

Preach the Word

by John Walvoord

John Walvoord emphasizes the critical importance of preaching the Word of God effectively, filled with the Holy Spirit, and addressing the needs of both believers and the lost.

Duration: 26:27

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Matthew 28:19-20, John 8:32, Acts 4:12, Romans 10:9, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Timothy 4:2

Topics: "Expository Preaching", "Biblical Evangelism"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of preaching the word of God effectively. He references 2 Timothy chapter 4, where Paul outlines the elements of effective speaking. The speaker shares his personal experience of being saved by a preacher who clearly explained the gospel message. He criticizes modern preaching that fails to address the salvation message and emphasizes the need for expository preaching that covers the whole Bible. The purpose of Dallas Theological Seminary is also mentioned, which is to equip students with a strong biblical foundation for expository preaching.

Transcript

The blessings as well as the intimidations of being the president at Dallas Theological Seminary is the legacy of leadership that our school has enjoyed. I'm only the fifth president since the founding of DTS, and that means there were four before me. Three of them are still alive.

I was two when Dr. Chafer passed away, so I obviously did not know him. I was introduced to him as a child when a pastor of ours tried to steal my father's copy of Dr. Chafer's book on grace, and that was a fun family event in the living room of our home in Glenwood Springs, Colorado. But I began to hear about Dallas at a very young age, and it's been my privilege to know the previous three presidents, all three of which have offices on our campus that tells you a little bit about their commitment and their support of what we're doing in our day and time here at DTS.

Dr. Wolvard served Dallas Theological Seminary since September the 1st, 1935. That's 67 years of faithful service to our Lord through the ministry of Dallas Seminary. Since 1986, when he retired from being president, he served as the chancellor until just a little over a year ago when he was given a promotion to Chancellor Emeritus.

That made room for Dr. Swindoll to become a chancellor. Along with his academic credentials, which are huge and many, he also pastored for 17 years in the city of Fort Worth alongside of what he has been

doing at Dallas Seminary. He's recognized as one of the world's leading conservative evangelical theologians, especially in the work of eschatology.

He's written, contributed, or edited over 30 books, including the best-selling Bible Knowledge Commentary. He was named the alumnus of the year by Wheaton College, but he and his wife, Geraldine, have been married for over 60 years, and their relationship has been a model for us all. During the school year, when I'm not traveling quite as much, I try to venture over and get an hour with him every few weeks, and it's been my privilege this last year to do that, to pick his brain, to listen to the history, to hear his heart, and to appreciate his support and his prayers for what we're doing here and why you're here at Dallas Seminary.

Gives me a great privilege to introduce our Chancellor Emeritus, our honored colleague and friend, Dr. John F. Wohlford. Would you join me in welcoming him? Thank you. All the generations love you, as I do.

Thanks for being here. First, may I apologize for coming to you in a wheelchair, but I've been declining other invitations to speak, but this was one I couldn't turn down. Geraldine and I have been so wrapped up in this school for so many years that the possibility of saying something effective and helping in the beginning of the school year was too much to resist.

I want to say a personal word of welcome to the 300 new students we have this year. You are precisely the size of the whole student body when this chapel was built, and they debated a little bit about whether they should build it as big as they did. We have had a wonderful privilege from God to see the work grow.

Now, this morning I want to speak on a subject that I'm not fully able to expound, and that is how to be effective as a preacher. It's possible for a person to go through Dallas Seminary and take all our courses, and when he gets through, still be a mediocre preacher. I don't think that's necessary.

It isn't a matter of gift. It's a matter of dedication and meeting the standards of Scripture. We have Paul's consensus of this in 2 Timothy chapter 4, where he in five verses packs in the elements of effective speaking.

I charge you, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead that is appearing in his kingdom, preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itchy ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers, and they will turn their ears from the truth and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill thy ministry.

Now, this passage is worthy of a careful exposition, but I want to confine myself to these first three words, preach the word. If the purpose of Dallas Theological Seminary can be summed in those few words, we were founded not so much as a protest against modernism, though our doctrinal position is distinctive. We were founded because Dr. Chafer believed that the average seminary curriculum did not give its students enough Bible to give them a basis for expository preaching, which to him was the absolute necessity of effective preaching in our modern day.

Accordingly, he wrote these words. Now, how can we be sure that we are effective at preaching? I personally am quite critical of much of our modern preaching. There are, of course, liberals that don't have much to say, but even evangelicals often fall completely short of what they ought to be in the pulpit, and

the result is disastrous for the church as a whole, for its growth, for its growth and blessing of God, because the truth has not been effectively proclaimed.

Therefore, today I'd like to say just a word or two about this. Now, there are some things that are important. You probably have heard the little expression that the preachers are supposed to, not to expound the Bible, but they're supposed to inspire the audience.

That sounds rather interesting, but it happens to be totally scripturally false. The Bible doesn't talk about inspired preachers. It talks about the inspired word, and the power of the preaching comes from the word, not from the preacher.

There are, however, requirements, and one of the requirements is that you be filled with the Spirit. It's entirely possible to go through Dallas Seminary, take a place of leadership, and still be far from what you ought to be by the power of the Holy Spirit in your life, because being indwelt by the Spirit and being filled by the Spirit is possible only as we yield ourselves to him and let him have his way with us. I passed that hurdle back in my teenage years when I was in college, and I faced the issue of whether Jesus Christ was really the Lord of my life, and I really hadn't given it too much consideration.

I was saved, but it never occurred to me that if you accept Jesus Christ as God, you automatically accept him as Lord. He has the right to rule your life, and I made a definite decision in my first year in college that I was going to commit myself to the will of God regardless of what it was. Nothing else, nothing more, and so forth.

The whole idea of preaching and dealing with the word of God effectively was being filled with the Spirit. Now, there are certain things, I think, that are wrong in our modern preaching, and I'd like to have you avoid it. I think I've tried to in my latter years particularly.

I wasn't conscious of all this when I first started preaching, but it's first of all, of course, very necessary to have a passion for the truth of God. We are not dealing with trivial things that simply are ornaments in the lives of those who hear us. We're dealing with heaven and hell.

We're dealing with judgment on sin. We're dealing with an effective life for God that will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ. All these things are tremendously, tremendously important, but let me ask you a question.

How do you regard lost souls? You know that scriptures make plain that everybody who isn't a Christian is going into a Christless eternity where he'll experience eternal punishment, and every hour and every day there are thousands of people who end their earthly life and are plunged into eternal punishment. What's your feeling about it? Now, personally, that troubles me. That's awful.

So many of these people perhaps deserve it, even from our human standpoint, but unless they have trusted in Christ, they might have religion, they might be members of a church, they might have many of the things that belong to the Christian life, but if they aren't born again, they share the same destiny as a total atheist or a total unbeliever. And that bothers me. What can I do and what can you do to stem this tide of thousands of souls going into eternity without salvation? I think that's a question we have to face because it's a central question of our life.

What are you going to do about it? Well, I faced it as a young man and went to seminary here and completed my course of study and I reasoned that being surrendered to the Lord was being willing to be a

missionary to China. So my college and career, seminary career, I was planning to go as a missionary to China. When it came up to the point of making an application, however, the Lord very definitely said no.

And to make a long story short, the administration of the seminary asked me to come on as a member of the faculty and as a registrar. Now that had seemed to be a given, that was very easy, but back in those days the seminary was badly managed. It meant you had a job but no salary.

And I don't know if you've ever faced that before. To be sure, they started me out at \$100 a month but they didn't pay it. And six months later I discovered they had raised it to \$2,000 but it took me three years before I found out.

And it's humorous in a way, but have you ever been faced with the idea of a full-time job for the Lord but no money? Fortunately I was single at the time and I didn't have much financial need, living with my mother and she had a pension and the church paid me all of \$125 a month, I was a part-time pastor, and I could live on that. And that's what happened. Do you know how much they paid me the first year? Well, they paid me exactly \$7.50 a week.

I hope you never have to face the question of choosing a job when it's \$7.50 a week. But it's the will of God, what else are you going to do? And so I became a member of the faculty and that was really an important job because as registrar you're in charge of the whole educational program, class schedule, courses and so on. And we had only 100 students, but there was the need of admissions and that was his responsibility.

And so I've been serving the Lord for these many years in the seminary. And while I doesn't qualify as a missionary to Africa or China, nevertheless I've had the privilege of training hundreds of students, some of whom at least have gone to the mission field. And I've written books, one of which has been translated into 16 languages.

So I'm reaching hundreds of thousands of people through the written word that I never would have reached as a missionary. So the Lord knows best. And the will of God is perfect, it's always perfect.

Nothing better than that can be possible for us. Now it's very important that we first of all be ready to preach because we are filled with the Spirit. But if I can answer the question as to what you think about the people being lost, I think that we get at the heart of the problem.

A preacher should have a passion to win souls to Christ. He should have a passion to get out the truth. So much of our modern preaching is entertaining perhaps, and perhaps sometimes inspiring, but it doesn't get at the whole problem.

It doesn't really reach the souls of people, lead them to Christ, and lead them on into an effective Christian life, and how very, very important that is. I've heard so many sermons, and you have too, you sometimes ask the question, what in the world is he preaching on that for? And you can't see any rational reason for developing the subject that he's developing. I've listened to hundreds of godly preachers who preach to Christians, but in their entire sermon, no one became sensitive to the fact that probably 25% of their audience were unsaved, and not a word was given as to how to come to Christ and how to be born again.

The person ending that service as an unsaved person would leave it as an unsaved person. I believe that while sermons can't include everything, one sermon cannot, one of the blessings of an expository ministry is that you explain the whole Bible, and sooner or later you cover every subject that comes through it. My

own personal ministry, as was mentioned, I was a part-time pastor for many years, and I had three preaching assignments on Sunday.

I taught a Sunday school class. We went through the whole Bible on a 10-year cycle, and then in the morning services and evening services, I would preach one service, expounding the Bible word for word, and then another subject, the second service, would be a topical sermon where I dealt with the great doctrines of the scripture. In the course of my years, I covered the whole New Testament, verse by verse, one and a half times, and spoke on half the Old Testament books, and taught every important doctrine of the Christian faith.

So much of our modern preaching just ignores theology. You go to the church all your life and not be grounded in the truth, and that's a tragedy. God wants people to know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

If your preaching isn't about the truth of God, it's not real preaching, and so it's very important that we employ the word of God. I believe personally that in every sermon, you should have a section where you explain what it is to be a Christian. That's how I got saved.

I went to a church all my life. It wasn't until I was 15 that I learned that you couldn't get to heaven by doing the best you could. I thought that was all that was required.

I finally listened to a preacher who was a great soul winner, and he explained that we're spiritually dead, we're born, we're under condemnation, that there wasn't anything we could do about it, but that Christ went to the cross and died in our place and bore our sins, and now it's possible for God to extend by his grace the wonderful salvation that we have in Christ. There's only a half a dozen or more sentences of what he said, but I grabbed it. It was like a shaft of light for the first time in my life I knew what it was to be saved and to be trusting in Christ.

Because I was saved by a preacher who went out of his way to preach the gospel, it certainly taught me a lesson to do the same thing. When you preach, when you get through, ask yourself the question, if there was a man saved present in the audience tonight or today, what would he hear? Would he learn how to be saved? Would he have an opportunity? Would he be taught the truth of the scriptures about salvation? Certainly that is very important. I believe today the pulpit is often failing in this regard.

They assume that the main message is to Christians, and they pass up the opportunity to preach the gospel to the unsaved. I think it's very important that we keep salvation up and forth in the front in our ministry. There's another aspect of this that I think is obviously necessary, and that is that almost every sermon I've ever heard exhorted us to do better.

Did you ever hear a sermon that exhorted you to do worse? No. They all want you to do better. How many sermons have you heard who told you how? See, God has a program of sanctification.

It's complete, it's complex, but it's his program of leading a person who's a Christian into a holy life. And certainly that is very, very important. Important in that, of course, is the fact that we have an indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

He's our teacher and our guide. If we're surrendered to him, we will learn much about God's truth for our personal lives. It's impossible for a person to be an effective Christian without the power of the Spirit in his life.

It's also important that we have the other aspects of the truth. We know that the Bible itself is a sanctifying power, and that's why we should read it every day, why we should preach it, why we should meditate on it, like the psalmist who meditated on the Word of God day and night. You see, the Bible was intended to be a sanctifying part of our life.

The question is asked, how shall a young man cleanse his way, and the answer is by taking heed thereto according to thy word. You and I not only need the Word of God to preach to others, we need the Word to sanctify our own lives and to make us the kind of Christians that are an example as well as a source of information about it. We need this sanctifying power of the Word of God.

And then there's the intercessory work of Christ. So many people don't realize that we have a Savior who's at the right hand of God the Father interceding for us. And in the infinity of the God, he's able to give his full attention to you and to me 24 hours a day without any confusion.

When we pray, we join a prayer meeting already in session where the Son of God himself is praying for us. It really is amazing that we don't accomplish more when we realize the power of that prayer. But God is an intercessor for us.

Then we have the wonderful blessing of association with other Christians. There's a wonderful fact that if we go to church and mingle with our fellow Christians that they help us and strengthen us in our task for serving the Lord. So there's this whole program of sanctification, absolutely necessary, it isn't enough to tell people that they ought to be good, you tell them how, and search the Word and do the things that are helpful in giving us a holy and effective life.

And then Christianity by its very nature is a message of hope. I've been taught eschatology or prophecy all my life, probably because it was assigned to me when I joined the faculty, I didn't have much choice. But what a wonderful thing it is to have the hope that we have in Christ.

One of the tragedies of our day is that some churches never speak on prophecy. I get invited to whole prophecy conferences in church and sometimes people come to me and say, our preacher never preaches on prophecy. It's amazing.

Twenty-five percent of the Bible was prophetic when it was written, and you cross out prophecy and you've lost a fourth of the Word of God, and you've lost your position as an expositor of the entire Word of God. We must believe and must preach the truth of hope. I recall in Canada one time, I was speaking at a conference, and a lady who was a senior citizen came up to me, she said, this is the first prophetic sermon I've heard since I was a teenager, fifty years of no preaching on the truth of the hope of Christ.

It's so important, and I know there's excuses for it. They say there's so many other subjects why dwell on prophecy, but God's Word makes it plain that from God's standpoint, it's important, and it's rather interesting that again and again in the Bible, the exhortation is given especially to preach on prophecy, 1 Thessalonians 4. Comfort one another with these words, you see. We're told, we're commanded to do it.

We understand a preacher told us never to read the book of Revelation, it just confuses us. Well, it's obvious that he was confused, and he didn't read it, because if you had read just the opening verses, there's a special blessing on those who read and take heed. Prophecy is a wonderful instrument in leading people to Christ, in sanctifying believers, in giving them the hope they need in a world that has so much sorrow and trouble.

Hal Lindsay, of course, is the one that capitalized on that, when he was in Campus Crusade, he led hundreds of people to Christ, and he wrote the late great Planet Earth, which had a phenomenal sale, and it's hard to believe that the publisher only published 10,000 in the first printing, and now it's in the many millions. He's had over 2,000 letters from people who said through reading the book, they've come to Christ, and for everyone that writes, there's 10 that don't, so you can't imagine how that one book has influenced the Christian public. But it's necessary for them to preach the word, and I don't think it's necessary to spend a lot of time on all the details of prophecy, but people should know that Christ is coming, that they're going to be judged by him, that it's a blessed hope, a wonderful expectation.

To be with Christ is far better. We need to preach the truth about prophecy, and I hope you never get in a position where you're silent on this important aspect of what God has asked us to preach. You see, being an effective preacher covers many things.

It covers salvation, it covers sanctification, it covers eschatology or prophecy, but most of all, it means to preach the word. When you get through, if you haven't preached the word, you haven't preached the word, and I believe what I've said tonight is the sum of what the Bible has to say on this subject. I trust when you get out, if you want to join the ranks of the many that are mediocre preachers that don't preach the Bible, that don't know exactly where they're going or why they're going, but instead will have a clear message, a dynamic message that comes from the Bible itself, the power of the word of God to change people's lives, to lead them to salvation, to lead them to hope, and lead them to have lives that are well-pleasing to God.

So I've covered for you the Lord's best, and may it be your challenge never to be satisfied with mediocrity, but to preach the word effectively in the power of the Holy Spirit, to cover the whole word of God, not just pieces here and there, and be an expositor of the word of God. Shall we pray? Our Father, how grateful we are for the Bible and all it means to us, for the blessings that have come to those of us who have preached it, and believed it, and lived our life in the light of the scriptures. We pray, Lord, that thou will bless this student body.

They're in the time of wonderful privilege of studying and preparing for the future. Some of the happiest years of their lives are going to be spent right here on our campus. And we pray that thou will help them, not only to arrive at the truths that we're talking about, but when they get out, to be a man who is filled with the Spirit, who is preaching the whole word of God, and expecting God to hear and honor their ministry.

So we commit our many needs to you, Lord. There are no doubt many individual problems in the lives of students who come. The devil is a way of putting obstacles in our way.

But we trust that thou will give them the victory, and will make them effective as a servant for God, now and every day until Jesus comes. And we ask it all in Christ's precious name. Amen.

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