

Matthew 4:23; 5:1-2

Preaching is Indispensable

If I were to ask you why you come to church what would you tell me? I hope that you love church. There are so many things to love. There is the fellowship of your small group, catching up with friends. The laughter, the fun times. Gathering together and having the strong sense that you are a part of something. Good music, singing familiar songs, learning new songs. The preacher preaching and encouraging you to love Jesus more. **All of these good things that we enjoy about church are really nothing apart from one thing - experiencing God.** You can go to a social club and visit friends, can go to a concert and hear some singing, sit and listen to a man speak, **but what sets church apart is that we have come here today to hear from God, and then worship.** We call what we are doing worship because everything in our worship service, from the songs that we sing, to the prayers we pray, to the sermon that is preached, is all designed to confront us with God and provide an opportunity for us to order our lives accordingly.

The highlight of what we do is when the man who has been set apart by God, the preacher, takes the Word of God, stands before the people of God, and speaks what God has revealed in his word to his people. Preaching is the reason we come to church. Notice that I did not say a preacher, but preaching. Some preachers are better than others but there is one thing that is more important than any preacher - preaching! No doubt there are better preachers than me, but no one preaches a better gospel than I preach!

Today as we begin to look at the Sermon on the Mount I want us to remember the reason that we are here, the reason that we come each week at Oxford. We come to hear a Word from God from God's Word. And how do we hear a Word from God from his Word? Preaching.

READ TEXT

Here is the point of the message today. Preaching is indispensable to the church. It is important for us to start here because there are some who are ready to dispense with preaching. Listen carefully to me. Just because a man stands behind a pulpit and opens a Bible and says a few things that sound real good does not mean that preaching has occurred.

Put a preacher who has lost his conviction of the indispensableness of preaching with a congregation who doesn't demand to hear the Word of God preached and you have a recipe for ruin. There are many pressures on preaching today and if the preacher (or the congregation) loses their nerve they are liable to collapse under the pressure of a world whose ways seem right to them but in the end their way is destruction. The Bible say that the world is full of unrighteous people whose throat is an open grave but yet some choose to hear the words of men over the Word of God. Sadly many would rather take cues from the world than from the Word. This is a self-defeating enterprise for the church.

I read an article the other day from the Washington Post with the headline: *Liberal Churches are Dying. But Conservative Churches are Thriving.* The article pointed to a seminal moment when just 20 years ago Bishop

John Shelby Spong of the Episcopalian Church published a book titled, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*. Spong said that congregations would grow if they abandoned their literal interpretation of the Bible to make the interpretation more fluid as time changed. But over the years guess what's happened. 2015 research showed that people were leaving Mainline Protestant churches by about 1 million members annually. While at the same time those churches that believe things like Jesus literally raising from the dead are growing.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/01/04/liberal-churches-are-dying-but-conservativechurches-are-thriving/?utm_term=.5fd3362dc32e

Where do you think that congregations get the idea that the Bible is either to be taken literally or ebbs and flows with the times? Such ideas come from the pulpit! "Preachers" preach a message that a congregation embraces. Either the congregation will embrace truth or error.

The world may think that preaching is foolish but God has chosen the foolish things in the world to shame the wise. Preaching is one of the ways that God shows that his wisdom is wiser than the wisdom of men. Here's a secret, a point that we need to remember, preaching was never meant to be glamorous. Preaching is an instrument that God uses to penetrate the darkened world with light, to bring a sweet smell of life to a world filled with rotteness and decay.

Today I want to give you three reasons why we should believe in preaching. 3 reasons why preaching is indispensable to the church.

1. God Has Spoken

We must remember Christianity's foundational confession. In a world full of voices there is one voice that is distinct, one voice that is greater than all others piercing through the veil of our sinfulness and calling us from darkness light. God has taken the initiative to make himself known. And he has spoken in the most straightforward way - giving us his Word. And in dramatic fashion he has called us who have heard his Word to tell it to the world his Word

The book of Hebrews opens in this way. Hebrews tells us that God spoke long ago through his prophets and in the last days he spoke through His Son. This Son is the same Son who was in the beginning speaking words and bringing the world into existence. The Father spoke through the Son and now the Spirit speaks through the Word to the world today.

God has spoken and since he has spoken we can't help but speak. Preachers are those who are called and commissioned to proclaim the truth of God into the world. Preachers are called to herald, to stand at the town center, and proclaim not their own message but a message of another. Preaching is proclaiming this message, preaching is proclaiming Him, proclaiming a message of life in a world deadened by sin.

This is why Jesus has come. Jesus has come with a message. As a matter of fact, the wonderful things about Jesus is that he hasn't just come with a message he is the message.

2. Jesus Preached

When you think about Jesus what is the first thing that comes to your mind? Maybe you think about what he wore or what he might have looked like. Maybe you think about a star filled manger scene or an old rugged cross sitting atop Calvary's hill. Maybe you think about Jesus going through the countryside and healing all those that were brought to him. All of those things are very important aspects to the ministry of Jesus, but today I want you to consider an aspect of Jesus that some may have overlooked. An aspect that is put before us in Matthew 5. While Jesus was on the earth he chose to make his ministry a ministry of proclamation. Jesus was a preacher. Have you ever considered Jesus as a preacher?

When we look at the life and ministry of Jesus there is one thing that is undeniable. Jesus tells us quite a bit about who he is and what he has come to do. One of the ways that he does this is by extended periods of teaching. If we look closely at Matthew's Gospel we will see Matthew dividing his gospel into 5 extended teachings of Jesus. These are called the 5 Discourses. First we have the Sermon on the Mount, 5-7. Second is the Mission Discourse in 10. Third is the Discourse of Parables in 13. Fourth is what some call the Discourse on the Church in 18. And finally, the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 23-25. All of these discourses can be viewed as Jesus telling us what it means to be a subject of his Kingdom.

Preaching was important to Jesus. I hope that preaching is important to you. How can it be important to me? I am not a preacher. There is one final reason that I want to share with you about why we shouldn't be dismissive to preaching. God has ordained preaching as a way for us to know him.

Number 3:

3. Through Preaching You Either Grow or are Hardened

The preacher is not the only one involved in preaching. We have gathered together today for one purpose - to hear the Word of the Lord. I as the preacher have been preparing all week for this moment, you have come ready to hear what God says. One of the ways we show this is through prayer. We give a prayer in the message for one reason - we are together desperate to hear from God.

I am confident that you didn't come here to hear a man but to meet with God as we encounter him through the preaching of his Word. There is nothing else like this event where we gather ourselves together in expectation and full of faithful expectation that God will speak to us through His Word. And when he speaks to us his Word will have an effect. Listen to the words of Isaiah 55:

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (verses 11-12, ESV) This means that the Word of the Lord will have an effect. What kind of effect will the Word have?

There was one preacher who knew what kind of effect the ministry of the Word would have, the Apostle Paul. Here is how he summed it up in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17:

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

You can either grow or be hardened. If you come week after week and hear the Word of the Lord faithfully preached and you are not seeing progress in your spiritual life then don't think that the Word is not having an effect on you. The effect may not be the effect that you desire but it is either saving you or hardening you, either a sweet smell of the life in Christ or the fragrance of death.

If preaching is so important and indispensable then don't you think that you should develop whatever it takes to listen? Listening to sermons is always difficult for the hard hearted but it is a matter of life and death. I am so encouraged as a preacher when I read Hebrews and see that he as a preacher knew there were people who would become dull of hearing. He says in 5:11, *About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing...* Paul warned the young preacher Timothy:

I 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, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

Since sermons are so important and since we have such an important task set before us I want to give you 9 easy to get the most out of preaching:

How to Listen to a Sermon

9 Ways to get the most out of preaching *He who has ears to hear, let him hear. (Matthew 11:15 ESV)*

Come Humbly

- God has a Word for you. Come quick to hear and slow to speak. Come to recognize and worship the majesty of God.

Come Thirsty

- Be convinced that this is the best place for you to be. Saturate your mind with Scripture before hand. Receive the Worship guide before the Sermon and pray over the passage and the worship service.

Come Clean

- Are you passionately pursuing God? Would your time tell the story of one who is pursuing God, or are you pursuing vanity? Repent of any unconfessed sins and present yourselves to God as a living sacrifice.

Come Loaded

- Worship is an experience with God. Trust the Truth that you already have and come ready to receive more.

Come Fresh

- Get a good nights sleep the night before.

Come Teachable

- Don't be overly critical. You are here to listen, here to receive.

Come Undistracted

- Set your mind on your expectant hope

Come Without Settling

- Test each word and listen to hear Christ proclaimed. If you disagree see if you disagree with the preacher or with the Word. If you disagree with the Word then take that thought captive and make it obey Christ.

Come Expectant

- God is ready to speak to you, are you ready to listen? Don't desire to leave without hearing from God. Take notes, interact with the text and with the preacher.

Preaching is indispensable. Are you listening? Maybe you need ears to hear. Ears to hear words of life done by faith. You need to be a Christian.