

two chapters of Genesis, the record of human history as we know it, it's ten times God saying something, God speaking, God communicating, God sending forth his word. And then seven times it says, "And God saw."

So God would say something and then he would see that exactly what he wanted happened because God's Word proceeds powerfully, and it does exactly what God sends it to accomplish. And so God's Word goes out and it creates life. God's Word is a life-giving word. It exposes darkness; it brings in light. It also divides; it divides people from animals, and sky from land, and water from the rest of creation. There are these separations and divisions that come in, and God's Word does all of those things.

When God speaks things happen, things change, and life comes into being. And so the teaching of the Bible is in Hebrews 11, that God spoke creation into existence. That all that is comes from the very Word of God. And so first of all we learn in the Bible that God is a God who preaches. He sends forth his Word powerfully, and it affects change in his creation.

SATAN PREACHES

As we move forward to Genesis 3, we also learn that Satan preaches. And very early on we read this, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Did God really say?'"

So in Genesis 1 and 2, ten times God says something, then in Genesis 3, Satan comes along with his own sermon and he preaches it to our first parents, Adam and Eve, "Did God really say? Is that really what God meant? Couldn't it be like this? Couldn't it be like that?" And all of a sudden there's confusion. I believe it's a literal serpent, but it's also Satan. This evil spirit being that God made good, but he corrupted himself and became evil. And here there's confusion, and now there's two conflicting sermons.

God said, "You can eat from any tree that is in the garden with the exception of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Satan comes along and says, "Is that what God really said?" And then Satan actually contradicts the Word of God, and he says, "God is basically lying to you. You shouldn't believe him; he's just trying to rob you of all of your glory. You could be like God, knowing good and evil."

I want you to see that there is this conflict between truth and lies, between good and evil, between light and darkness. And it's been this way since Genesis 3. So much so that here we see Satan showing up to our first father, Adam, in a garden and preaching a false sermon to him. Later comes Jesus, the last Adam, and Satan shows up to him in a wilderness, and he comes preaching to Jesus.

Here's what we read in Matthew 4:3 and 4, "The Tempter," that's Satan, the serpent, the dragon, "came to him," that is Jesus, saying, "'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.'" In context, Jesus had been out in the wilderness forty days and forty nights; he'd been fasting and praying, he's obviously hungry and tired. And Satan shows up and preaches a sermon.

Satan's sermon is, "Do what I want and I'll give you what you want." It's still the same sermon that he tends to preach. "I'll give you whatever you want, just do what I want." It's an issue of worship. It's an issue of obedience, and allegiance, and alliance. Well, unlike our first father, Adam, and his wife, Eve, who believed the false sermon of Satan and fell into sin, Jesus rejected Satan's sermon. He said no to the lies, he said yes to the truth, and he repeatedly quotes from the book of Deuteronomy saying, "No, this is what the Word of God says." And he goes to war with Satan with the Word of God.

That's why the Bible uses the imagery in the Scriptures in places like Hebrews and Ephesians that it's like a sword. So when Satan comes with lies, you need the truth. When Satan comes to tempt you, you need to combat him with the truth of God's Word. And where Satan sadly convinced our first parents to believe his lies and to follow his false sermon, Jesus remains true to the Word of God. He does not sin, he quotes the Scriptures, and he fends off this demonic, satanic attack.

Now here's why this is important: not all preaching is good. Not all preaching is biblical. Not all preaching honors God. The Bible goes on to talk about false teachers, false prophets, false apostles. People who say that they speak for God, and they don't. In fact, Satan is using them to communicate lies.

And I'm not talking about secondary issues. I'm not. We have male elders; some churches have women elders. We believe that all the spiritual gifts, like speaking in tongues, exist today; some churches have grave concern of that, or rejection regarding that. There are some things that we would disagree with other Bible-believing, Jesus-loving Christians, but they're not necessarily false teachers, false apostles, they're not working for Satan. Those are secondary issues.

We're talking primary issues. Groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses who come knock on your door, and say, "You want to do a Bible study?" "Well, you have a different view of Jesus, the Bible, than we do." Mormons, same thing. And I tend not to be overtly political, and I don't mean to pick a fight, though I might have a hard time getting the toothpaste back in the tube after I say this, but we've even got a situation right now where, with the "I am Mormon" campaign, the Mormon Church is trying to present itself as another Christian denomination. It's not. It's a different religion.

Doesn't mean we don't love Mormons; we do. It doesn't mean we won't open the Scriptures with Mormons; we will. But it does mean that if you think that the same thing being taught in the Mormon Church is the same thing being taught in the Christian Church, you've been deceived. Because they have a totally different view of Jesus, and a totally different view of salvation.

So we live in a day when you can't just say, "I want to be teachable and I want to learn." And some of you are new Christians, non-Christians. Some of you are very teachable, you're very eager, you want to learn, and I would say, "Great. Praise be to God." And since we live in a day when so much preaching and teaching is available, and so much of it is free on the Internet, it's a wonderful opportunity, but it's also a wonderful opportunity for false

teaching.

So be careful, and be discerning. Just like you tell kids, "Don't put everything in your mouth." Right? Be a little discerning about what you receive for spiritual nourishment and sustenance. Because not only is it God who's preaching, Satan's also preaching. It's not only God who sends out preachers, it's Satan who sends out preachers as well.

PROPHETS PREACHED

Now, God sends out a series of Old Testament preachers. So we start with God and Satan, and we're going to do a little biblical theology, and think through the storyline of the Bible. And God sends forth prophets, and prophets preach.

You see this in the Old Testament. Over two hundred times a prophet says, "Thus saith the Lord." So when a prophet speaks, they're saying, "God gave me a word, and I'm his instrument, I'm his vehicle, I'm his messenger." And they'll preach the Word of God, or write the Word of God, or both.

And so there is this succession of Old Testament prophets. Many of the books of our Bible, prophets. Daniel, prophet. Isaiah, prophet. Jeremiah, prophet. Zechariah, prophet. Prophets throughout the Old Testament. And it culminates with the last, greatest Old Testament prophet, John the Baptizer. And we read about him in Matthew 3:1-3, "John the Baptist came," what? "Preaching."

There's a lot of preaching in your Bible. It's really peculiar to me that there are certain groups or even networks of churches that are opposed to preaching. That they would jettison preaching. And sometimes what they're really struggling with is the authority of God's Word. They don't want anyone to open the Bible and say, "Here's what God says."

Well, John the Baptist was a guy who was living in a day when there were a lot of religious, moral, spiritual people. Some people loved the Lord, but some people pretended they loved the Lord when really they didn't. And they had sin in their life that they were unwilling to deal with and recognize.

So, he came preaching. John's a preacher. He's an Old Testament preacher. He's preparing the way for the coming of Jesus. "John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 'Repent.'" That's what preachers do. They preach what? Repentance. The Bible is not taught were repentance is not required. Because the assumption is that we're all sinners and that there is sin in our life that we need to bring to God so that it could be changed that we would not continue in the pattern of life that has been in rebellion.

Now, here's what happens when repentance is preached: some people love it, some people hate it. You get very strong reactions. If you read the Old Testament, what tended to happen to the prophets? They got killed. The only way to silence them was to murder them. And what happens when repentance is preached, you get very strong, sometimes violent emotional reactions. Because repentance is saying, "That's wrong. 'What you believe, that's wrong. What you're doing, that's wrong.'"

And you know what, two thousand years later, it's still this way. Correct? I mean, you could say it nice, and loving, and gracious, with a smile, and put your pointed finger in your pocket so you're not even pointing at people, and say, "That's wrong, you're wrong." And they're still going to react angrily, violently, or humbly and repentantly.

The Puritans had an old line. They would say, "The same sun that melts the ice, hardens the clay." Some people are very tender toward the Lord, and when they hear about their sin and their need to repent and change, their heart melts. They're like, "Oh, you're right. Oh, I feel terrible about that. I need God to help me. I want that to change." They melt.

Other people, they become very hardened. "How dare you? You have no right. That's very unloving. Let's talk about your life, not mine. Let me grab my Internet access and share this with the world. I'm sure there's others who would agree with me." It can escalate very, very quickly.

Well, John was that kind of guy: "Repent. Repent." Now let me say this. Sadly, repentance is not something that is very common, even in the church today. Instead, what has happened is therapy has overtaken theology. And I'm not opposed to all therapy, and trying to help people, and trying to help people get off drugs and alcohol, and all those addictions and compulsions. We love people; we want them to get help. There's a lot of truth through general revelation that can be found in the social sciences. And I'm not denigrating that at all.

But a therapeutic model begins with this assumption: you're basically a good person, and what is holding you back are the sins of others, and the nature of the culture; so what we need to do, we need to encourage you to love yourself, to esteem yourself, to embrace yourself, so that you could maximize your goodness.

Now, the Bible says, "You're bad." Completely different assumption. And you don't need to just embrace yourself; you need to become a new self. You don't need to just accept who you are; you need to have God change who you are. And what you don't need is just to feel better; you need to be new.

So it's a very different set of assumptions that are working for how to deal with the human condition. And so a Christian will come along and say, "Let's talk about repentance." Whereas a non-Christian will come around and talk about something other than repentance. "Do you love yourself? Do you have a high self-esteem? Do you feel good about yourself? Are you actualizing your potential? Do you know how wonderful you could be? Are you achieving your dreams?" And it's not centered on God as the standard of holiness and right and wrong. It's centered more on my feelings and my vision for my life, and whether or not I feel like I am getting the support that I need to become the person I desire.

Conversely, the Christian message is, "Who is God? Who are we? What does God say we are? What does God see we do? And where do we need to

repent? Where do we need to have a change of mind to agree with God? Where do we need to have a change of nature to be connected to God? Where do we need to have a change in desire so that we would desire to obey God?" You see the difference? Completely different.

And so what you're not going to get apart from Christianity is a strong call to repentance. But when the Bible is open, and the preacher speaks, it should be repentance. And that's John the Baptizer following in the line of all of the Old Testament prophets. Repentance. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

And so a prophecy was given by the prophet Isaiah, hundreds of years prior, that John the Baptizer would come, and he would prepare people for the coming of Jesus by preaching repentance. What this means is you can't understand Jesus apart from repentance. Jesus doesn't come along just to make us better; he comes along to make us new. Jesus doesn't come along to just make us feel better; he comes along to tell us the truth, and that he loves us. And we feel good about his love, but we feel good about his love after we feel bad about our sin.

Not only does John the Baptizer preach, he receives a strong reaction. What do they ultimately do to John the Baptizer? They behead him. They behead him because they couldn't get him to stop preaching repentance of sin. And the only way to silence him was to behead him.

JESUS PREACHED

Moving right along, we've looked at God preaching, Satan preaching, the Old Testament prophets preaching. What about the Lord Jesus? Well, the Lord Jesus is a preacher. Jesus preached. I'll give you two examples of where this happens in Scripture. But here's the big idea: very few people conceive of Jesus as a preacher. We think of him hanging out with children, and feeding people, and caring for people, and healing people, and doing miracles, all of which is true. But a lot of Jesus' time was preaching, was preaching. Oftentimes in open air, sometimes in synagogues.

We read of an occasion in Luke 4:16-18, Jesus "went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day," that was the Saturday, "and he stood up to read." So the synagogue was like the church. The people would get together on Saturday. We now gather on Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection. Someone would read Scripture. Someone would give a teaching. There would be prayers, perhaps singing, giving of the offering. The Old Testament synagogue system was a scattered set of places, houses of worship, that very much is like the church as we know it today.

Jesus stood up to read. "And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news.'" Very early on in Jesus' ministry, he opens up the scroll, so their version of the Bible, it's the same content. It was on one long scroll.

And he goes all the way down to the point, I think if memory serves me correct, in Isaiah 61 where it says through Isaiah, some seven hundred years prior, it was prophesied that Jesus would come, and that the Holy Spirit would be upon him so that he could be a powerful preacher. And he could proclaim good news, that's the gospel. This is about his death, burial, resurrection, in our place, for our sins.

And Isaiah prophesied this, Jesus comes, reads it, and then he says this, he says, "Today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus says, "That's me. I'm the Spirit-anointed preacher. God among you." Here's what I want you to see. Jesus is a preacher. Jesus is a preacher.

We get this, as well, I'll give you one other occasion in Scripture, in Matthew 4:17, "From that time on Jesus began to," what? "Preach, saying," what? "Repent." So what did they do to Jesus? They killed him as well.

Now, here's what I want to say, Jesus fed people, but they didn't crucify him for that. Jesus healed people, but they didn't crucify him for that. Jesus cared for widows, orphans, the poor, the marginalized, the outcast, and the abused, and they didn't kill him for that. Jesus loved women who were despised even in their own community, and he befriended them. But they didn't kill him for that. Jesus loved his mother, and they didn't kill him for that.

Why did they kill Jesus? Because of his preaching. Because he kept saying things like, "I'm God. You're a sinner. I'm here to save you. Repent." And when they didn't, just like they treated the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptizer before him, they ascertain the only way to silence him was to kill him. And so they crucified Jesus. Of course he rose three days later to keep on preaching.

What's your picture of Jesus? I would submit to you that the average person today, even the average evangelical Christian, sees Jesus more as a therapist than a preacher. Someone who listens a whole lot more than he talks. Someone who understands you a lot more than someone who makes demands of you. Someone who sympathizes with you far more than someone who rebukes you. On the scale of therapist to full-throated prophet, where is your primary view of Jesus?

See, if Jesus is only therapist, he doesn't tell you what to do, he just listens. He doesn't judge you, he just tries to sympathize. He doesn't tell you you're wrong, he doesn't tell you to repent, he doesn't tell you to change. He's there to be a friend, a comforting presence, a kind ear, and a nice, gentle encourager. But the Jesus of the Bible, if he were not a preacher, he'd still be alive today. He would not have ever died. Of course we know Jesus is alive today, and he's exalted. He's back in heaven and he's ruling and reigning.

But much of his ministry life on the earth was about what? Preaching. Sometimes it was small groups, sometimes it was large groups. Sometimes Jesus, quite frankly, assembled a megachurch, thousands, thousands. It says on certain occasions that people would walk for hours across rugged terrain to listen to him preach. Sometimes it was thousands of men, plus the women, plus the children. You're looking at large crowds of people coming to hear Jesus what? Preach.

Now, we don't have the full transcripts of Jesus' sermons, things like the Sermon on the Mount, it's a summary of a long sermon. How do we know the sermons were long? Well, sometimes it says everybody got really, really hungry. They'd been there a long time. And so we don't have the full sermon transcripts, but what we do hear is Jesus was a preacher, and he preached repentance of sin, and the coming of the kingdom of heaven. What he had was a sense of urgency, "Now is the time. Sin is a problem, and time is of the essence." So at Mars Hill Church what we believe is that preaching is incredibly important.

APOSTLES PREACHED

So Jesus hands off this prophetic ministry of preaching after his death, burial, and resurrection, he hands it off to his apostles. I want you to see that in the history of the world, from creation all the way to the end, God always has preaching going on.

Here's what we read of the apostles and their preaching, at the end of Mark's Gospel Jesus says this, "He said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim,'" that's preach, some of your translations will say, "preach." "The gospel," that's the good news about Jesus' death, burial, resurrection in our place, for our sins. Our God came on a rescue mission. He did it. He fulfilled all the Scriptures. Everything he said was true. Our God conquered sin. Our God conquered death. Our God is alive. Our God loves us. Go tell people.

"Proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." Tell the whole planet. "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Do you see the strong reaction again? Jesus says, "Some people are going to love you. Some people are going to hate you. Some people are going to go to heaven. Some people are going to go to hell. Some people are going to open their hearts to the Lord. Some people are going to close their hearts to the Lord." And it's going to come through preaching. It's going to come through preaching. This is going to be a hard job, right?

So what do they do to the apostles? They kill them too, all but John the Beloved, the youngest disciple. In so far as we can tell from history, they all died a martyr's death. How many of you guys coming in here, if I were to say, "Do you want to be a preacher?" You'd say, "Yeah." "Do you want to be hated and killed?" Hand goes down. "No." But when you raise your hand to be a preacher, you're raising your hand to be hated. You're raising your hand to be opposed. You're raising your hand to be despised if you preach repentance.

Because again, the same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay. Some people love the preaching of God's Word, some people hate it. Some people love to repent of their sin. Some people hate to be reminded that they even are a sinner.

So the church is birthed with a sermon. Act 2:14, we see Peter, he's the leader of the disciples, first among equals, his name is always listed first. They're all gathered together and Peter stands up, and the New Testament church is birthed, and the Holy Spirit descends on the church to anoint, and appoint the church, to continue the ministry of Jesus after he's ascended back into heaven.

We read, "Peter, standing with the eleven," so he's with the rest of the apostles. "Lifted up his voice and addressed them." And then he preaches a sermon. The New Testament, New Covenant church is birthed through the preaching of a sermon. A Spirit-anointed, Spirit-appointed sermon about Jesus.

Now, if you read the rest of the book of Acts from there, almost every single chapter of the entire book of Acts has a sermon in it. The book of Acts, for those of you who are perhaps new to Christianity, it's like our early history book. It's a chronological telling of how the early church got started after the resurrection of Jesus. And how Christianity spread from those who are Jewish, to those who are non-Jewish.

There are other places in the New Testament you can learn about the early church, but it's really packed in historical fashion in the book of Acts. This would be something interesting for you. Just read the book of Acts, you will see almost every single chapter has preachers preaching in sermons.

Roughly the only exceptions are when a preacher has preached here and he's traveling to here, and that chapter is about his traveling to go preach somewhere else. Or, it records that they took the preacher and put him in jail so he couldn't preach anymore. And then even sometimes he converts people in jail, and he preaches to the jailers.

So the book of Acts is a lot of preaching. And here's what you'll find, every single sermon in the books of Acts—and I've gone through and I've investigated every single one—talks about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death. That's the essence of Christian preaching. Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus was buried, Jesus rose, Jesus is alive, everything he said about being God, forgiving sin, it's all true. And his resurrection proves he's not just a good man, he's the God-man. He's in a category unto himself. He's not like any other religious leader or teacher.

We also see in the book of Acts the apostles preaching. Some of their sermons are really long. Way longer than mine. You're welcome. Some of them are super long. There's an occasion in Acts 20, it says basically that Paul preached until midnight. And one kid named Eutychus, probably in the youth group, he got so tired he fell asleep, fell out a window, and died. That's a sermon right there. And Paul came out and healed him, and made him go back and listen to more preaching, I'd assume. But some of the sermons are really long. Again, in the book of Acts we have summaries of what was said. We don't have the full transcript of what was said. But some of the sermons were indeed very, very long.

PASTORS PREACH

So God preaches, Satan preaches, prophets preach, all the way up to John the Baptizer, the last Old Covenant prophet, preaches. Jesus comes preaching. He sends out apostles to do preaching. And this leads to our day, in which pastors preach.

Titus 1:9, "He," speaking of an elder, the word here is also referencing what we would call a pastor. These various words like "pastor" and "elder,"

they're synonymous in places like 1 Peter 5 and Acts 20. "Elder" tends to be more of the office, "pastor" tends to be the job description of loving the people.

The Bible talks about the fact that Jesus is our good shepherd and the people in the church are like sheep that Jesus loves, and part of his flock. And that there are wolves out there, false teachers, sent by Satan with false sermons to lead people astray. So God raises up shepherds to care for the flock and to serve under Jesus, the chief shepherd.

Here, "He" an elder, so that's this pastor/elder, "must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught." So to be a pastor or an elder in the church, you need to have sound doctrine, know the Bible, believe the truth. "So that he may be able to," do two things, "give instruction in sound doctrine and to rebuke those who contradict it."

So a pastor is supposed to do two things: teach what the Bible teaches, and correct errors with the Bible. Because again, Satan's going to send in false teachers, false apostles, false prophets, false preachers, false doctrine. Sometimes this is people in the church. Acts 20 speaks of this, "Men will arise from your own number, distort the truth, and lead many astray."

Let me say that the greatest threat to the health and well-being of any church, including ours, is not all those people out there, it's us. When you're relationally connected to someone, when you know someone, when you love someone, and they start to go astray, it's hard to say, "You're starting to smell like a wolf. What you're teaching isn't biblical. Where you're going isn't godly. You're trying to divide people and bring them in your direction to start your own church, or ministry, or cult, or cause suspicion about other leaders. You're being divisive." Sometimes it's for the money. Sometimes it's for the power. Oftentimes behind such sin is sexual sin and really dark agendas for the abuse of others.

So what a pastor is to do is two things: Teach the truth, be a good shepherd, look after the sheep; and deal with the wolves, and the false teaching, and the false doctrine, to keep the church healthy. When Paul admonishes in the New Testament sound doctrine, it's the Greek word for "healthy." We just don't want to have a church where, you know, our theology is like a crossword puzzle, and we all got all the blanks filled in. We want to have robust, healthy, biblical teaching about Jesus so that, like a well-balanced diet, you can be healthy, repent, grow, love Jesus, mature, help others. That's what sound doctrine is, it's healthy.

Pray for your church, would you? Pray for your leaders. Not just your elders, deacons, Community Group leaders, Redemption Group leaders. As we spread now, and we're a church in fourteen locations across four states, and growing, can you imagine the complexity of the weird teaching that comes in the door?

And everywhere it's different. The closer you get to the urban centers, it's all about sexual identity. Sometimes you get out into the suburbs and its people who got bored with Christian evangelicalism and started drifting off into weird, tangential doctrines. You go down to New Mexico and it's trying to take Jesus and co-mingle him with demonism, and superstition, and native religions. You go down into Portland and Jesus is just a hippie, that's all he is, just a guy walking around homeless, growing his own food, but he's not Lord, God, Savior, King, and Christ. He's got a hacky sack, but no throne.

Here's how it works historically: when a bunch of people become Christians, cults come right in behind that. They like to pick off all the new Christians who don't know the difference yet. We have so many new Christians at Mars Hill. We want to make sure, that yeah, they're growing in love. We also want to make sure that they know what true and false doctrine is so that they can grow in godliness and love for Jesus, and not get off track.

We've actually had certain religions send in their leaders with their name tags on, into the foyers of our churches on Sunday. Met a couple of guys wearing name badges that said "elder." Won't tell you what team they were on, but they rode their bikes to church. And anyways, they're walking around with name badges "elder" and I'm in the foyer, I'm like, "I don't know Pete and Repeat. I don't know who those two guys are."

I walk up, I was like, "Hey, welcome, are you guys elders?" They're like, "Yes, we are." I was like, "In what church? Not this one, because I would know. Probably." We do have a lot of elders. And they said, "Oh, we're from this, you know, other religion." I said, "Well, if you want to stay, take the name badge off that says 'elder.'" I said, "Why would you wear the name badge that says 'elder?'" "Well, in case anybody needs prayer or wants to talk." "Oh, you're going to need prayer, and we're going to talk. You know?" But other religions showing up pretending to be our own leaders in our foyer on a Sunday.

Sometimes you will hear, "Oh, you know, sometimes the elders, boy, they were pretty stern with that." Or, "They were pretty serious." Or, "Boy, that kind of got complicated." Well, sometimes it's this, we don't want to just teach sound doctrine, we also have to correct and refute the stuff that's not just secondary issues, Christians who love the Bible and Jesus disagree, and it's an internal family debate. We're talking about big issues that cross the boundary into false teaching.

So pastors are supposed to preach, and they're supposed to teach. At Mars Hill this means elders and pastors will do one-on-one, small groups, classes, Sunday services. I tend to preach live a lot. When I'm out we have live preaching at all of the different Mars Hill churches. We have Re:Train, which is a school that I think half a dozen seminaries have received the credit from now for a degree program, under the leadership of Pastor Dave Bruskas and Pastor Justin Holcomb.

We have something called Q School, it's a qualifying school, elders who want to preach have to go through preparation, and testing, and training, and then we send them actually through an approval process, kind of like "American Idol" without as much pain. So that they can get up and preach and we can evaluate them, and give them feedback. So there's a whole mechanism in place.

And if you're here and you're saying, "I feel called to preach." We would say, "Then qualify first as an elder." 'Cause only pastors preach. I'll show you where we get that. It's in this handy dandy book I found. Right here in 1 Timothy 5:17-19, "Let the elders," the pastors, "who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." He says, "Honor all your elders, and those who preach and teach, make sure you honor them." "Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses." So, those who are preaching and teaching are supposed to be the who? The elders.

We go back in 1 Timothy 3, just a few chapters previously, it gives the qualifications of an elder. So 1 Timothy 3, it says, "Here's what an elder is." And then 1 Timothy 5 says, "Here's what an elder does, preaching and teaching." If you feel called to preach, men, do first qualify as an elder.

Only the elders preach, and not all the elders preach on Sunday. They'll teach in other situations. And some elders preach on Sunday depending upon their gifting. Some are better one on one. Some are better in class. Some are better in dialogue. Some are better in smaller groups, medium-sized groups. Some work better in larger services. It's everybody using their gift wherever it works best, and wherever God has appointed them.

HONOR PREACHERS

I would say this, honor preachers. Okay, this is not me. You guys do honor me, you love me, I appreciate it. I'm very honored to preach at Mars Hill Church, and I feel very free to preach the Word of God, and I'm very grateful for that. But here's what I would ask you, be careful not to speak ill of other preachers. If they say something heretical, or they're leading people astray, then, yeah, other leaders need to come along for the well-being of the flock and say, "Well, let's not listen to that because that's really not right. And hopefully they straighten that out."

But what can happen is, especially in an age of sound bites, and edits, and misquotes, there are some very godly people that endure some very ungodly gossip. Anywhere that the preacher loves Jesus and teaches the Bible, we're for it. Amen? We're just for it.

Some of you say, "I wouldn't do it that way." Well, that's fine. But if they love Jesus, and they're teaching the Bible, they may do it different than we do, they may do it different than I do, it may not be our style, may not be the way we go about it. But you know what, we're not Jesus. And the church belongs to Jesus. And Jesus can judge whether or not certain methods or styles are acceptable or unacceptable to him.

Early on, one of my sins was being jealous of great preachers because they were so gifted, and they were so successful, and some of them were so famous. That rather than being humble, and listening, and learning, and asking, "How could I grow to do a better job?" I got jealous, and I get critical. "Oh, I could do that better than them. They don't read very well. They missed that point. I agree with all of that but they missed this one thing."

I always love it when people introduce a preacher and they're like, "I don't agree with everything he says" like, who does? I'll tell you what, I don't agree with everything I've said. Right? I look back and I'm like, "Oh, wow, sorry." I preach an inerrant Word; I don't proclaim to be an inerrant word.

Be gracious when you're hearing preachers. If it's pastors from other churches, you go to visit a friend's church, come with a gracious ear, pray for the preacher, honor the preacher, be teachable, see what you can learn. As other pastors teach at Mars Hill would you please come with a gracious ear of honoring? Like, "I want to pray for them. I want to encourage them. I want to have ears to hear. I want to learn what I can. I want to receive whatever God has for me through them." And if there's false doctrine, yeah, we'll deal with it. In the grace of God, there's not.

But this issue of honor, think about it today. There's so little honor that's shown anybody, let alone preachers. We live in a day where for free you can download amazing Bible teachers. And I would encourage you, redeem your commute, listen to Bible preachers, praise God for them, pray for them, support their ministries if you want to send them a gift for all the goodness you've received.

But let's be a people who honor preaching, who honor preachers, because they have enough opposition from Satan. They have enough problems fighting wolves. And they're just regular men who are struggling in the grace of God to do the best they can.

One of the ways we honor preachers is this, "Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses." Now, in the age of the Internet, it's amazing. Something gets said that's not true, and then it gets commented upon, and then it becomes a big deal about something that never happened. Or something gets taken out of context.

Again I'm not talking about me, I don't feel dishonored in Mars Hill. But I do want to establish a culture at Mars Hill, and I want us to be a people that we give Bible teachers the benefit of the doubt. That they're innocent until proven guilty. And guilty is not necessarily determined by a Facebook discussion group.

There's a difference between a charge and a criticism. Do you know what the difference is? A charge is an actual allegation of actual wrongdoing. Like committed adultery, taught false doctrine, stole money. A criticism is, "I don't like them. I don't agree. I wouldn't have said it like that." Be careful to only bring a charge and not to treat a criticism as a charge.

And, man, I don't think I should say this, but I will anyway— My theological convictions lean more toward what is known as Reformed theology. John Calvin, Martin Luther, people like that are very influential to me, and I appreciate them very much. But what I find with some who hold the same convictions I do, they start to treat preaching like wine tasting. My friend James MacDonald uses this analogy, "Oh, hints of Calvin with tannins of Luther. Mmm, that's very Lloyd Jonesesque with a sweet Spurgeon aftertaste." And all of sudden they start criticizing, and disrespecting, and dishonoring faithful Bible teachers.

I had a guy recently say, "Well, he's an Arminian." I was like, "He's an Arminian Christian Bible teacher who's nice, so I like him more than you because you're not nice." I want us to be a people who pray for preachers, who honor preachers, who hold preachers to a high standard. And if there's

a charge, it needs to be investigated. But there's a difference between a criticism and a charge.

And while you're at it pray for me. James 3:1 says, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers because teachers are going to be judged more strictly." I get that. I feel that. I honestly feel the weight of the burden of responsibility of the task that the Lord has called me to.

But, man, when we have preachers come to Mars Hill, or our conferences, or events, or other elders are teaching, please honor them, don't dishonor them. Please don't make it your task to criticize them. And don't think that just because they're different than what you like, that they're disobedient to the Lord.

PREACH THE WORD

So, that being said, I love this verse, this is the Tweet-able verse on preaching in all of Scripture. "Preach the," what? "Preach the Word." Second Timothy 4:2. He just says it. "Preach the Word." This is the Word of God. This is where preaching is so important. Preaching says that the Bible is true, and through the Word of God, God speaks. So the preacher is to open the book and to teach the people.

Now, there are lots of books that are words about God. People's opinions about God. This is the Word of God. This is the Word from God. This is the only perfect thing on the Earth, right? We believe the Bible, okay?

I've done this many times, but I guess I'll do it again right now. There are really only two views of the Bible. This is one view of the Bible, okay? I interpret it, I'm in authority over it, if I don't like it I can ignore it, if I don't believe it I get to change it, if I find it inconvenient I can alter it, I can explain it away, I can say no, I can edit it as I please. I'm in authority over the Scriptures. That's treating it like it was a word about God. Just another book by some other people giving their opinions too.

Friends, that's not our view of the Scriptures. Our view of the Scriptures is this: It's the Word of God. It's not something under us, it's something over us. It's not something that we have authority over; it's something that we're under the authority of. It's not something that we can edit and change because this is what God says.

You hear this all the time, "Well, can't you just change that?" Edit God? Uh, no. I don't feel free to edit God with my three-pound fallen brain that went to public school. I don't feel I have the right to edit God. I'm not smart, but I'm smart enough to know I'm not that smart.

And so our view is, "No, we come under the Word of God." And preaching is where the Word of God is opened up, and the people of God sit under the Word of God. So let me tell you what you're doing right now, worshiping. Sitting, listening to the Word of God is an act of worship.

It's saying, "I'm under authority of the Word of God and leaders." It's saying, "I want to learn something, I don't know it all." It's saying, "I know there's sin in my life, and by the grace of God, if the preacher through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God can help me find it and deal with it, I welcome that." It's sitting with the people of God, as an act of worship, saying, "And we're in this together, and we all belong to Jesus, and we're here to obey, and apply, and explore the Word of God together."

You're not just sitting there, you're worshiping God by being teachable. Thank you. By listening. Thank you. By being willing to consider what the Scriptures have to say. And I'm not saying that I'm always right, and when I'm wrong I'm open to correction, and I want to do the best job I can.

HOW DO WE PREACH THE WORD?

Couple of things in closing about preaching. So how do we preach the Word? There are three different ways.

Expository Preaching

There's expository preaching, where we go right through books of the Bible. At Mars Hill Church, that's been, generally speaking, our bread and butter. I don't know how many books of the Bible I've taught, a lot of them. We just finished Luke, we spent 2 years in Luke. They always tell you, "You want to grow your church, do a short series with short sermons." So we did an hour in Luke for two years, and it worked. So, you know, it's a great book, and we find that people like the Bible.

Some people say, "You can't go all the way through books of the Bible." You can. And what it does, it forces you to deal with stuff you wouldn't otherwise deal with. And it helps people learn how to study the Bible in context for themselves. And I think it also makes sure that you're not just following whatever the preacher's wanting to say. You're following whatever's in the book of the Bible that you're in, by the grace of God.

So, here's what's coming up for us as far as expository teaching: In the fall we're going to do the book of Esther. Yeah, okay, so one person's fired up. Great, okay. Now we're up to two, you and me. We're up to two. We're doubled, awesome. We get two more, we're up to four, double again, okay.

So, the book of Esther we're going to start this fall in September, crazy book. Like nobody preaches it. Nobody. The Reformers, they treated it like Superman did kryptonite. "We just kind of keep some distance from that. That's just a strange book." Young, beautiful girl sleeps with the king to the glory of God—huh? So we're going to unpack Esther, okay. We're going to unpack Esther. And then after Esther we're going to do Ephesians, starting in January. We're going to spend sixteen weeks, go all the way through the book of Ephesians. I've got a book coming out, and we're just going to go all the way through the book of Ephesians.

Textual Preaching

The second form of preaching is textual. This is where you don't take a whole book of the Bible, but you take a section. So when we did "The Seven" series recently, we looked at Revelation 1, 2, and 3, that was textual preaching. It's looking at a chunk of Scripture, not the whole book. We're going to have that coming up as well. Next summer we're going to do the Ten Commandments, Lord willing. So we'll just be looking at a chunk of Scripture.

Topical Preaching

And the third is topical, which I'm doing today in the "Jesus Loves His Church" series. This is where you take big ideas and themes through the Bible, and you put them together into unified concepts. What's baptism? What's Communion? What's preaching? Looking across the storyline of the Bible, looking at the threads and the big ideas that weave certain concepts together.

So at Mars Hill the bread and butter is expository, books of the Bible. We do some textual series, looking at chunks of certain books of the Bible. And sometimes we do topical series, looking at big ideas in the Bible, pulling sections of Scripture together.

WE PREACH JESUS

Now, let me give you a few things in closing at Mars Hill. Number one, we preach Jesus. We preach Jesus. Our belief is that the whole Bible is ultimately about Jesus. That he is the God who made the heavens and the earth. That he's the one we've rebelled and sinned against. That he's the one who's come in human flesh on a rescue mission, to save us from Satan, sin, death, hell, and the wrath of God. That he has lived the sinless life that we have not lived. That he died a substitutionary death on the cross that we should die. That he was buried and three days later he rose. That for forty days he evidenced his resurrection from death to crowds large and small. He then ascended into heaven. He commissioned the church, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to continue getting his message out to the world, until he comes again to judge the living and the dead, and establish a kingdom that never ends. That's our Jesus.

We believe the whole Bible from beginning to end is ultimately about Jesus. There are other things in there, but that's the big idea. Jesus taught this at the end of Luke's Gospel. He opened the Law and the Prophets and he explained to them how everything in the Old Testament was about him. Jesus said, "Not one dot or crossing of a *t* will go unfulfilled. I will fulfill everything in the Scriptures."

In John 5 Jesus was arguing with religious people and he said, "You diligently study the Scriptures thinking that in them you'll find eternal life. Yet you've failed to realize the Scriptures reveal me, and you don't come to me for life." Jesus said, "The whole point of the Bible is me." That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:22, "We preach Christ and him crucified."

Ultimately it's about Jesus. So it doesn't matter what we're talking about, marriage, Communion, baptism, friendship, whatever, we always talk about Jesus. And that's my promise to you, and my prayer request of you, please pray that we would always do a good job talking about Jesus. I don't know if you know this, he's alive. He's wonderful. He loves you. He'll forgive your sin.

WE FOLLOW THE PULPIT

Number two, we follow the pulpit. We believe that preaching leads and other things follow. So we hook up our Community Groups to the sermon series. So if you're not in a Community Group, get in a Community Group. What we talk about on Sunday is what they unpack and apply for mission, and life change, and friendship, and community during the week. There are now over six hundred groups, with over eight thousand people, meeting weekly. And so the preaching leads, and then the Community Groups follow up on the subject of the sermon.

WE LOVE TECHNOLOGY

Number three, we love technology because technology provides an opportunity. From sound systems, to cameras, to vodcast, to podcast, we praise God for the age of technology in which we live. I praise God. I got a degree in communications from one of the top programs in the country before something called the Internet came into existence. That's how old I am.

And then we start Mars Hill, in the providence of God, at about the same time, almost sixteen years ago, that the Internet goes public in the Puget Sound, with a bunch of guys, in a little company called Microsoft. And we have been riding the wave of the opportunity of the Internet for almost sixteen years. We don't have a PR firm behind us, we don't have a denomination. It's just us.

But since the mid to late '90s we've been taking sermons and giving them away for free on the Internet. And God multiplies that and he blesses that. This last year, the last twelve months, between the audio downloads, the video downloads, all of it, it's about 15 million downloads of just the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. We also have thirty-six services across four states. We have subtitles for those who are hearing impaired. We have Spanish translations for those who are non-primary English speakers. And I praise God for all the technology that we get to use. We don't apologize for it; we use it in the grace of God.

PREACHING IS FOR TRANSFORMATION

And number four, we believe preaching is not just for information but transformation. Jesus' own brother James says it this way, "Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." You can hear a lot preaching and teaching, but if you don't obey it, you're not benefiting from it. It's like watching vitamins you've never eaten. Close, but not the same effect. You can be aware of a lot of preaching and teaching, but if you don't obey it, you'll have information but not transformation.

So as you listen, I want you to be good listeners. Whether it's me, other leaders in the church, or other podcasts and vodcasts that you listen to. Always

be asking, "Holy Spirit what's in this for me? What do I need to do? Where do I need to repent? How do I need to think differently? Act differently? Where do I need to apologize? What's your word for me? What do you want me to know? How do you want me to respond?"

This is why we even organize our series of events on Sunday or Saturday depending upon your church, around the sermon. Have you noticed that the sermon is in the middle of the service at Mars Hill? You ever wondered why? Because we believe that you need to respond to the Word of God.

So after the preaching we take Communion. After the preaching you have time to repent. After the preaching you have time to give your life to Christ. After the preaching we give our tithes and offerings. After the preaching, if we have baptism that day, we do baptisms. After the preaching we do a lot of our singing to give you an opportunity to repent of sin, remember Jesus, partake of Communion, his body and blood, to repent, to be forgiven, to reconcile with others, and then to rejoice in God. So we don't want you to leave right after the sermon. It's God speaking to you, and then you responding. And that's why we put the sermon right in the middle of the service.

JESUS HAS LOVED MARS HILL CHURCH

Lastly, here's the question I get fairly often because I'm the primary preaching pastor. I love being your preaching pastor. I really do, I love my job. People ask, "What happens if something happens to you?" It's always the, "What happens if you get hit by a bus?" I never get hit by a car; I always get hit by a bus in the question. I guess I'm thick enough, maybe I could handle a car. But the question is always, "What if you get hit by a bus?"

And let me say a few things, number one, I have no intention of going anywhere, okay? I love Mars Hill and I'll preach at any Mars Hill, and I'm committed to Mars Hill, and my hope, prayer, goal is the same that it's always been. I would like to be the member of one church my whole life, Mars Hill Church. Okay. I'm forty-one, I still got some tread on the tires, we're not done yet.

So don't worry about me, I'm not going anywhere. I love our lead pastors. I love what I get to do. I love the way things are organized. It's not the same pressure on me that it once was. I love my executive elders with Pastor Sutton and Pastor Dave. Like, I'm really happy, I'm really encouraged, I feel very honored, I love you, I love Jesus, I love the church, I love what I do. So I don't plan on going anywhere.

Certain people are like, "I'm leaving my pastorate to go be a consultant, or conference speaker, or to do..." And I'm just like, "Really?" That's like a guy who says, "I quit eating, and now I'm eating lawn mowers." Like, "Why would you do that? That doesn't even make sense to me. You had this wonderful thing that you traded in for this other thing that's not nearly as wonderful." I love the church. I love you. I love us. I love him. I love what he does in us. I'm not going anywhere. Everything else to me would be an absolute downgrade in wonderfulness. I just made up a word.

And number two, I don't intend on dying. You know, it's like, a guy asked me recently, "What if you get hit by a bus?" It's like, I'm looking for a bus. You know? I keep getting this question. Is there a bus around? I mean, I expect to live a long time in the grace of God. My aunt, my family, I mean, they eat bad, drink hard, work laborers' jobs to one hundred. Yeah, we're Irish. I mean, we don't, we run rough, but we run for a long time. That's how we do it.

I expect to have a long life. I'm in good health. I got a great doctor. I plan on being here for a really long time. So let's say I don't die, okay, can we just make that plan too? Wouldn't that be weird, if your kids looked at you, they're like, "What happens if you die?" And you're like, "Look, man, how about I don't? Can we also plan for that?" Okay.

If something happens to me, I get sick, or something happens, the lead pastors at all the churches, as well as a number of our other elders, they can preach and are preaching, and they could assume the pulpit. So we could do a couple things, we could have one of our current elders, we have fifty-some with sixty more in process, we could have one of those elders, or a team of them cover the preaching via video. Number two, we could bring in somebody else from the outside. Number three, we could turn the fourteen churches over to various local elder teams with a different live preacher at every single one of the churches, making sure that we distribute the best preachers into the best spots because we have a lot of good preachers. So we got three options. And there is a pencil plan in place for that.

But hear me in this, in fifteen years, every single day, Jesus has loved Mars Hill Church. He's been so good to her. She's just a total miracle. I just love her with all my heart. I hope, and trust, and pray that God gives me many, many, many more years to preach and teach. I know that Jesus will continue to love his bride, Mars Hill Church, no matter what, and take care of her.

But hear me on this, let's make a plan that I live into my eighties. Let's make a plan that the first fifteen years were just the firstfruits, and a good start. Because this last year we saw more people baptized, more people meet Jesus, more lives get changed, more people in Community Groups, more people attend Sunday service, than any year in the history of the church. It was our best year ever. The year before that was previously the best year ever. The year before that was previously the best year ever. And the year before that was previously the best year ever.

You know what, it's getting better every year. More leaders, more salvations, more marriages, more children, more churches, more plants, more services, more people growing, more lives changing, by Jesus because he really does love this church. And so how about we make a plan that you and I, we just love what Jesus loves. We love this church and we see what the future holds for us together.

I give you my word, I'm the most excited I've ever been. I love preaching and teaching here. You are a wonderful people that I praise God for. I wouldn't trade you for any group I've ever seen on the Earth. I'm honored to teach you every single Sunday. Thank you for letting me do so. I'm very, very, very excited. Thank you. So here's what we're going to do, we're going to give you a chance to respond. I'll pray. You've heard, "God speaks, we respond," that's what we believe.

Father God, thank you for the Scriptures that we don't have to speculate who you are, what we've done, what we need, what you say, what you've done. You tell us. Thank you. Open our ears to hear. Open our minds to understand. Open our hearts to obey. God, I pray for all who would teach at Mars Hill. Those teaching in the kids' ministry, those teaching in Community Group, Redemption Groups, serving group, those who are mentoring, counseling, those are formally teaching, informally teaching, those who are teaching classes, those who are preaching services. Whatever it is, wherever it is. Lord Jesus, I pray that they be filled with the Holy Spirit, that they would teach the truth, that they would call people to repentance with love in their heart. And that people would respond by honoring the Scriptures and the Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray, amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.