



## EXPOSITORY PREACHING

SERIES: HOW WE FUNCTION – FOUR KEY VALUES

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2 Timothy 3:14-4:4  
Third Message  
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We come now to the third of four key values, Expository Preaching, in this short series covering how we function as a church. It's a little ironic that we're utilizing a topical series to say why we don't preach topically! My desire is not to speak on what expository preaching is, but to give some insight as to why we preach that way.

I will begin by giving a definition of expository preaching that has had a profound effect on the way I preach. Of all the definitions I have read, this is the one that has touched me the most. It was written by John Stott, one of the most gifted of expositors. He said: "Biblical exposition is communicating the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and his people obey Him."

The Scriptures are central to everything we do here at PBCC. The sermon is the pivotal element in our gathering on Sunday. Ray Stedman used to call this principle "the big burner concept." That which is preached from the pulpit keeps the fire going under everything else. The pulpit is the primary means by which the saints are equipped. We believe in the power of expository preaching! And what makes it expository preaching is not so much that it is preaching from the Bible as it is preaching the Bible itself. It is preaching that derives its content from the Scripture directly. It is an exposition of a text (drawing out what is there) rather than an imposition (making a text say what the speaker wants it to say).

Our text is from the 2 Timothy. These are the apostle Paul's last recorded words, written perhaps weeks or even days before his martyrdom. Someone has said, "last words are lasting words." That is certainly true in this case. In the middle of chapter 3, the apostle has just unfolded for Timothy the character of the age in which he is to minister. It's an age of religious apostasy and moral defection, one in which people are described as "lovers of self...rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim 3:2, 4). In the midst of these difficult circumstances, Paul exhorts Timothy to remain faithful:

**You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in**

**righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.**

**I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 3:14-4:4 NASB)**

Our conviction of the value of expository preaching comes from a number of basic convictions about the nature of the Bible itself. Here Paul says two things about Scripture. First:

### All Scripture is from God

"All Scripture is inspired by God" (3:16). Although we commonly refer to the inspiration of Scripture, the original thought behind this word is actually the opposite of its meaning. Inspiration means "to breathe in"; the Greek word translated inspired actually means "to breathe out." It would be more accurate to say expiration rather than inspiration. The NIV translation accurately reads, "All Scripture is God-breathed." It is expired by God, i.e. it is from God himself. Paul is telling Timothy that the Bible comes from God. God is its ultimate author; therefore it carries the weight of all that he is.

The Bible is not inspired like a composition by Handel or a painting by Picasso. It is inspired as "God-breathed." Other passages of Scripture indicate that this process of inspiration did not destroy the individuality of the human writers; they retained their distinct personalities. But this passage says that all Scripture originated from God's mouth, by God's breath or God's Spirit. Thus it is accurate to call it the word of God. So Paul could write to the Thessalonians: "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe" (1 Thess 2:13).

That bold pronouncement is a statement of authority about the writings of the apostles. These words are indeed the writings of men. God used the language of

men, the grammar, syntax and vocabulary of men. Paul wrote out of his own rabbinic background. And yet he says that what he wrote on the page was indeed the word of God. The other apostles believed that too. Peter and John both believed that their words were the word of God. Throughout history, God has always communicated through human beings who look, talk, and behave just like you and me.

The Scriptures are new for some of you. You are either a brand new believer, or maybe you are in the process of becoming a Christian, and you are still trying to understand how all the pieces fit. The notion that God's word is revealed through man's word may be difficult to grasp. Moses was the first of a long list of prophets to whom God spoke. To use the Hebrew idiom, God spoke "mouth-to-mouth" with Moses, face-to-face, in direct revelation. From Moses Israel derived the first five books of the Bible (originally these probably were one book, perhaps written on different scrolls): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. When Israel entered Canaan (in the middle of the 15th century B.C.), the question on their minds was: How will we know when the next prophet comes, as Moses is about to die? How will we discern God's voice from the plethora of pagan voices around us? The Canaanites, the Syrians, everyone had their own prophets. How would the Israelites discern the voice of God?

So God gave them three tests of a prophet: 1) He must be a Jew; 2) God would speak to him face-to-face (through direct revelation, not divination); 3) The prophet must predict the future with 100% accuracy. That was the bottom-line test. Prophets were mostly preachers who proclaimed the will of God. But one of the ways to know whether they were speaking for God or for themselves or some other source was if their predictions came true. So in every case a prophet would give a short-range prophecy by which his proclamations could be tested. If these came true, then he was a prophet of God. If not, Moses said not to be afraid or in awe of him.

From that point on a number of prophets arose in Israel: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, men who communicated the word of God in the languages of men. Their predictions authenticated their proclamations. Then about the 5th century B.C. that process came to an end. God no longer spoke through prophets. God was silent for about 400 years. The Old Testament was there for the reading, it was God's word for that time, but he did not speak any longer until he spoke in his Son.

God's final revelation was through his Son Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews begins his letter with these words: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb 1:1-2a). That is the Lord Jesus Christ. And then our Lord passed on his authority to the twelve disciples whom he commissioned as apostles. Jesus said to them on his last night on earth: "All this I have spoken

while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:25-26). "Teach you all things": this is the apostolic warrant for writing all their letters. "Remind you of everything I have said to you": this is the apostolic warrant for the writing of the gospels. That is why the apostles remembered in such fine detail the things that Jesus said and did: the Holy Spirit brought it to their memory.

All of this is simply to say that the apostles had the same authority as the Old Testament prophets. When they spoke, they spoke with the authority of God, specifically with the authority of Jesus Christ. Here I have to say that I'm a little uncomfortable with what we call red-letter Bibles. Reading those words printed in red ink can give the impression that the words of Jesus are more important than the rest of the text. But Paul would have us know from this passage that his own writings came with the same authority as the words of Jesus.

That is our first conviction: All Scripture is from God.

Our second conviction is:

### **All Scripture is profitable**

Explaining the purpose of Scripture, Paul says it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Scripture is profitable because it is God-breathed. Its divine origin explains its human profit. This is expressed in a couple of ways in this passage. Paul calls the Scriptures the "sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The Bible is the handbook of salvation. Its effect is to save us, to transform us. Its primary purpose is not found in science, or even history, but in redemption.

The whole Bible is an unfolding of God's plan of redemption: man's creation in God's image; his fall into sin; God's continuing love for him in spite of his rebellion; his eternal plan to save man through his covenant of grace with a chosen people, and the culmination of that plan in Christ. None of this would be known apart from revelation. Since the Bible is a book of salvation, and since salvation is through Christ, the Bible focuses its attention on Christ.

John Stott writes:

The Old Testament foretells and foreshadows him in many and various ways; the gospels tell the story of his birth and life, his words and work, his death and resurrection; the Acts describe what he continued to do and teach through his chosen apostles...the Epistles display the full glory of his person and work, and apply it to the life of the Christian and the church; while Revelation depicts Christ sharing the throne of God now and coming soon to consummate his salvation and judgment. This comprehensive portraiture of Jesus Christ is intended to elicit our "faith" in him,

in order that by faith we may be saved.<sup>1</sup>

That is the beauty of the Scriptures. In the Bible you will find a Person who will become more real to you than the book itself. It's a Savior that saves, not a book. And the Jesus who saves us is the Jesus who is revealed only in the Bible.

Many people read the Bible and never feel its impact. Scholars spend their entire lives studying it and never knowing its transforming power. That has always been true. Jesus told the scholars of his day: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). The purpose of reading and studying the Scriptures is not merely to grasp the truth, but that the truth might grasp you.

Isaiah uses a different analogy. He likens the word to rain: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa 55:10-11 NIV).

God's word is powerful. It will not return void. It changes your life. When you first begin to read the Bible, you realize that God loves you very much. You would not know that apart from revelation. That is the first thing that attracted me to this book. The more I read the gospels, the more I couldn't put it down. God cares for us so much so that he became one of us. You wouldn't guess from this world, but he does. That is what the incarnation is all about: God is with us; God manifest in the flesh.

Then God died for us. We would not understand the cross unless God had explained it to us. And once we understand God's love for us through the word, and respond to it and receive it by faith, God actually comes to live inside of us through the person of the Holy Spirit. He begins to change us. He creates in us a hunger to know the truth. He opens our eyes to understand truth, and the Bible changes us. The word, working in our life through the power of the Holy Spirit, begins to change us little by little.

Because of those two convictions, that all Scripture is from God and that all Scripture is profitable, Paul's exhorts Timothy to preach the word: "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word" (4:1-2a). Because God has spoken, and it is his word that is profitable, his word that changes lives, his word that won't return void, Timothy and every other pastor is preach that word. Paul always viewed the Scriptures as something that had been "entrusted" to him. They were a sacred, precious deposit of truth which he was responsible to communicate and distribute to people. He told the

Corinthians: "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1).

Paul saw his responsibility as that of a steward. In that day, a steward was a manager of an estate. We might think of a steward as a housekeeper or butler, one who rummages through the pantry and serves food and wine for the family meals, similar to a steward or stewardess on an airplane who is entrusted with certain commodities which they are responsible to dispense. Paul says it's the job of elders and pastor-teachers to delve into the pantry of God himself and bring out the goodies of his word on which others can feed. That is my job as a pastor.

We have been entrusted with valuable commodities, what Paul calls in Corinthians the "mysteries of God," that deposit of truth that contains the secrets of life. These are the truths about life, about God, about ourselves. Ray Stedman used to call these the "lost secrets of humanity." The Bible contains the answers to the questions that plague us: How do we deal with our guilt? How do we heal a hurting marriage? How can we be reconciled with a brother or sister when the relationship is disrupted? How can we find meaning and purpose in life? What do we do when our heart is breaking? Those are the secrets that have been lost. They are mysteries, because they are undiscoverable by observation.

But God has revealed them to the apostles, who through the process of illumination and inspiration, spoke and wrote of those mysteries. They are recorded in the Bible. They are available to be revealed by the Spirit to those who love God. That's how we understand what life is all about. That is how we can face difficult times and not collapse. That is how we discover a resource for living when everything else is taken away from us.

That is our message. We have no other. We don't have any wisdom that will help you live your life or bring hope to your troubled marriage. But God does! Our job is not to make up sermons. Our responsibility as pastors is to simply say again what the apostles have already said. That is why the exposition of the Scriptures is such a powerful means of changing hearts – because we are simply saying again what the apostles have said. We don't have any authority to command you to change something. We can't control your life and demand that you behave in certain ways. All we can do is exhort you as brothers, and encourage you to listen to the apostles and what they have to say. That is why God has gifted men and women with the gift of teaching, a supernatural ability to teach the Scriptures with clarity and accuracy.

It's not an easy task. Remember what John Stott said: Biblical exposition is communicating the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and his people obey Him. Picture both rims of

the Grand Canyon. On one side is the Biblical world, on the other side is the contemporary world. A great gulf of two thousand years separates the two. The task of an expositor of the Scriptures is to bridge that gap between the ancient and the modern world, to be both biblical and contemporary; to understand both what they mean and what they say.

Unfortunately, most preaching does one or the other. Some preachers are faithful to the text, but their sermons are as dry as dust in their academic presentation of biblical truth. Other preachers are sensitive to the modern world. They read all the books, they know the people, they know how to communicate, they tell great stories, but unfortunately, they don't understand the Scriptures. People are entertained, but not equipped.

Rare is the person who combines both of those qualities: faithful to the Scriptures, and yet relevant. There is power evident when both of those are combined. That is when God's voice is heard. God still speaks through what he has spoken, and then God's people will obey him. That is the ultimate end. It's not information, but transformation. God's word is not meant to make us smart but to make us holy.

That is why it is our conviction here at PBCC to preach through entire books of the Bible, working our way through the texts Sunday after Sunday until the book is finished. We try to keep a balance between the New and Old Testaments. Because we have multiple preaching pastors, we are usually working through more than one book at a time.

Since for years now all our messages are printed, when a series is finally finished we have complete coverage of the biblical book available for private or group study. That is what drew me to this church. When I was in college and seminary I received those messages in the mail and they had a powerful effect on my life. These men knew the truth and knew how to communicate it effectively. I was amazed to discover that many of the men on staff did not have any formal theological training. I did, but they knew the Scriptures better than me.

That is the first mark of a Spirit-filled church. It is a biblical church. The pastors expound the Scriptures. The members read and reflect on the texts in order to grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord. The Spirit of God always leads the people of God to submit to the word of God.

There are a lot of things that make life worthwhile. But there are two things that we cannot do without. If we don't have them, we don't have anything. Those two essentials are: the presence of the indwelling Christ, and the word of God. We don't need a husband, a wife or children. We don't even need a job. We don't have to have good health. What we need is what we have: God and his word. That's why Paul told the Ephesian elders in his final farewell: "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

1. John R.W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 103.

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