

Bold Preaching – 2 Tim 4:1-5

2 Timothy 4:1-5. I'm going to take a short break from our study of the Gospel of John, to talk about some of the criteria that make for a solid church. Fundamental characteristics that define us, and drive us, and describe us. Hence the title: Bedrock – Foundations of a Solid Church. Not to be confused with *The Flintstones*.

It's been 4 1/2 years since I last talked about some of these things, and it's time for a refresher. Because the extent to which we keep them in the forefront of our minds, is the extent to which we will abide by them. Instead of defaulting to what's convenient, and easy, and culturally palatable.

Not only that, but knowledge leads to conviction, and conviction leads to unity. To the extent we *know* who we are and what we do, we'll be passionate about it; knowledge leads to conviction. And any time a group of people *share* common convictions, they're united.

Starting with bold preaching. Foundational bedrock for *any* solid church. And the passage in the Bible that speaks to it most directly, is 2 Timothy 4.

The apostle Paul is writing, and says . . .

[1] 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: [2] preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. [3] 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, [4] and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. [5] As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

This is the end of Paul's last letter, written in prison while waiting to be executed. Addressed to Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus. And of all the things he could have said in his last few paragraphs, he chose this: *Preach, the, word.* V2. As in the Word of God. Which makes it a bedrock conviction and practice.

Solid churches . . .

Preach from the Bible and the Bible alone (v1-2)

The Bible, because that's the *word* to which Paul refers. *Preach the word*, he says. The Word of God. His written revelation to us. His purposes and desires. His redemption and plan. Solid churches don't just *believe* the Bible, they *preach* it. From the pulpit to the ministries. Up front and behind the scenes. In worship centers and counseling rooms.

All across the board, solid churches *preach* from the Bible. As in, proclaim it. Herald it. Urge people to consider what it says. Persuade people to accept its claims. Encourage them to believe its substance.

More than just *referring* to the Bible, solid churches *explain* it. Expound on it. Amplify it. And not just because God inspired it; or people need it; but because God commands it.

This isn't some namby-pamby *request* on Paul's part. An option to *consider*. "If you get the chance, could you preach the word? If you can fit it in around the blessing of your pets and your motorcycles, would you talk about it a little bit? If your dramas and specials allow, could you open it?"

I don't think so. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul says, *I charge you, v1.* I command you; I order you; I exhort you. And as if that wasn't enough, he adds as much weight and validity and emphasis as he possibly can. Saying, *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.*

It's kind of like saying, "With God as my witness, get it done. Preach the word, so help me God. In light of his return, get at it. In view of his judgment and kingdom, don't stop."

Far from a request . . .

• It's a command

A command with as much force as Paul could possibly bring.

And solid churches do it. They declare what it says and say what it means. Taking the whole Bible into account, with a consistent hermeneutic; a consistent method of interpretation. They preach the Bible.

And the Bible *alone*. They don't preach their *own* counsel, or their *own* thinking, or the word *plus* something; like religious traditions or secular psychology. Solid churches preach the word alone. Because that's the only thing God *says* to preach. Preach, the, word. Period. Full stop.

Then, in *v2b*, he tells us *how*. *Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.* Preach the word, employing these various means, *with complete . . . teaching.* As in instruction; explanation; application.

Preach, with teaching. Why? Because all heat and no light burns people to death. All preaching and no teaching is deadly. All style and no substance is empty.

And by the same token, all light and no heat *bore*s people to death. All content and no passion is painful. Think, "dry college lecture."

So solid churches strive for both. Preaching *with* teaching. Just like Paul says. They strive to proclaim and explain. Exhort and exposit. Encourage and enlighten. Declare and describe.

That's the first part of this bedrock foundation of bold preaching. Solid churches preach from the Bible and the Bible alone.

Second, they . . .

Declare its truth, popular or not (v2)

Paul says in *v2 – Be ready in season and out of season.* Ready to preach the word when it's popular and when it's not. When it's easy and when it's hard. When *everybody*'s doing it, and nobody's doing it. Be ready. As in stayed up, prayed up, and fired up.

We visited a church one time, and after the service the pastor told me that he got up at 3:30 that morning to finish preparing his sermon. And I thought, "Well, that explains what I just heard." There was a lot of words, but not much content. A lot of thoughts, but not much flow. Because he wasn't ready.

And while that might happen from time to *time*, due to circumstances outside our control, it should be a rare exception. Because God says be *ready* to declare his truth. Prepared. Primed. Because you never know when it's going to be needed. And you never know when it's going to be hated. Warmly embraced or strongly opposed.

The best example of bold preaching being *in season* is the atmosphere following disasters. Or assassinations. Events that shake us to the core. Shake our foundation. People aren't just *open* to God's Word, they're desperate for it.

I'll never forget the spiritual sensitivity after *9/11*. Churches were full. Hearts were open. I was on staff at a church in the Chicago suburbs, and we were leading prayer meetings in the parking lot of our offices; a business complex. At lunch time everybody came outside, held hands, read a brief scripture passage, and prayed together. People were hungry; and soaked up everything that was said like a dry sponge.

Now, not so much. "Who needs the Bible when we're safe and secure? Fat and happy? Who needs old news when there's so much new news? Who needs this when we know *better*?" Sometimes the word of God is *in season*, and sometimes it's *out of season*.

But . . .

• **Most of the time it's both**

Especially in churches. Some people are *hungry* for God's word, and some people aren't. Some can't *wait* to get here, others can't wait to leave. Some people listen with open ears and open heart, others don't listen at all. Some people lean in with eagerness and engagement, others are like cardboard cutouts. Every single week it's popular and unpopular at the same time.

Question. Should any of that matter when it comes to declaring it? Preaching it? Should I pour it on because some people like it, or ease it up because others don't? Should I try to *soften* the blow when it falls like a hammer or cuts to the core? Massage it to make it more gentle; less offensive; more acceptable?

May it never be. Otherwise, *I'm* disobedient and you're missing out.

It's not my job to be a social weatherman and speak up only when times are good; when the word of God is *in season*. It's not my job to assess cultural sensitivities, and ease off when things are touchy. God says preach the word *in season and out of season* (v2). Whether *I feel* like it or not, and whether you want to *hear* it or not.

And believe me, there are times when *I don't* feel like it. I sense the opposition. I fear your response. I *know* some things are hard to hear. And I care. I *care* about your heart. I *care* about your thoughts.

But I care more about God; and his thoughts. And he's clear. Declare the truth, popular or not. Be ready, *in season and out*. So we try. Solid churches try.

Third, they . . .

• **Proclaim its authority without apology (v2)**

Middle of v2. *Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort*, with complete patience. In other words, apply it to people's lives without

apology. Bring it to bear as the sole standard by which they should live. Say what needs to be said, say it like it is, and let God do what he's going to do. That's the *gist* of these 3 words.

Starting with *reprove*. Which means to expose someone's sin. Solid churches proclaim the authority of God's word without apology, by . . .

• **Exposing sin**

"You know that thing you're about? That attitude you harbor? That practice you perpetuate? It's wrong. Sinful. Missing the mark." That's a *reproof* in the biblical sense. It's calling someone out for their sin, and doing so unapologetically. The very opposite of ignoring it. The opposite of saying, "It's not *that* bad. Don't sweat it."

That's one of the *worst* things you could say to someone in sin. And one of the worst things I could say to *you*. That only *insulates* your sin. Excuses you. Lets you off the hook instead of holding you accountable.

Better to bring God's word to bear in a way that's equal to its weight and authority. *Exposing* people to the soul-searching, soul-piercing thrust of his truth. Because like a surgeon's *knife*, it also heals. In the long run, *reproof* heals.

That's the first word Paul uses to describe the way in which solid churches preach.

The second is *rebuke*. *Preach the word . . . reprove, rebuke, and exhort*. If reproofing someone is *exposing* their sin, rebuking them is . . .

• **Confronting obstinance**

Stubbornness. Hardness of heart. That's the second way solid churches proclaim the authority of God's word without apology. Because a *rebuke* is a sharp reprimand. "The Bible says that what you're doing is wrong, and you need to knock it off." That's a *rebuke*.

It's bringing God's disapproval to bear, and leaving it. It's pressing someone until they repent or refuse to listen. It's confronting their obstinance so that the Lord can get through. And solid churches do.

And then third, they proclaim the authority of God's word without apology by . . .

• **Urging righteousness**

Preach the word . . . reprove, rebuke, and exhort it says. As in, plead for holiness. Stress godliness. "Repent and be clean. Turn and be whole. Give up what's wrong and do what's right." Solid churches urge righteousness.

Now, at this point you might be thinking, "Man that sounds harsh. Maybe even unloving."

If that's you, it's actually just the opposite. To proclaim the authority of God's Word without apology is the *most* loving thing you can do. Because anything else gives people a false sense of security while they're headed for judgment. If we love people at all, we *must* proclaim the authority of God's word without apology.

• **But not without patience**

Reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience it says (v2b). God help us. Because that means we have to contain our frustration when someone *rejects* the word. Contain our exasperation when they're slow to accept it.

As long as people are willing to listen, even just one person, it's our responsibility to preach, and do so without apology.

Fourth, solid churches preach the word with boldness, and . . .

Share its message with a sense of urgency (v3-4)

Because the time is coming [v3] when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, [4] and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Every time I preach this text, I think it can't get any worse. And yet here we are. The time isn't just coming, it's here. Where people are *running* from the truth. *Running* from conviction. Taking their ball and bat and going elsewhere or nowhere. Searching the internet for someone who tells them what they *want* to hear. And then pretending that they're part of a church and living biblically.

They won't *endure sound teaching*, so they pursue teaching that tickles their *ears*. Teaching that makes them feel good. Teaching that condones their lifestyle. Or addresses their pet issue. Or assuages their guilt. Or alleviates their complacency.

And they end up buying into half-truths, wandering *into myths*, and practicing a *form* of religion that has no power. All while rationalizing it, and deceiving themselves to feel good about it.

That's why solid churches share the message of God's word with a sense of urgency. Because it may be the only time or the last time that some people will hear it. Before they take *their* ball and bat. Or fall by the wayside. Or descend into sin.

And then last, solid churches . . .

Stay the course no matter what (v5)

The course of preaching the word and fulfilling their ministry. Like Paul says in v5. *As for you* [speaking first to Timothy], *always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry*. Your purpose. Your calling. The ministry of preaching the word. The same ministry God has entrusted to me. And to you in your various ministries. Stay the course and fulfill it. No matter what.

And do so *sober-minded*, Paul says. Treating the work of ministry with the importance it has and the weight it carries. Keenly aware of all that's at stake. Cognizant of the great need and great privilege of ministry. And acutely aware of the great sacrifice and effort to fulfill it. Solid churches are sober-minded churches. And stay the course because of it.

Not only that, but they *endure suffering*. Just like Paul says. They stay the course by *enduring* hardship, instead of escaping it. They bear up under it instead of fleeing it. Solid churches go all in and stay all in. And determine ahead of time to do so. No matter what. Because opposition and attack *will* come; it's part of the game.

And last, solid churches *do the work of an evangelist*; the hard work of preaching the

Gospel and discipling the saints. How else could they stay on track? How else could they stay the course? Preaching, and teaching, and discipling *is* the course.

So don't quit; even if others do. Don't waver, even if difficulties mount. Or problems pile up. Stay the course and fulfill the ministry no matter what.

Summary

That's the first foundation of a solid church. Bold preaching. The bedrock on which Christ will *build* our church. Anything else, any other kind of preaching, is sinking sand.

Pray – Father, find us faithful. Faithful to preach your word, and your word alone. Faithful, in season and out. Faithful to fulfill our ministry. Faithful to stay the course. Oh God, bolster us, and strengthen us, and fill us, and fuel us.

You Are Loved