

Jesus Is Worth It

Part #12 - "Preach the Word"

Text: 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on August 4, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** We live in a fascinating time when it comes to how people think about truth. For the past 1500 years or so people in the western world have believed that there is such thing as truth that is outside of us. That is to say, there are things that are true regardless of how you feel about them. But since the 1960's our culture has largely rejected this idea of truth. In our day truth is often a matter of opinion. What is true for me may not be true for you. People do not like that idea that there is one truth about any issue.
 - Kelly Monroe wrote a book called *Finding God at Harvard*. She writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** **"Students feel safer as doubters than as believers, and as perpetual seekers rather than eventual finders."**
 - All of this sounds very open but it raises all kinds of questions: if there is no ultimate truth, how do you decide what is right and wrong? You can't be a perpetual seeker forever. You have to make decisions. And if you decide something like racism is wrong, why should others follow your view of truth? You see, it sounds very open but there are a lot of problems.
- The Christian Church faces many questions as well. In an age that rejects absolute truth, what should we do with this book? It makes all kinds of absolute truth claims about God, about how to live, about sin, about our need for our Saviour, about Jesus Christ being the only way back to God, about heaven, and about hell?
 - Should we change our message? Should we downplay the harder parts? Should we just be quiet?
 - Our passage today is so helpful because it speaks first about *the challenge of relativism*. Then secondly, it talks about *the responsibility of Christians* in an age of relativism. And then finally it shows us *the motivation we need to fulfill our responsibility*.

THE CHALLENGE OF RELATIVISM

- Let's begin then by talking about **(SHOW SLIDE 3) the challenge of relativism**.
 - You can see it right here in what Paul says to Timothy in verses 3-4. **READ 3-4** – 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, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.**
- These verses are a warning to Timothy and to us. Paul is warning Timothy that the opposition he is facing for his Christian teaching will only increase. Notice that Paul says a time is coming when people will not put up with something. People within the church and outside the church will push back against something. What is it? Look at verse 3.
 - People will not put up with **"sound teaching."** That means teaching that accurately reflects what the Bible says and leads to spiritual health.

- Paul states it another way in verse 4. **READ 4a** – *will turn away from listening to the truth*
- **(SHOW SLIDE 4) Paul warns that in Timothy’s day, and increasingly towards the end of time, people will turn their ears away from the truth.** When the Bible claims to be God’s revelation of truth to humanity people will push back and say it is merely the thoughts of ancient men.
 - When the Bible says we have sinned against God but that Jesus came to save us, people will reject any idea they need saving and say Jesus is just a good human teacher.
 - When the Bible says sex is God’s good gift to be enjoyed exclusively between a man and a woman within marriage, people not put up with this and will call it regressive, homophobic, and narrow. They will not endure sound teaching but will turn away from listening to the truth.
- But it is not simply that people turn their ears away from the truth. They also turn their ears toward something. Look at verse 3. **READ 3b** – *but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.*
 - So even though people have turned away from truth their ears still itch to hear something. In fact, they amass teachers to talk to them. How do they choose these teachers?
 - They find teachers who will affirm them in their own views of truth. They find teachers who will affirm them in living after their own desires. So they read books, listen to podcasts, and watch people who say, **“Yes, you should do whatever makes you happy. Be true to yourself.”**
- So we could put it like this: **(SHOW SLIDE 5) They turn their ears away from truth but turn their ears toward teachers who affirm them in living how they want.**
 - So here you have a picture of a culture that rejects anyone who says there is such thing as absolute truth. Rather, truth becomes whatever each person desires. Each person decides for him or herself what is true.
 - This is what we call “relativism.” Relativism is the idea there is no such thing as absolute truth that applies to all people at all times in all places. Truth is relative. Therefore, I decide what is true for me. I decide what is right and wrong. Truth is whatever suits my own desires. There is no question that this is the prevailing view of our day. This Paul says is the challenge of relativism.

THE FAILURE OF RELATIVISM

- When we come to the second point I will talk to Christians about how we should respond to the challenge of relativism. But for now let me speak to those of you who say, **“What’s wrong with that? Why can’t I decide what is true for me?”**
 - I want to suggest to you this morning that although it sounds so freeing to follow your own path of truth, you cannot live like this. In fact, you cannot raise kids like this or build a society like this. Let me show you what I mean.
- It was the famous atheist Frederick Nietzsche who said, **“God is dead.”** By this he meant that western civilization had killed God in the sense that it had abandoned Christian truth. Although Nietzsche was happy to get rid of God and Christianity he was terrified at the consequences of this.
 - He rightly saw that if you get rid of God then there is also no reason to continue to hold the moral values of Christianity. Yet, western civilization was built on Judeo Christian values

like honesty, love, justice, and kindness. People may not have always followed these but it was generally agreed that these were absolute truths that should be followed because God is honest, God is love, God is just, and God is kind.

- But if you kick God out of your society then there is no reason for people to continue to keep these values. They are now free to make up their own values. But Nietzsche was terrified of this because if everyone just follows their own made up truths this will eventually plunge civilization into chaos. We go back to the law of the jungle.
- Think on a basic level of raising a family. Imagine that one day your 16-year-old son is caught cheating on a test at school. What do you say? Perhaps you say, “**son you should not cheat?**” He says, “**Why not dad?**” “**Because it is wrong son.**” “**Why is it wrong dad?**”
 - Now if you say, “**Because it is just is**” he will rightly respond by saying, “**who says?**” Now you are in trouble. You see if there is no God then there is no absolute truth that says you ought to be honest. So, you are left to say something like, “**well society works best if people are honest.**” But then your son could say, “**Why should I care about society? It is a dog eat dog world. I am trying to get into university. Cheating gives me the slight edge I need over my classmates.**” If truth is a matter of personal preference everything falls apart.
 - It was the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky that said, “**If God does not exist then everything is permissible.**” This is what Nietzsche saw and was afraid of.
- So I am simply asking you to consider the logical end of making your own self the determiner of truth. It sounds so freeing but it is not. Do you really want to live in a world where every person decides what is true? I don't. I want a world where it is an absolute truth that it is always wrong to sexually assault a child, to hate someone because of the colour of their skin, or to treat a woman as second class because of her gender.
 - But to believe this you must believe that there is such thing as absolute truth. You must believe that truth is not simply a matter of personal preference. In short, you must believe in God and build your life not on what suits your own desires but on what he says is right and wrong.
 - Well I will leave it at that for now simply encouraging you to examine what is the best thing to build your life on – your own thoughts or God's thoughts?

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CHRISTIANS

- Well, let me turn now to speak to Christians. The question before us is how we should respond to this challenge of relativism. When people resist truth so strongly should we downplay our message to appeal to them? Should we downplay our sexual ethic? Should we say, “**well Jesus is our way to God but you can have your own way?**”
 - Having considered the challenge of relativism let's turn in the second place to talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 6) the responsibility of Christians.**
- As Paul comes to the end of his letter he gives Timothy a charge. Look at the end of verse 1. **READ 1b – I charge you.** Paul is saying, “**there is something I want to impress upon you and I cannot impress it strongly enough.**” What is this charge? Look at verse 2. **READ 2a – preach the word.**
 - This is the dominant thing that Timothy is to give himself to. Despite his shy nature, despite the opposition of people within his own church, despite the challenge of

relativism, despite the overwhelming number of teachers who say what people want to hear, Timothy is to give himself to this one thing: preaching the word.

- To preach means to herald. A herald spoke on behalf of a king. A herald does not make up his own message. A herald delivers the king's message. A herald does not have to be smart, winsome, funny, or wise. A herald's one requirement is to faithfully communicate what the king has said. It is the message, not the herald that is of supreme importance.
 - That is why Paul does not simply say, "**Preach.**" He tells Timothy *what* he is to preach. He is to preach "**the word.**" In this letter the term "word" refers to the good news of Jesus Christ.
 - It is the message that despite our sin God loved us and sent Jesus Christ into the world to rescue us and all of creation through his life, death and resurrection. It is this good news that all who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life. It is the good news that shows us how to live a life that is pleasing to God.
- Now this preaching is certainly done by pastors in the sense of preaching from the pulpit. But heralding the message is not just something that happens on Sundays. Every Christian can be a herald. Sunday school teachers herald the word. Parents herald the word to their kids. It is just as much heralding the word when you sit in a coffee shop and talk about Jesus as when I get up on Sunday morning.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 7) So regardless how unpopular the truth is, Christians are responsible to herald the good news about King Jesus.**
- Now does this mean we jam it down people's throats? Not at all. Paul goes on to give four rapid-fire commands to describe how we are to herald the message. Look at verse 2. **READ 2 – "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.**
 - To speak in season and out of season means when it is popular and when it is not, when it is convenient and when it is not. To correct means to show someone where they are wrong. To rebuke means to tell someone to stop living a certain way. But it does not end there. We are also to encourage.
 - And then notice carefully that in the church and outside of it we are to herald the good news "**with complete patience and teaching.**" This means Christians don't jam the truth down people's throats when they don't want to hear it but it does mean we speak as we have opportunity. Some of you are great at correcting others but need to be more patient and encouraging. Others of you love to keep the peace and encourage but need to hear that there is a time to correct and rebuke.
- One of the greatest reasons to build your life on this book is for the simple reason that it disagrees with you. Think about this. If you are the one who decides what is true and what is not then you will always be right in your own eyes.
 - But be honest, are you really competent to decide truth? Ten years ago you were convinced that you were right about so many things but now you look back and think, "**what an idiot I was.**" Today you think you are much wiser but ten years from now won't you look back and think, "**what an idiot I was.**" Are you really competent to decide truth?
 - Or be honest about this: how is it all working out for you? I confess when I am in charge of my life I make a mess of things.
 - You see this book will correct you. But if we are humble we will recognize that we need this.

- So let me bring this second point together. In a culture of relativism it is the responsibility of the church is to hold up this book and say, ***“Here is a rock to build your life on. This book is God’s truth to humanity. It shows us that our sin has separated us from God. It tells us that despite our sin God loved us and sent Jesus to rescue us if we will believe in him. It tells us how to live so as to be fully alive. It tells us what happens after death. It encourages us through the hardships of life.”***
 - This is why our church is all about this book. This is why we teach it, preach it, sing it, read it, memorize it, study it, and strive to live it out.

THE MOTIVATION WE NEED

- But it is right at this point that Christians struggle. Okay, we get that the Bible is God’s word. We get that since it is God’s truth we should keep heralding regardless of opposition. But that is easier said than done.
 - Like Timothy we can feel timid. When we face opposition we can be tempted to back off. In fact, we can start to doubt the truth ourselves. That is why we must talk about one more thing.
 - We’ve seen the challenge of relativism. We’ve talked about the responsibility of Christians.
- Now finally let’s look at **(SHOW SLIDE 8) The motivation we need to fulfill our responsibility.**
 - I want you to see that Paul prefaces his charge to herald the word with three great truths about Jesus. He intends for these three truths to motivate us to fulfill our responsibility.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 9) First, we must fulfill our responsibility to herald the word because Jesus is returning.**
 - **READ 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.* This charge to preach the word is given, Paul says, ***“by his appearing.”***
- That truth alone should break through all the fog that often covers our eyes and makes us think this world is all there is. Oh let this truth break through your mind. Jesus the creator of all worlds, the defeater of death and evil, will soon appear. He who is presently invisible to your eye will soon materialize. Every eye shall see him.
 - Right now we see everything as if by the light of a candle in a dark room. But a day is coming when Jesus will throw open the blinds and like the noon day sun enables one to see everything clearly so on that day we shall see reality for what it is. We shall see God himself.
 - But as C.S. Lewis writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 10) *“What is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else—something it never entered your head to conceive—comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left? For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. . . . That will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not.”***¹

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Kindle Edition, Location 949.

- When this truth of Christ's return breaks through to me I cry out, ***"Oh God, forgive for not taking you more seriously. Please oh God, use my life to enable others to hear about you. I confess I am weak. I often do not know what to say. But oh God teach me that on that day many would meet you with joy because they know Christ."*** We must fulfill our responsibility to herald the word because Jesus is returning.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 11) Second, we must fulfill our responsibility to herald the word because Jesus is coming to judge.** Look at verse 1 again. **READ 1 - *Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead.***
 - Christian, you must not lose courage when people resist the truth because listen, you will not be judged by people. Jesus alone is the judge. He simply calls you to be faithful.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 12) Finally, we must fulfill our responsibility to herald the word because Jesus is coming to reign.**
 - **READ 1 - *Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom.*** Let this truth break over you. The world that we know right now will soon end. Jesus, the king over all, is coming to put an end to all evil, to rid this world of death, and to renew it that he might reign over it forever and ever.
 - Jesus' kingdom will not last a few hundred years like the Babylonians, Persians, or Romans. Jesus' kingdom will not last a few thousands year. His kingdom will endure forever.
- When the truth of Jesus' reign breaks through to you, you can see how critical it is that the church keep heralding the good news of Jesus for he is the only one who can bring us to this eternal kingdom.
 - When the truth of Jesus' judgement breaks through to you and you see your friends, family, and co-workers standing before the throne of judgement you can see how critical it is that we keep heralding the truth.
 - And when the truth of Jesus' return breaks through to you all that matters is that you, your family, and those you know learn the truth about God, about sin, about Jesus, and about eternity.
- Let us be a church that gives utmost importance to heralding the word. Let us be Christians who devote ourselves to this word, to allowing it to correct us, rebuke us, and encourage us. Let us herald the word.