

Preaching In A 21st Century Context

(A Pastoral Manifesto)

Introduction: 1) Last words are meant to be lasting words. Words that make an impact, that leave a lasting impression. In 2 Timothy, Paul knows his execution is imminent. What does he do? He takes the time to write a letter to his young son in the faith and ministry, a man named Timothy. As he draws his letter to a close, he pens the last words he will ever write in 2 Timothy 4:1-5 (read).

2) The challenge to “preach the word” has never been greater in the western world. Biblical and theological ignorance are at an all-time high, and “stupid saints” do not bring glory to God. Both the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 and the Great Commandment of Matthew 22:37-39 make this absolutely clear. We want to capture for Christ the hearts and minds of His people. Ultimately, that responsibility falls on the shoulders of those who preach and teach the Bible.

3) A definition to guide us:

- A short definition: “Faithful preaching is Christ centered, text driven, and Spirit led that transforms lives into the image of Jesus.”
- A longer definition/description: “Faithful preaching is text driven preaching that honors the truth of Scripture as it was given by the Holy Spirit. It’s goal is to discover the God-inspired meaning through historical-grammatical-

theological investigation and interpretation. By means of engaging and compelling exposition and proclamation, the preacher explains, illustrates and applies the meaning of the biblical text in submission to and in the power of the Holy Spirit, preaching Christ for a verdict of changed lives.”

16 Theses for a Faithful Ministry of Preaching

1) I will have a firm conviction concerning the ultimate authority for my life and for my preaching ministry.

- The main options are 4:
 - a) Reason – I live the way I do because I think...
 - b) Experience – I live the way I do because I feel...
 - c) Tradition – I live the way I do because we have always...
 - d) Revelation – I live the way I do because God’s Word says so.
- A faithful teacher and preacher will take to heart the wise admonition of Charles Koller, “In expounding the Word of God, there is a grave responsibility upon the preacher to convey the truth without distortion ... With eternities at stake, the hearer cannot afford to be in error, nor can the spiritual teacher whom he trusts ... Every man has a right to his opinion, but no man has a right to be wrong in his facts ... The integrity of the pulpit demands accuracy, thoroughness, and a scrupulous regard for the text and context.” (*Exp. Preaching Without Notes*, 64-65).

- J. I. Packer adds, “The true idea of preaching is that the preacher should become a mouthpiece for his text, opening it up and applying it as a word from God to his hearers, talking only in order ‘that the text may speak itself and be heard, making each point from his text in such a manner that [hearers] may discern [the voice of God].’” (*God Has Spoken*, 28).

2) I have settled the issue of the Bible’s full and complete inerrancy, infallibility and sufficiency in my heart and mind.

- This was the view Jesus had of the Bible! (Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; John 10:35; 17:17).
- Your people need a clear word not an uncertain sound.
- To fail to preach the Bible is to abandon the only reliable and trustworthy authority that you have. What the people hear who are listening to you is not a word from God but only the opinion of a man.
- If you doubt the full truthfulness and sufficiency of the Bible, it would be best for you to consider leaving the ministry.

3) I will preach in such a way that I help my people develop a biblical and Christian worldview way of thinking and living.

- One goal of preaching in any historical context is to help and teach your people to think Christianly, biblically.

- This challenge has never been greater in our nation. Barna is correct, “Most Christians don’t act like Jesus because they don’t ‘think like Jesus.
- Al Mohler: “Expository preaching is that mode of Christian preaching which takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible. All other issues and concerns are subordinated to the central task of presenting the biblical text. As the Word of God, the text of Scripture has the right to establish both the substance and the structure of the sermon. Genuine exposition takes place when the preacher sets forth the meaning and message of the biblical text, and makes clear how the Word of God establishes the identity and worldview of the Church as the people of God.”
- John Piper reminds us, “It is not the job of the Christian preacher to give people moral or psychological pep talks about how to get along in the world; someone else can do that ... most of our people have no one in the world to tell them, week in and week out, about the supreme beauty and majesty of God.” (*Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 12).
- 2 Corinthians 10:5: “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

4) I will make biblical exposition my foundational and normal manner of preaching.

- Mark Dever: “The first mark of a healthy church is expository preaching. It is not only the first mark; it is far and away the most important of them all, because if you get this one right, all of the others should follow” (*9 Marks of a Healthy Church*, 39).

Expository preaching allows the Scripture text to determine both the substance and the structure of the message. How one structures the Scriptures will determine how one structures the sermon. The Scriptural text drives and determines, shapes and forms sermon development as it relates to the explanation of the biblical text.

- Sidney Greidanus: “Biblical preaching is ‘a Bible shaped word imparted in a Bible-like way. In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said.’” (*The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 11).
- Don Carson: “Six Advantages of Expository Preaching”
 1. It is the method least likely to stray from Scripture.
 2. It teaches people how to read their Bible.
 3. It gives confidence to preachers and authorizes the message.

4. It meets the need for relevance without allowing the clamor for relevance to dictate the message.
5. It forces the preacher to handle the tough passages.
6. It enables the preacher to most systematically expound the whole counsel of God if sufficient chunks are handled.

5) I will always seek to expound the theology embedded in the passage I am teaching.

- Doctrinal/theological preaching is often absent in contemporary pulpits.
- Utilize the classic categories of theology:
 1. What does this text say about the Bible (and the doctrine of Revelation)?
 2. What does this text say about God (also Creation, angelology)?
 3. What does this text say about humanity (and sin, our fallenness)?
 4. What does this text say about Jesus Christ (His person and work)?
 5. What does this text say about the Holy Spirit?
 6. What does this text say about Salvation?
 7. What does this text say about the Church?
 8. What does this text say about Last Things?
- Let your exegesis drive your theology, not the reverse.
- Utilize the great confessions and creeds of our faith.

6) I will always show how the text points to Christ and never fail to preach the gospel.

- 5 essential questions to ask of every text:
 - 1) What does the text teach us about God?
 - 2) What does the text teach us about fallen humanity?
 - 3) How does the text point to Christ?
 - 4) What does God want His people to know?
 - 5) What does God want His people to do?
- Never forget: We do not treat the Bible like a Jewish rabbi (OT esp.) or self-help guides. We are heralds of King Jesus and His gospel!
- Never forget: A text cannot mean today what it never could have meant to its author or original readers. However, in light of progressive revelation and the whole Bible, it may mean more than the author and original audience was able to understand. (Ex. Viewing an iceberg from only above or as a whole. 90% is beneath the surface!). With the completed canon, we get to see all of it!
- J. H. Jowett captured the essence of what we are after when we stand to proclaim the Word of God: “What we are after is not that folks shall say at the end of it all. “What an excellent sermon!’ That is a measured failure.

You are there to have them say when it is over, “What a great God!” It is something for men not to have been in your presence but in His.”

- It's All About Jesus (slightly revised) by Tim Keller

Jesus is the true and better *Adam* who passed the test in the wilderness not the garden, and whose obedience is imputed to us.

Jesus is the true and better *Abel* who, thought innocently slain by wicked hands, has blood now that cries out, not for our condemnation, but for our acquittal.

Jesus is the better *Ark of Noah* who carries us safely thru the wrath of God revealed from heaven and delivers us to a new earth.

Jesus is the true and better *Abraham* who answered the call of God to leave all that is comfortable and familiar and go out into the world not knowing where he went to create a new people of God.

Jesus is the true and better *Isaac* who was not just offered up by his father on the mount but was truly sacrificed for us. And when God said to Abraham, “Now I know you love me because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love from me,” now we can look at God taking his son up the mountain of Calvary and sacrificing him and say, “Now we know that you love us because you did not withhold your Son, your only Son, whom you love, from us.”

Jesus is the true and better *Jacob* who wrestled and took the blow of justice we deserved, so we, like Jacob, only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and discipline us.

Jesus is the true and better *Joseph* who, at the right hand of the king, forgives those who betrayed him and sold him, and uses his new power to save them.

Jesus is the true and better *Moses* who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant.

Jesus is the true and better *Rock of Moses* who, struck with the rod of God's justice, now gives us living water in the desert.

Jesus is the true and better *Joshua*, who leads us into a land of eternal rest and heavenly blessing.

Jesus is the better *Ark of the Covenant* who topples and disarms the idols of this world, going Himself into enemy territory, and making an open spectacle of them all.

Jesus is the true and better *Job*, the truly innocent sufferer, who then intercedes for and saves his stupid friends.

Jesus is the true and better *David* whose victory becomes his people's victory, though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves.

Jesus is the true and better *Esther* who didn't just risk leaving an earthly palace but lost the ultimate and heavenly one, who didn't just risk his life, but gave his life to save his people.

Jesus is the true and better *Daniel*, having been lowered into a lion's den of death, emerges early the next morning alive and vindicated by His God.

Jesus is the true and better *Jonah* who was cast out into the storm so that we safely could be brought in.

Jesus is the *real Passover Lamb*, innocent, perfect, helpless, slain, so the angel of death will pass over us. He's the *true temple*, the *true prophet*, the *true priest*, the *true king*, the *true sacrifice*, the *true lamb*, the *true light*, and the *true bread*. The Bible really is not about you is it? It really is all about Him.

7) I will avoid the preacher's snares that too many get trapped by.

- In his outstanding little work, *Preaching for God's Glory*, Alistair Begg notes what he calls "caricatures of truth preaching." He lists 7:
 - 1) *The cheerleader*. This well-meaning fellow has a peculiar need to be liked and accepted. Whatever the context of a particular message, he is going to be positively inspiration. The preacher's task, he feels, is to "pump them up" and prepare them for the daunting week that awaits them as soon as they leave the building.

- 2) *The conjurer*. When we hear the congregation declaring, “Wasn’t it amazing what he got out of that?” we should not immediately assume that the news is good. When the preacher refuses to do the hard work of discovering the actual meaning of the text in its context, and when he divorces discovery and application, just about anything can be conveyed – and often is!
- 3) *The storyteller*. This man has convinced himself that since everyone loves a good story and since people tend to be less inclined to follow the exposition of the Bible, he will develop his gift of storytelling to the neglect of the hard work of biblical exposition.
- 4) *The entertainer*. This man fosters an environment in which the people come to sit back, relax, and assess the performance rather than to have a confrontation with the biblical Jesus and the living God.
- 5) *The systematizer*. I am referring here to the preacher who views the text of Scripture merely as the backdrop for a doctrinal lecture. This is different from the individual who in the course of exegesis of the passage draws out the elements of Christian doctrine. The systematizer’s theological framework is so pronounced that it predominates the exposition.

6) *The psychologist*. Unfortunately, the pulpits of growing numbers of churches are being filled with pseudo-psychologists who have decided to become purveyors of “helpful insights,” most of which can be (and often are) delivered without reference to the Bible.

7) *The naked preacher*. In our “bare all” culture it has become increasingly in vogue for preachers to use the pulpit as a place for sharing their faults and foibles and to make an attempt at “authenticity.” By this means they let the people know how “real” they are, as if the people needed help to make such a discovery! The sermon is usually not the best place for such sharing. We have our hands full proclaiming the Gospel, pointing to Christ, telling *the* story. It is not advisable to use the time to point to ourselves and share *our* story.

This list is selective and not exhaustive. We will not comment here about “the politician” or “the end-times guru” or “the hobby-horse rider.”

8) I will model in my preaching how I hope and want my people to handle, study and teach the Bible.

- Are you raising up Titus 2 and 2 Timothy 2 men and women in your community of faith?
- Are you showing your people week in and week out how to rightly handle the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15)?

- This is the value and wisdom of faithful, biblical exposition. You equip them for when you are not around anymore. It is like being a good parent who trains their children for adulthood.

9) I will work to plan my preaching weeks, if not months, in advance.

H. B. Charles: “7 Reasons Why You Should Plan Your Preaching”

1. To fulfill your divine call to preach the word (2 Timothy 4:1-2).
 2. To practice biblical wisdom (Proverbs 3:5-6; 15:22; 13:3).
 3. To maintain doctrinal balance (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Acts 20:26-27).
 4. To faithfully shepherd the congregation (1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 2:15).
 5. To strategically oversee corporate worship (Colossians 3:16).
 6. To be a good steward of your time (Ephesians 5:15-17).
 7. To submit to the leadership of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14, 27; 1 Corinthians 2:11-12).
- See Stephen Rummage, *Planning Your Preaching* (Kregel, 2002).

10) I will not avoid or neglect the tough issues of the day. I will address them clearly and directly with grace and truth.

- In your preaching model the incarnate word (John 1:14)
 - Preach with grace
 - Preach the truth
- Luther said, “If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ” (quoted in *Good News*, Sept/Oct 1998, p. 9).
- This generation is drawn, rightly, to issues like adoption, the environment, poverty, racism, the sex-slave/work-slave trade world. However, you cannot remain silent and sit on the sideline when it comes to issues like abortion, gender, and same-sex marriage. You should also not shy away from issues like overt nationalism, greed, stealing, fornication, adultery, divorce, gossip and backbiting.

11) I will put in the hard work necessary in the study. I will commit to a minimum of 10-12 hours a week.

- 2 Timothy 2:15
- Take control of your calendar. If you don't, others will.

12) I will utilize a minimum of 5-7 commentaries when preparing to preach. All of us need the help of good and godly men and women who are smarter than we are!

- Don Carson: “Make a mistake in the interpretation of one of Shakespeare’s plays, falsely scan a piece of Spenserian verse, and there is unlikely to be an entailment of eternal consequences; but we cannot lightly accept the same laxity in the interpretation of the Scripture. We are dealing with God’s thoughts: we are obligated to take the greatest pains to understand them truly and to explain them clearly.”
- Best commentaries and commentaries consult “Building a Theological Library” at www.danielakin.com.
- Recommended Series:
 - Christ-Centered Exposition
 - New American Commentary
 - The Expositor’s Commentary
 - The Tyndale Old Testament and New Testament
 - The Holman Old Testament and New Testament
 - Kent Hughes: “Preach the Word”
 - MacArthur New Testament Commentaries
 - The Bible Speaks Today Series
 - The NIVAC (Old Testament and New Testament)
 - Warren Weirsbe’s “Be Series”
 - The New International Commentary on the Old Testament and New Testament
 - Pillar New Testament Commentary

13) I will read and listen to good, faithful preaching. I will especially take

advantage of the excellent resources available that are “free!”

BibleGateway.com

Spurgeon’s Sermons (<http://www.spurgeongems.org/sermons.htm>)

DesiringGod.org (John Piper)

Radical.net/media/ (David Platt)

DanielAkin.com

StudyLight.org (“Bible Study Tools”)

Preceptaustin.org

GracetoYou (<http://gty.org/resources>) (John MacArthur)

Gospel Coalition (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/resources>)

Capitol Hill Baptist Church (Mark Dever)

Sermons/The Village Church (Matt Chandler)

Wisdom for the Heart (Stephen Davey)

Sermon Audio Library/FBC Durham (Andy Davis)

Truthforlife.org (Alistair Begg)

Insight for Living (Chuck Swindoll)

H.B. Charles Jr.

Tony Merida.net

The W.A. Criswell Sermon Library

Bryan Carter (Concord Church)

Believers Chapel Dallas

Eric Mason (Epiphany Fellowship Sermons)

Ligon Duncan (LigonDuncan.com)

Thabiti Anyabwile (FBC GrandCayman/anacostiariverchurch.org/sermons)

J.D. Greear (JDGreear.com/The Summit)

Darren Patrick ([thejourney.org/sermon series](http://thejourney.org/sermon-series))

Matt Carter (austinstone.org/resources/sermons)

Johnny Hunt (FBC Woodstock/sermon notes)

Blake Wilson (<http://crossoverbiblefellowship.org/teaching-library/>)

Hispanic Preachers:

Miguel Numez (<http://liabi.org/nosotros/ermones-online>)

Juan Sanchez (<http://highpointeaustin.org/app/media#!/14128827>)

Jose Abella (<http://www.prclife.org/media/sermons/>)

Otto Sanchez (<http://www.ibozama.org/index.php/sermones>)

Sugel Michelen

(http://ibsj.org/?post_type=mediacast&media_category=&mediacast_tags=&author_name=sugelmichelen)

Carlos Contreras (<http://www.graciasoberana.org/series>)

Raudel Hernandez (<http://summitesp.info/sermones/>)

Asian Preachers:

Stephen Um (<http://www.centerforgospelculture.org/resource/>)

Halim Suh (<http://austinstone.org/resources/sermons?preacher=Halim%20Suh>)

Ryan Kwon (<http://www.resonatemovement.org/preacher/ryan-kwon/>)

Chris Cha (<http://www.kaleoalaska.org/Media>)

Mark Lee (<http://www.vantagepointchurch.org/media/message-archive/>)

Mitch Lee (<https://gcconline.org/sermon-speaker/mitchel-lee/>)

Chul Yoo (<http://www.higherconnectionchurch.org/sermons/>)

Sterling Lee (<http://www.fbcpearlcity.com/sermons.html>)

John Hwang (<http://www.ccm.com/teaching/#Resources>)

14) I will guard my heart and mind and never stop growing as a man of God who is being conformed more and more into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:1-3).

- Robert Murray M'Cheyne: "My people's greatest need is my personal holiness."

15) I will cultivate a pastor's heart and love my people the way Jesus loves them.

- It will temper your preaching if you tend to be harsh.
- It will embolden your preaching if you tend to be hesitant.

16) I will continually remind myself: what you say is more important than how you say it, but how you say it has never been more important!

- It is probably a sin to preach the Bible poorly!
- Apart from God's Word you have no word!
- However, it is crucial that what we say we say well!

- I agree with Charles Koller who says, “It is more important clumsily to have something to say than cleverly to say nothing” (Charles Koller, *Expository Preaching Without Notes*, 42-43). However, in Ecclesiastes 12:9-10 Solomon says, “...the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.”
- I also agree with Chuck Swindoll who warns us, “If you think the gathering of Biblical facts and standing up with a Bible in your hand will automatically equip you to communicate well, you are deeply mistaken, it will not. You must work at being interesting. Boredom is a gross violation, being dull is a grave offence, and irrelevance is a disgrace to the Gospel. Too often these three crimes go unpunished and we preachers are the criminals...preaching is not as simple as dumping a half-ton load of religious whine, and a hodgepodge of verbs, nouns, and adjectives; but preparing the heart, sharpening the mind; delivering the goods with care; sensitivity, timing, and clarity. It’s the difference between slopping hogs and feeding sheep...[Therefore] study hard, pray like mad, think it through, tell the truth, then stand tall. But while you’re on your feet, don’t clothe the riches of Christ in rags. Say it well.” (Eva. Chp. Of Fullerton Newsletter, date unknown).

- Finally, one of the great princes of preaching, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, understood all of this well when he said: “What is preaching? Logic on fire! Eloquent reason! Are these contradictions? Of course they are not...A theology which does not take fire, I maintain, is a defective theology; or at least the man’s understanding of it is defective. Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire...I say again that a man who speaks about these things dispassionately has no right whatsoever to be in a pulpit; and should never be allowed to enter one.” –(Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching*, pg. 97).

Conclusion

- William Willimon, former Dean of the chapel at Duke University, said 20 years ago, “today’s conservatives sound like yesterday’s liberals.” In a fascinating article entitled “Been there, preached that,” (Leadership, Fall 1995), Willimon sounds a prophetic warning to evangelicals that they might not be seduced by the sirens of modernity and follow the tragic path of insignificance which mainline denominations have trod. “I’m a mainline-liberal-Protestant-Methodist-type Christian. I now we are soft on Scripture. Norman Vincent Peale has exercised a more powerful effect on our Preaching than St. Paul...

I know we play fast and loose with Scripture. But I've always had this fantasy that somewhere, like in Texas, there were preachers who preached it all, Genesis to Revelation without blinking an eye...

I took great comfort in knowing that, even while I preacher a pitifully compromised, "Pealed" – down gospel, that somewhere, good ole Bible-believing preachers were offering their congregations the unadulterated Word, straight up. Do you know how disillusioning it has been for me to realize that many of these self-proclaimed biblical preachers now sound more like liberal mainliners than liberal mainliners? At the very time those of us in the mainline, oldline, sidelined were repenting of our pop psychological pap and rediscovering the joy of disciplined biblical preaching, these "biblical preachers" were becoming "user friendly" and "inclusive," taking their homiletical cues from the "felt needs" of us "boomers" and "busters" rather than the excruciating demands of the Bible. I know why they do this... it all starts with American Christians wanting to be helpful to the present order, to be relevant (as the present order defines relevance). We so want to be invited to lunch at the White House or at least be interviewed on 'Good Morning America.' So we adjust our language to the demands of the market, begin with the world and its current infatuations rather than the Word and its peculiar judgments on our infatuations. If you

listen to much of our preaching, you get the impression that Jesus was some sort of itinerant therapist who, for free, traveled about helping people feel better. Ever since Fosdick, we mainline liberals have been bad about this. Start with some human problem like depression; then rummage the Bible for a relevant answer. Last fall, as I was preparing in my office for the Sunday service, the telephone rang. ‘Who’s preaching in Duke Chapel today?’ Asked a nasal, Yankee-sounding voice. I cleared my throat and answered, ‘Reverend Doctor William Willimon. ‘Who’s that?’ asked the voice. ‘The Dean of the Chapel,’ I answered in a sonorous tone. ‘I hope he won’t be preaching politics. I’ve had a rough week and I need to hear about God. My Baptist church is so eaten up with politics, “I’ve got to hear a sermon!” When you have to come to a Methodist for a biblical sermon that’s pitiful.”

- Walt Kaiser would concur with Willimon:

“It is no secret that Christ’s Church is not as all in good health in many places of the world. She has been languishing because she has been fed, as the current line has it, “junk food;” all kinds of artificial preservatives and all sorts of unnatural substitutes have been served up to her. As a result, theological and Biblical malnutrition has afflicted the very generation that has taken such giant steps to make sure its physical health is not damaged by using foods or products that are carcinogenic or otherwise harmful to their

bodies. Simultaneously, a worldwide spiritual famine resulting from the absence of any genuine publication of the Word of God continues to run wild and almost unabated in most quarters of the Church.”

-Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], pp. 7-8.

- Luther, in a different day to be sure, saw the church in a similar condition.

However he did not despair, for he saw, as we must see, the antidote that will cure the patient. In his “A Treatise on Christian Liberty” he throws down the gauntlet and gives us final words to guide us and inspire us:

“Let us then consider it certain and conclusively established that the soul can do without all things except the Word of God, and that where this is not there is no help for the soul in anything else whatever. But if it has the Word it is right and lacks nothing, since this Word is the Word of life, of truth, of light, of peace, of righteousness, of salvation, of joy, of liberty, of wisdom, of power, of grace, of glory, and of every blessing beyond our power to estimate.”

-Martin Luther, “A Treatise on Christian Liberty.” *Three Treatises*.

Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1947, 23.

To Luther’s word we should all voice a hearty, “Amen and amen.”

