

Christians, Preach the Word!

- I. Consider the Source of the Word
- II. Appreciate the Power of the Word.
- III. Remember the Purpose for the Word

¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God^[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

***4** In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ²Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³For 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. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

Just for a minute, I want you to imagine that you've just moved to Appleton and you're looking for a church to join. What would you look for in your new church? What qualities, maybe even amenities, would you want your new church to have? Would you say, "Well, I'd want a church where the people are friendly and they make me feel welcome and the pastor remembers my name?" Or would you say, "I want a church that is something for my children, and if that includes a Lutheran elementary school, so much the better." Or maybe it's, "I want a church that offers the style of worship that I like or I want a preacher who talks about topics that are on people's minds today." Or "I want a church that's having an impact on the community, feeding the hungry or helping out the poor". Or maybe you say, "As long as the church has plenty of parking, no stairs to climb, comfortable seating, coffee in the winter and air conditioning in the summer, that's all I need in a church."

Now, it's certainly not wrong to take these things into consideration when evaluating a particular congregation. But I wonder if that's the kind of scorecard that God would use if he were evaluating a congregation. I mean, those are things that we might be looking for in a church. But is that what God is looking for in church? If God were to pick one thing that he would want to see in a Christian congregation, the one thing he would want his church to prioritize over everything else, what do you think it would be? Or to put it another way, when it comes to God's agenda for the Christian church, what's number one on his list?

In our text for today, the Apostle Paul answers that question. The words that he wrote to his son in the faith, Timothy, still apply to each one of us and to the congregation we belong to.

In 2 Timothy 4, Paul writes, *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word.* (2 Timothy 4:1-2) There's God's agenda for his church:

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Why? Why is that so important for Christians to preach the Word?? Paul outlines 3 reasons here in our text. He says,

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Here in our text, Paul explains to Timothy and really to all of us, why we need to faithfully share the Word of God. Paul writes, *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.* (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Do you think those words are being fulfilled today? You think of how many people today gravitate toward churches, or political or cultural leaders, that tell them what they want to hear, whether it's the idea that all human beings are basically good, or that God just wants you to be happy or it doesn't matter what lifestyle you choose to follow. So often, humans create religions based on what they think or what they want— whether it's the idea that everybody will go to a better place when they die, or the idea that truth is something we need to decide for ourselves, or the idea that God used evolution to bring the world into existence. Everywhere you turn, you find people who are ready to believe and promote just about anything. Or as someone once said, when people turn away from God and his Word, it's not that they suddenly believe in nothing. Rather, when people turn away from God and His Word, they start believing in anything. Isn't that right? Whether it's astrology or Karma or Fate or science, people are putting their faith in a lot of things which in the end, are leading them astray. Or St Paul wrote in the verses immediately preceding are text, *Evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.* (2 Timothy 3:13)

Well, it's against that backdrop of false beliefs that Paul offers this advice to his son Timothy, *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you have learned it.* (2 Timothy 3:14) Earlier in this letter, Paul referred to the faith of Timothy's mother, Eunice, and grandmother Lois. Undoubtedly, those two women had shared with Timothy the truths of God Word, even as a child. In fact, Paul reminds Timothy, *from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures.* (2 Timothy 15)

I wonder if the same thing could be said about you? Was a children's Bible one of your favorite books growing up? Maybe your mother or grandmother read you the stories of David and Goliath or Noah and the Ark or Jesus feeding the 5,000. If you've been blessed to know the holy Scriptures from the time you were a child, well then, praise God, not only for what you learned, but also from whom you learned it.

But now someone might ask, “But what makes the Bible so special? I mean, there are a lot of religious writings out there. What makes the Bible different than the Quran of the Muslim faith for The Vedas of Hinduism?” Well, Paul says, first of all, I. Consider the Source of the Word.

How does Paul put it? *All Scripture is God-breathed.*

Theologians refer to that as Verbal Inspiration. The fact that God inspired, that is, he breathed into the prophets and apostles the very verbs, the very words they were to write. You realize

what that means? It means that the words of the Bible did not originate in the minds of human beings. They originated in the mind of God. How did St. Peter put it? *Prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:21)*

That means that even though Paul had a little different writing style than John had, and even though Isaiah used different words than Luke did, the fact is, all their books had the same author. The entire Bible came from the same source. Or as Paul puts it, *all Scripture is God-breathed.*

If you think about it, isn't that why it's so important for the church, yes you and I as Christians, to preach the Word? What the world really needs to hear is not what you or I think or what he or she wants but rather, what God clearly says. If you and I are going to have the impact on this world as God intends, if we're going to be light shining in a dark place, then we have to be willing to tell people what God wants them to hear, not in an arrogant or better-than-thou attitude, but rather, as Paul says, *with great patience and careful instruction.* Or, as Paul put it, *Be prepared in season and out of season. (2 Timothy 4:2).* In other words, be prepared to share the Word, when it's convenient, and when it's not.

But now someone might ask, "Why would a share the Word with people who don't even believe it? That brings us to the second thing we need to consider as we uncover God's agenda for his church. We need to: (II.) Appreciate the Power of the Word.

Doesn't Saint Paul allude to that power of the Word here in our text? What does Paul write to Timothy? *From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:15)* In other words, the Scriptures, the written Words of God, have the ability, they have the power, to make a person wise. Now there are a lot of books that can give a person earthly wisdom, you know, helping you learn how to manage your money, repair your car or win friends and influence people. But there's only one book that can give a person the kind of wisdom that results in eternal salvation, only one book that creates faith in the true God.

Or to put in another way, the Bible not only communicates the facts about Jesus, the savior of the world. It also works in people's hearts the faith to believe in Jesus as their personal savior from sin. How does Paul put it in Romans 10:17? *Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.* More specifically, it comes from hearing the message of the Gospel, the good news that Jesus, the perfect lamb of sacrifice, has given his life to take away the sins of the world. The good news that Jesus didn't wait for you to come to him. He came for you first. He made you and me right with God by his blood and righteousness. And that good news not only gives you something to believe, it gives you the ability to believe it. That my friends, is a miracle. God the Holy Spirit uses his Word to work saving faith in the hearts of unbelievers.

You might say, that's the second reason that the church is committed to preaching the Word of God. Because we know the impact that God's Word has on human hearts and lives. As evidence of that, just look at the number of people who we are welcoming into membership in this family of believers called Mount Olive Lutheran Church this weekend. 45 different people, who have come to believe in Jesus through the power of God's Word. People who now want to continue to be fed by that Word and help share it with others.

But now someone might raise one last objection. They might say, "Well, if everybody at Mount Olive is already a believer, if in that sense, the Word has already done its work, then why do we have to keep preaching the Word?" I'll give you three reasons. First, because our audience

is not just sitting here in church. Who knows who's hearing the words from my lips today or from your lips throughout the week? Are there people listening to us who still have doubts about how God feels about them? Or what Jesus has done for them? Or how God's Word applies to their lives? All around us there are people who are spiritually lost and need to be found. Both publicly and privately, we must keep preaching the Word, which has the power to make people wise for salvation.

Secondly, we need to remember that even for believers, faith is something that is fragile. Satan is constantly beating on our faith to break it down and to lead us to doubt God's promises. That's why even believers need to continue to hear the promises God makes them in his Word, to give us something to hang on to when it seems like nothing else in our world is making any sense.

And number three, even though the number one purpose of preaching the Word is to lead people to faith in Jesus, the fact is, that's not the only purpose for the Word. Let's (III.) Remember that there's another purpose for the Word. The Apostle Paul's speaks of that purpose here in our text. In fact, he speaks of a number of purposes for the Word. Let's take them one at a time. Paul writes, *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching*. Isn't that the truth? There is so much we can learn from the Bible. How did this world get here? How does marriage work? What good is our government? What happens when a person dies? The Bible teaches us not only how to get to the afterlife. It also teaches us about how to live in the present life. Secondly, God's Word is useful *for rebuking*. In other words, God's Word, or more specifically, the moral law contained in God's Word, establishes an absolute truth, a moral standard, against which all human behavior can be judged. If a person's behavior or beliefs go contrary to God's written code, then God's Word exposes them as wrong. God's Word rebukes those errors.

But God's Word not only points out wrong thinking and doing; it also points out the right way to think an act. Paul says that God's Word is useful *for correcting*, that is, getting people on the right path. And, God's Word is useful *for training in righteousness*. Paul is talking about how the Scriptures, both law and gospel, serve to disciple us, not only to show us what to do, but to give us a reason to do it. All to what end? Paul writes, *so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*. In other words, in the pages of his inspired, inerrant, his holy Word, God gives you and me everything we need to carry out the good works that God has already lined up for us to do, no matter what our station in life.

If you think about it, what greater calling could any church body have, what greater calling could this congregation have, what greater calling could you and I have, than to take the very words of God, which have the power to work saving faith in human hearts, and the power to equip people for life in time and in eternity, and then cling to that Word for all we're worth, and share it with those who desperately need to hear it. For you see, that's God's Agenda...Uncovered. Christians, Preach the Word! In Jesus' name. Amen.