2-23-25

Preaching

The elders have encouraged the younger guys to get into the rotation for Wednesday night talks, which I think is a great idea.

So, I thought it would also be good for me to preach a sermon on preaching and teaching in general. We have a good portion of our congregation involved in either teaching Bible classes (kids and adults) and a bunch of guys who preach from the pulpit, so it’s not like this is a topic that only applies to me as the full-time preacher.

# Study the Word.

* **II Timothy 4:2a**. “*Preach the word*.” That’s going to be our next point, but we’re not there yet. We can’t do that until we first *know* the word.
* **II Timothy 2:15**. Accurately handling the word of truth. (correctly teaching the word of truth, CSB).
* The absolute *first* thing to do is to study the Bible and see what it says. And once you figure that out, just preach that.
* How do we study the Bible?
* Do we just read it and think about it? Well, that’s a big part of it.
* In fact, as simple as that sounds, you’d be surprised how many times we skip that step. Read it. Don’t skip to a commentary or article about it. Go read the Bible itself.
* Maybe you want to do a 5-minute talk about Zaccheus. Guess how you start? Read Luke 19:1-10 several times. What do you notice? What is it saying? Whatever it is, preach that.
* You don’t need anything fancy to study. You can just have a regular ol’ Bible. If it has cross-references, that’ll be a big help.
* You can use the YouVersion app or the Olive Tree app. The search functions will come in really handy.
* I did a series called Bible 101 that you can find on ScriptureStream.com. You can just read Mark’s notes—you don’t have to listen to the sermons. I tried to go over the different parts of Bible study.
* But let me just give you 4 quick points right now.

## Read the text.

* We already talked about this one.
* It doesn’t matter if it’s a passage you’ve read for years. Go back and read it slowly and carefully. You might be surprised to see something you’ve never noticed before.

## Context.

* Read some verses before and after the one you’re interested in. What’s going on? Who’s talking?
* When you’re preparing an outline, you may grab verses from several places. (You can use an app to search for key words and help you find relevant verses.) *But* *you have to look each verse up before you use it*. What is the context?
* It might be a quote from the devil, or one of Job’s foolish friends, or some false prophet.
* Or it might be using a word in a different way. Maybe you’re doing a lesson about the goodness of love in a marriage. And you say, “You know, just like in II Samuel 13:4, where “*Amnon said to him, ‘I am in love with Tamar’.*”
* There’s a problem. When you read the context, you see that they weren’t married, first of all, and that the word “love” there refers to the *lust* he had for her, and that he viciously assaulted her.
* So yes, it takes time, but don’t use a verse without verse reading the context to make sure it’s saying what you think it’s saying.

## Harmony.

* Here’s the central idea: The HS inspired all of this, and He didn’t contradict Himself. So, since we know that all Scripture fits together perfectly, we can use that to help us interpret it.
* Another way to say it is: *The Bible is its own best commentary*.
* **Matthew 4:5-6**.
  + What would you say? After all, the devil is quoting Scripture!
  + **4:7**. Jesus is demonstrating the need to harmonize ALL Scripture together. Don’t apply one verse in a way that makes it contradict a verse somewhere else.
* For example, if you’re studying MDR, you may read **Luke 16:18** and conclude that’s all there is to it. But God made an exception to His rule in Matthew 19:9 that you don’t want to miss.
* Harmony is important.
* Use your Bible app or concordance to search for every single relevant verse you can find on your subject.

## Translations.

* This step is really easy now because of Bible apps. We are blessed to have many English translations. If you’re puzzling over a verse, take 30 seconds and read it in 2-3 other translations.
* Sometimes the smallest shift in wording helps you understand it better.
* Those points are made briefly, but the main point to remember is: *start by studying the Bible*.

# Preach the word.

* **II Timothy 1:13, Titus 2:1**. Timothy and Titus were not supposed to go out and simply tell stories or jokes or entertain. They were to teach *sound words and doctrine*. Sound means *healthy.* In this context, it’s being used metaphorically to describe doctrine that is “true, pure, uncorrupted” (Zodhiates).
* People in churches across the land are starving because they need meat and potatoes but are only getting cotton candy! They need sound doctrine but they get fluff.
* **II Timothy 4:1-2**.
  + *Preach the word*. This is basic, but all too often this foundation is abandoned. Let’s get into the *Word of God*.
  + If I want to find out what *other people* say about topics, I can watch YouTube or order a book on Amazon or Google it. But Bible preachers and teachers are offering something unique. We are supposed to be studying the *Bible* and are now saying, “Here’s what *God* has to say about this.”
  + Let me give an example of an easy way to get off track. Let’s say you want to preach about abortion. That’s a needed lesson.
  + And so you spend time talking about statistics, and recent laws, and the Supreme Court, and someone’s emotional experience with abortion, and so forth. And maybe everything you say is good and interesting and true. But there’s one problem—you haven’t *preached the word* yet.
  + What does the *Bible* say about the life of a child? That’s what we need to know.
  + We might get lesson ideas from lots of different places: experiences, books, the news, social media, etc. That’s fine, but let’s make sure the sermon ends up being what the Bible says about it.
* **II Timothy 4:3-5**.
  + If Timothy simply planned his sermons based on audience appeal, he would stop preaching the truth over time.
  + His sermons would get more and more bland, less and less controversial, and he would cover only favorite topics.
  + But we need to do the work of *evangelists* (proclaimers of good news)—whether it’s for 5 minutes or an hour.
* So, remember that the goal is always to “*preach the word*.” That’s harder than just *coming up with something to say*.
* If I’m a creative person, I can just sit at a computer and type pages of things *I* want to say and then teach that. But that’s not a *sermon* (whether it’s 5 minutes or 30 minutes). It’s just a *speech* about my opinion.
* The Pharisees were experts at that—teaching about some rule that *they* really liked. The problem was, a lot of what they believed was just opinion and tradition, and did not have its origin in the Scripture, **Matthew 15:3, 9**.
* Imagine the Pharisees teaching their young men how to preach. “Okay now make sure to say this, and then say this, and then say this. This is what we believe, and so that’s what you need to teach.”
* That’s NOT what’s going on at Benchley. We’re telling you: The Bible says *preach the word* so that’s what we should all do—*preach the word*!
  + Don’t teach what some *human* is telling you to teach (whether it’s me, or the elders here, or your family members).
  + Instead, *preach the word*.
* If the Pharisees would have taught each generation of their young men to start fresh by going back to the original Scriptures, somebody would have noticed, “Hey wait a second, a lot of what we teach is not actually in these scrolls!”
* And you might have the same experience.
  + Maybe you want to make a point about the *requirement* of ending any spiritual gathering with a “closing prayer.”
  + But when you start looking, you find there is no such requirement.
  + After Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper…**Mark 14:26**.
  + And you might find I Corinthians 14:40—“*all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner*”—but nothing is specified about a closing prayer.
  + There’s nothing wrong ending a study or assembly with prayer, but do you have authority to preach that as a *requirement*?
* Be careful to go to the text and make your points from *there*. A Bible teacher *begins* with Bible study. What does *God* say?
* If there’s one thing I can encourage you NOT to do, *it’s to get up here and just say what you assume to be true*.
  + Don’t preach something just because you heard me say it, or because someone else wants you to say it, or because you’ve heard it your whole life.
  + Only say things you can prove from the Bible itself.
  + **I Timothy 1:3-7**. Timothy (and the rest of us) will have plenty to keep us busy just by teaching the truth. We don’t need to stray into fruitless discussions.
* A good test for this is to imagine how you would defend your point.
  + Imagine someone talks to you later, “Hey, I was wondering how you came to that conclusion.”
  + What would you say? “Well, that’s what David said.” I’m telling you right now—*I make mistakes*. But God does not. So, get your material from *His* book.
  + **Acts 15:24**. The Pharisees had been trying to require circumcision. What if someone had challenged them, “Where is your authority to require that in the *New* Covenant?” Answer: “Uhhh…” They had none. Just their traditions.
  + Let’s not be Pharisees.

# Apply the Word.

* **II Timothy 3:16-17**. Those words indicate action. “Here’s the wrong way. Here’s the right way. Now let’s do it!”
* **Titus 3:1, 14**. All throughout these letters to Timothy and Titus, and throughout the examples of good preaching in the whole Bible, it was always designed to bring about an effect!
* Whether it’s Moses at Mt. Sinai or Timothy at Ephesus or us at Benchley, the point of preaching is to get us all *moving* toward the Lord.
  + What would you think of the school teacher who has a lot of fun teaching, but doesn’t really care if the students *learn* anything?
  + What about the Dr. who is happy to take appointments, but doesn’t have the goal of *healing* the patients?
  + Well then, what about the preacher who likes to get up and preach, but isn’t overly concerned with trying to get himself and others to change?
* After talking about the judgment day in II Corinthians 5:10, Paul writes in v. 11: “*Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men…*” In other words, all of us should remember that there is a lot at stake. The purpose of preaching is not to fill up time, but to beat back the devil and to glorify God!
* Try to have the demeanor of Jesus.
  + Jesus was not egotistical.
  + He was trying to help people.
  + He met with Nicodemus at night. He was a Pharisee, but he was sincerely seeking truth. And so Jesus explained things to him.
* Our goal is for everyone to end up in Heaven together in the end. What do people need to do to get there?
* As a practical point, give people a to-go box. We’ve feasted on God’s word together, and now it’s time to take something home.
* You might even try to state it concisely near the end of the lesson, so people can walk out of the auditorium with a plan of action.
* I’ll give you an example for this sermon:
  + *To my brothers who will be giving lessons: let’s make sure we study the word, preach the word, and apply the word.*
  + *And to the rest of us as we listen, let’s do our best to appreciate and encourage good, Biblical preaching*.

# Further tips on preaching.

* I break a lot of public speaking rules. So, for any of these tips that relate to the actual delivery of the lesson, read at your own risk. 😉
  + You are not supposed to have extensive notes. But I write out virtually everything I’m going to say (manuscript outlines).
  + You are supposed to walk around to emphasize points. I stand in the same spot the whole time.
* Delivery is important, and we should continually get better at it. But as long as you’re getting the message to the people, that’s what counts.

## How do I choose a topic?

* Read your Bible.
  + Get ideas from daily Bible reading.
  + It’s a good idea, especially when you’re just starting out, to take a single passage and try to understand it thoroughly and bring a lesson about it.
* Observe life.
  + Pay attention to what’s going on, what people are talking about, what’s on the news and social media. Evaluate it through the filter of the Bible and bring a lesson about it.
  + Is everyone worried about an asteroid hurtling toward earth? Preach about God’s sovereignty, or being prepared for death, or worry.

## Keep it concise.

* For a Wednesday Night Talk, I *usually* just make one basic point, using 1-2 passages. But whether we’re talking about a sermon that’s 5 minutes or 30 minutes….
* *Be able to say in one sentence what you are trying to get across to people*.
* If you can’t do that, you are not ready. Period. You have not thought about this topic enough to boil it down.
* You may not be able to do this until the end of your study, but it needs to be done. You need to be able to answer the simple question: *what is the point of this lesson?*
* This is sometimes the hardest part, but it is extremely valuable. I cannot emphasize this enough. You must think about this ahead of time.
* And then—get this—you can literally just tell people what you’re trying to say.
  + “Here’s what I’m trying to say: We should make time to pray.”
  + “The point I want to emphasize from this passage is: *Jesus* was humble, so *we* should be humble.”
* People love it when you just simplify the message. Even if you’ve mumbled and bumbled around for a few minutes, trying to tie passages together, and things seem to be falling apart, people’s attention will instantly return when they hear you say something like, “Let me just try to summarize this…”.
* Being concise is typically more helpful to people than long-winded explanations they can’t remember a few minutes later.

## Control nerves by doing all your preparing ahead of time.

* Do not write “Talk about love” on your outline and think, “I’ll just say whatever comes to mind in the moment.” That will be a disaster. At least, it would be for me.
* If I can’t think of what to say when I’m calmly sitting at my desk alone 2 days before, what makes me think I’m going to come up with some gem off the cuff while 150 people are watching me??
* Plan exactly what you want to say ahead of time. Not only will that decrease your Scriptural mistakes, it will also make you much less nervous.
* Again, this is just how *I* do it. You may have a method that works better for you.

## Truth first, delivery second.

* Focus on your *content* more than *eloquence*. That’s why my sermon emphasized Bible study.
* Having said that, we’re talking about the *spoken* word, and if your delivery is terrible, it gets in the way of the message.
* With experience, you’ll learn to make sure your voice is heard and that you are pronouncing your words clearly. You may have a very helpful lesson that would encourage Mimi Dodd on the back pew, but she won’t benefit from it if you look down and mumble so that she can’t hear.
* Some of the greatest speeches of all time (like MLK’s “I have a dream” speech) contain mispronunciations or sentences that don’t finish. It’s ok. It doesn’t ruin everything. Just move on.
* If you move on with confidence, no one will care. If you spend 30 seconds apologizing, or drawing attention to your mistakes (“Oops, I said “um” again), it’s awkward.
* This may be an inaccurate and exaggerated way to say it, but: *people don’t care about you*. Let me explain. They care about the *message* you are trying to get across. They have their own lives and problems on their mind, and they’re trying to get some spiritual food to help them, and they don’t care that you stumbled on your words or said “Acts” when you meant “Romans.” Just correct when necessary and move on.
* Use pauses, emphasis, facial expressions, volume, speed, etc. in a way that’s natural to *you*. Don’t try to talk like someone else, or be an actor. Just say things the way you would naturally explain it to someone in the foyer 5 minutes after services.
* I know it’s not the same. Public speaking is different, but try to *genuinely* talk to people.

## Use illustrations, stats, anecdotes, etc. wisely.

* Prove your point from the *Bible*.
* Stories and illustrations can help us *understand* or remember a point, but unless they are from the Bible, they do not *establish* a point to begin with. Big difference.

## Application

* John got very practical with people (Luke 3:10-14). So did Jesus (Matthew 5:16-ff), and Peter (Acts 2:38), and Paul (Acts 17:30), etc. You get the idea.
* Preachers can’t just talk generically about *ideas* all the time. What does God’s word say about actual life—what people need to go home and do (or not do)?
* A good lesson will give people a “to-go box”—something to take home.
* When you write an outline, try to not only explain a passage, but give some suggestions on how to apply it.

## Practice.

* Practice your talk out loud. Use the exact notes you’re going to use in the real thing. Use the same Bible.
* Your brain will remember, “Oh, at the bottom of this page in my notes I have the Abraham example, and when I turn to this verse it’ll be on the left page of my Bible.” It just makes things smoother.
* For about my first 20 years at Benchley, I preached every single sermon to an empty auditorium ahead of time (usually early Sunday morning). I only gave that up when we went to the 3 services in the morning so I could preserve my voice.
* Before that, when I was in college living in a dorm, I drove to an empty parking lot and practiced out loud in my Chevy S-10 pickup. (That steering wheel heard a lot of good teaching.)
* This is when you’ll figure out that you wrote the wrong reference, or that something is accidentally a tongue-twister, etc.

## Try to avoid a “Concordance Lesson.”

* Let’s say you want to do a 5-minute lesson on Using Good Speech.
* So you Google “Bible verses about good speech” or use a concordance, and then try to squeeze in 32 different passages about speech into 5 minutes.
* I make this mistake all the time. Learn from me. When I was a teenager, a preacher in his 80s gave me some good advice: “You’re using too many verses.”
* That sounds funny (it may even sound *wrong*), but it’s usually better to use fewer passages so you have time to explain and apply each one more deeply.

## Make your notes easy to read at a glance.

* As you can see in this document, I use a two-column format with a bullet outline to make it easier to glance down and see where I am on the page. Since I turned 40, I also switched to 14-point font. Don’t laugh at me.
* Also, I use a brilliant, God-given device to keep track of where I am on the page. It’s called a *pointer finger*.
* Any Scripture that I will turn to in my Bible and read will be in **bold**. Other Scriptures that I only refer to will be in the normal font or in parentheses.
* Sometimes I just read a Scripture without turning to it in my Bible. So, I just put it in my outline in “quotes” and in *italics*.
* I use the color red as my cue to click the PowerPoint. With few exceptions, every word on my PowerPoint will also be on my outline. If the computer glitches out, I can keep going.
* I number the pages of my outlines. That lessens my chance of the pages getting mixed up.
* I also use *italics* to emphasize a certain word in a sentence. Emphasis can really change the way it comes across.
  + I *encourage* you to read your Bible daily.
  + I encourage *you* to read your Bible daily.
  + I encourage you to *read* your Bible daily.
  + I encourage you to read your *Bible* daily.
  + I encourage you to read your Bible *daily*.

## Be nervous but natural.

* I still have nerves after years of preaching. When I started, an older preacher told me, “Don’t worry, the first 200 are the hardest.” Thanks a lot!!
* I recommend channeling that nervous energy into your *volume* and *enthusiasm*. *Use* that energy instead of thinking you need to suppress it.
* But it’s a different thing to be *unnatural*. If you try to sound like someone else, it will be unnatural because you are not someone else. You are you.
* No one else on the planet has a brain that thinks exactly like yours, or a voice that works exactly like yours, or sentence structure exactly like yours.
* Ten different guys can explain the same verse correctly, but they’ll do it in ten different ways because that same message is being filtered through them as individual personalities.
* Remember, this is Benchley we’re talking about. People love you. They are patient and caring. They are excited to see young men developing, and they know that takes lots of practice and experience.
* I know one guy who got up to do his first Scripture reading with comments and *squeaked*. He was so nervous, his voice just wouldn’t work. He literally couldn’t talk. He went on to be a gospel preacher for decades.
* May God bless us in this incredible work!