn't matter who is standing before you, how well-dressed they are, how eloquently spoken they are, if they are are not proclaiming the Word of God with the authority of thus saith the Lord then they are a fraud and a mockery to the ministry.**

**Is this how we see preaching in the Bible? What does the Apostle Paul say about his preaching in 1 Corinthians 2:4-5? "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." This is where the power is preaching comes from. It is in the Holy Spirit operating through the preaching of the Word that power is demonstrated. The sure-fire way to guarantee that the people of God are not fed with the rich food of the Word is by having men in the pulpit who's only desire is to make a name for themselves. That is why they use enticing words. That is why they they speak in their own wisdom. It is not so that God may get the glory. It is not so that Christ Jesus would be magnified. It is so that they can look great in the eyes of the people and their name can be made known. How wicked this is. If this type of thing is ever seen here in this congregation I plead with you to call it out. When I was ordained to be the pastor here I made a vow before God that it is the call of Christ, the glory of God and the welfare of the church, and not any selfish object, that moves me to undertake this sacred office. If at any point you believe as though this is not the case then it is your sacred duty to bring those concerns to either the session or the presbytery so that this congregation would not be hurt by my selfishness. My prayer, and the prayer of anyone who enters the pulpit and preaches the Word of God, must be the same as the words of John the baptist in John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease."**

**This brings up another important aspect of the power of preaching. If the power is not from the man who preaches but from**

**the Spirit of God operating through the preached Word, then it necessarily follows that what must be preached is the Word of God. This is Paul's command to Timothy, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word." No man has the authority to stand in the pulpit and preach from a mere human text. This is well understood, and thankfully I don't know of any churches where this has been an issue. But there's a way in which preaching from the Bible can be done but the Word not be preached. So often men will use a passage to simply springboard into a talk about some hobby-horse of theirs that has nothing to do with what the passage is actually saying. Matthew Henry says, "It is not their own notions and fancies that they are to preach, but the pure plain word of God; and they must not corrupt it, but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, they speak in Christ." To do otherwise is just a roundabout way of peaching man's wisdom and not the Word of God. Nothing I can say in my own strength or wisdom is of any value to you, but only that which is according to the Word of God. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward." So as you are sitting there you must be listening to see whether the point of the passage is the point of the sermon. If not, it may be nice, it may be eloquent, it may be enticing, but it is not powerful. It is only the Spirit operating through the Word that is the power of preaching.**

**So understanding this is the power of preaching, then what exactly is preaching? In order to answer this we must consider the parts of preaching. Look with me at verse 2, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long**

suffering and doctrine.” To reprove means to convict and correct. Preaching must convict men of their sins and show them their need for a Savior. Oftentimes this is done very overtly, calling out particular sins, calling upon the congregation to examine their hearts to see what sins are there, and then carefully drawing them to Christ Jesus who washes away the sins of the world. This is how the Spirit draws men unto salvation. William Perkins writes, “Let the gospel be preached in such a way that the Holy Spirit effectually works salvation. For in renewing men so that they may begin to will and to do what is pleasing to God, the Spirit really and truly produces in them godly sorrow and repentance to salvation.” This is what we mean when we confess that the Word of God is an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation. But the other side of reproof is correction. The preaching of the Word shows us where we are wrong. It shows us the foolishness of our actions. And after showing us where we are wrong and the foolishness of our actions, it calls us to walk in obedience to the will of God. Preaching must apply doctrine in a way that transforms lives marked by ungodliness and unrighteousness.

Preaching also includes rebuke. To rebuke is to warn and to censure. The preaching of the Word warns the people of God of the dangers of false doctrine and heresies. It drives away the wolves from the folds of the Lord. There is a reason, when appropriate, I bring up false teachers and false doctrines. It is not so that I can look smart for knowing about these things, but to warn you of the dangers of them because they are beginning to make inroads into the church. If you are not instructed and warned about these false teachings then you are in danger of falling prey to those wolves who are seeking to snatch the lambs out of the pasture. Perkins says that the preaching of the Word is “the weapon which has shaken the foundations of ancient heresies, and also, more recently cut to pieces the sinews of the Antichrist.” This weapon must continue to be wielded because the evil one continues to make his attacks. And the other side of rebuke is censure. The sins of the people must be

**spoken against. This is what Paul does when he instructs the Corinthian church concerning the sexually immoral man in 1 Corinthians 5 when he says they are to “deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” This is a censure of the church which is used as a warning to the rest of the congregation as well. This is why church censures ought to be made known publicly, so as to protect the rest of the flock from following down the same path of perdition.**

**And lastly Paul says that preaching includes exhortation, which is the instruction and convincing of the people of what God’s Word says. How can we know how to live a life pleasing to God? Because Scripture tells us. How do we know how to grow more and more in Christ? Because the Scripture tells us. The Word must be applied in such a way as to live well in whatever context the Lord has placed you, whether it be in the context of family or work or the church or the state. Exhortation is the application of the study of the pastor to the people of God, calling men to faith, calling them to a greater love and obedience to God. Christ Himself is the example of one who by His preaching exhorts. Christ Jesus taught publicly in His ministry, both in the temple and in the public places. Wherever people were gathered, He was ready with an exhortation to them. Paul tells Timothy that this must be part of his preaching. This is the minister of the Word proclaiming with a prophetic voice and the authority of thus saith the Lord. It is through exhortation that the doctrines of the church are made plain and the people of God are called to embrace those truths as their own. This is one the primary purposes of this very sermon series, to exhort the saints.**

**And so, dear congregation, there is a responsibility laid upon you in this. You are not passive during the preaching of the Word but you are to active in the hearing of it. This is why the Westminster Confession of Faith lists the conscionable hearing of the Word as an element of worship. You are to be just as active in this portion of the worship service as the pastor is. Our Directory for Public Worship says, “The worshipers participate in the preaching**

**of the Word as they listen with ‘diligence, preparation, and prayer, receive it with faith and love, lay it up in [their] hearts, and practice it in [their] lives.’” How are you approaching the preaching of the Word? Do you come with a ready and open ear, waiting patiently on the Lord to reprove, rebuke, and exhort you? Or do you sit there and nod off or draw on your bulletin or let your mind wander to some other thing? Dear saints, you have a duty, a requirement, to be active in your hearing this Word preached and to received it with joy as the very Word of God. The Larger Catechism in answer 160 says, “It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the Scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.” You must give your attention to the parts of worship.**

**Now lastly, what is the purpose of preaching? Here in our passage Paul gives one of the purposes of preaching in verses 3 and 4, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” He is saying that in preaching the minister counters those teachers who do not preach the truth but preach fables. There are those who get up each Lord’s Day morning and stand before a congregation and tickle their ears, spouting off only what the people want to hear. Never once is there reproof, rebuke, or exhortation. These men have taken Paul’s command for longsuffering to an absurd conclusion. They are not being patient with those who are weak in the faith or those who are struggling with things, they are capitulating to the ever changing culture and just saying what they know will not offend anyone. Friends, the Gospel offends. Ministers should not seek to intentionally offend people, but if you are not offended by your sin when confronted with it by the preaching of the Word then either your heart is hardened or I have failed in my sacred duty.**

Another purpose, and perhaps the primary purpose, of preaching is to declare what God has to say for His people. We do not believe in the continuation of the prophetic office in this New Covenant dispensation. We are not like the charismatics who claim that their men are prophets and receive divine revelation concerning the affairs of men. But that does not mean we do not believe in a prophetic function within the church today. The prophets of old had a two-fold function: first, foretelling; and second, forth-telling. Foretelling is the inspired uttering of events yet to take place such as the prophecies of Daniel and Isaiah and John in Revelation. This is no more in the church. But the function of forth-telling is still alive and well. The minister is given this gift and sacred duty when he is set apart to the sacred office. He does not give utterance of things yet to come, but speaks forth the inspired Word of God already revealed in the Scriptures. This is what is meant when we say the minister speaks with the authority of thus saith the Lord. This is why the church confesses that the faithful preaching of the Word of God is to be received as the very Word of God. Ministers are God's mouthpiece in the world. We are His ambassadors among the people. This is why Paul can say in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." This is why Williams Perkins' book on preaching is entitled *The Art of Prophecy*, because when the Word of God is preached Jehovah speaks to His people.

The last purpose of preaching I want to touch on today is that preaching is shepherding. If a minister's preaching is not shepherding the flock then he is not preaching. Congregations are not herds of cattle; they are flocks of sheep. Christ calls elders and pastors to be shepherds. Cattle have to be poked and prodded, forced to go in the direction that the herdsman wants them to go. Cattle have to be driven with whips and commands. They have be lorded over. But the same is not true of sheep. The shepherd stands in the midst of the flock and lovingly tends for his sheep. There is no prod or whip in the shepherd's hand, but a rod and a staff which is



used to both guide along the paths as well as to correct when needed. This is what preaching ought to do, guide the flock along the paths of righteousness and correct error when it is needed. The Apostle Peter uses this imagery when speaking of the elders in the local church in 1 Peter 5:1-3, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.” And just as the sheep have the responsibility to hear the voice of the shepherd and heed his directions, so too do you have this responsibility as well. “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.” Unless your hearing of the Word is mixed with faith and is brought to bear in your life then you will not profit from it. Remember, it is not the voice of man, it is not the voice of Joshua Smith, it is not the voice of anyone else that is to be heard in the preaching, but the voice of the Good Shepherd Christ Jesus Himself, who must be heard and obeyed.

Brothers and sisters, this Gospel ordinance, this element of worship ought to be of the utmost importance in the life of the church. It is the preaching of the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation as Romans 1:16 tells us. It is the Spirit operating through the Word preached that makes it an effectual means of grace. It is in the preaching of the Word that you are fed you daily bread and are made perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says. And it is the preaching of the Word in which the sheep hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and led in paths of righteousness for His namesake, Psalm 23. So what is preaching? Preaching is the proclamation of the Word of God to His people by His minister.