

Pastor's Conference #3 - Sufficiency of the Word

by Alistair Begg

Alistair Begg's sermon underscores the critical importance of the sufficiency of Scripture in guiding the church amidst contemporary challenges.

Duration: 55:05

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 24:27, John 5:39, Romans 15:4, 2 Timothy 3:14-17, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Biblical Authority", "Pastoral Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the urgency and importance of preaching the word of God. He emphasizes the sufficiency of the Bible for salvation, transformation, and proclamation. The speaker highlights the current loss of conviction in the sufficiency of the Bible and the tendency for people to choose teachers who align with their own desires rather than seeking the truth. He encourages Timothy, and by extension all pastors, to keep their heads, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill all the duties of their ministry.

Transcript

Preach the Word, Leaders Training Seminar, Sufficiency of the Word, Alistair Begg. Applause Well, thank you for such a very kind introduction. I'm not sure I recognize myself in what's been said, but it is a privilege to be here.

I'm delighted to be back with Greg and the rest of the team, and also to be following my good friend Marty Goetz, whom I remember for many things, not least of all because he plays the piano without his shoes on. And those of you who haven't been close enough to him won't know this. You detect this through sight, not through one of the other senses, I can assure you.

And I do think that this is his secret. I haven't theologized it yet, but it is wonderful to be following him. I also recognize that while I was on the docket tomorrow morning, I was not on for today.

Greg has graciously not alluded to the fact that the reason that this very foundational message was given to John MacArthur was because we anticipated that John would do a most excellent job on it. John, however, has chosen a very unfortunate time to get unwell, and as a result, here I stand. I do feel bad for you, coming as you did, anticipating a cannon, and finding yourself confronted by a peashooter.

Referring to myself in that way, I don't mean to be proud. I've counted it a privilege to be the friend of John MacArthur for some 20 years. I met him when I was 26.

He came to Scotland, and from that day became a friend. One of the key examples, as Greg has said, to me in my own attempt at opening up and understanding and expounding the Scriptures, and I know that together we thank God for him and continue to remember him in our prayers. I myself am greatly strengthened by reminding myself, as I remind you, that our focus this morning, however, is not on the efficiency of the messenger, but is on the sufficiency of the message.

And it is perfectly plain throughout biblical and secular history that God has chosen to use some of the most unlikely people, some of the most ordinary people, in extraordinary ways, because he is determined to exalt above all things his name and his word. And therefore, I invite you to turn with me to the word of God as we find it in 2 Timothy and chapter 3. 2 Timothy chapter 3, and I would like to read, breaking into Paul's line of thought, from the 14th verse of this third chapter of 2 Timothy. Paul uses a little introductory statement, a clarifying statement, throughout this second letter.

It's two words in Greek, *su-de*. You find it, for example, in verse 1 of chapter 2, distinguishing Timothy from the rest of the group. He does the same again in verse 10 of chapter 3. He does it again here in verse 14 of chapter 3, and he does it again in verse 5 of chapter 4. Timothy, I want you to be distinctive in your generation, and it is with this little phrase in Greek that the 14th verse begins.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, I give you this charge.

Preach the word, be prepared in season and out of season, correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. Father, again we turn to you in our need and pray that you will make your book live to us, that you will show us your Son within your word, that you will show us ourselves, and that you will renew within us solid and lasting convictions regarding the abiding authority and sufficiency of all of your word.

For Jesus' sake, amen. I'm very glad to be following Chuck Smith in this respect, that he has just spoken on the importance of simplicity in the teaching of Scripture. And I do want to be as simple as I can.

I want to say, as something of a disclaimer, that my purpose is not to enter into some technical discourse on the nature of the sufficiency of Scripture, nor on the doctrine of inspiration itself. I think I'm fairly safe in assuming that that is familiar material to many of us, and that what our concern is is not so much to discover those principles and those truths, but it is, as with so many other aspects of our Christian living, to be reminded of them, and to be reinforced in them, and to be renewed in our commitment to them. I think in this respect we will be helped by reminding ourselves that the context in which Paul was writing to

Timothy was one of quite incredible confusion.

The church was facing a variety of threats, which were coming to it both externally and internally. And they were, from a human perspective, challenging, threatening the existence of the Christian community. Those who, from a human perspective, looked at the events of those days might have safely assumed, on the basis of their secular understanding, that the church would not make it into a subsequent generation.

Bishop Henley Moule, writing in an earlier generation of this, says, Christianity trembled, humanly speaking, on the verge of annihilation. And it was in this environment, not a very encouraging environment, but a very daunting environment, that this most unlikely of servants, young Timothy, was called to receive the baton of responsibility from his colleague, and his mentor, and his father in the faith. There was incredible persecution, which was unleashing itself on the church.

There was, we're told from the 10th verse of chapter 1, a wholesale defection on the part of many in the province of Asia. And if that were not bad enough, Timothy was also aware of the fact that what he was receiving from Paul was, according to Paul's understanding of things, his swan song. As verse 6 of chapter 4 makes clear, Paul was aware of the fact that his life was ebbing away, that he was living in this dingy dungeon in Rome, under the shadow of execution, and he recognized that the possibility of him being able to advance the ball, as it were, up the field for another first down in the cause of the gospel, was largely going from him.

And therefore, the pressing urgency of his life was to convey to this young man, Timothy, in an environment of manifold confusion, the absolute clarity, and authority, and sufficiency of the Scriptures. These were not truths that were new to Timothy, but they were necessary for Timothy, even as they are for us this morning. The confusion in Timothy's day was disparate, but it could be summarized in two thoughts.

Namely, that it was doctrinal confusion, inasmuch that people did not know what they were supposed to believe. And it was moral confusion, which, of course, will always accompany doctrinal confusion, insofar as the men and women in the congregations were just unclear as to how they ought to behave. So both in the realm of belief and in the realm of behavior, the church trembled on the brink, says Mill, of annihilation.

And here we are, and you don't have to be too brilliant to recognize that there is an immediate point of identification, despite the fact that we are removed by some 2,000 years from the events in Timothy's day. Because I think it is safe to argue that once again, right at this point in history, the church trembles on the brink of capitulation. More pressing than any other issue is the challenge of pluralism and syncretism.

And when the church is tempted to take on board anything other than the simplicity of the gospel and the sufficiency of Scripture, then it will always be in danger of capitulation. And its missionary zeal will diminish. And its desire to see unbelieving people becoming committed followers of Jesus Christ will begin to falter.

And more money will begin to be spent on political causes than on the evangelization of the world. The church trembles on the brink of capitulation. We live, at this point, at the end of the millennium, under tremendous pressure to capitulate to the idea that there is no unique revelation in history.

In other words, that Gaia and the belief in Mother Earth, that Buddhist notions, Hinduism, all of that smorgasbord of pluralism is actually the answer to the question. We live at a time in which truth has been

devalued and tolerance has been enthroned. And young men and women growing up in our churches with a kind of how-to Christianity, devoid of a solid understanding of biblical theology, are trembling on the brink of capitulation.

To capitulate to the notion that there are many different ways to reach the divine reality. To capitulate to the idea that all formulations of religious truth or religious experience are, by their very nature, inadequate expressions of that truth. To succumb to the notion that it is necessary to harmonize as much as possible all religious ideas and experience, so as to be able to create one universal religion for all mankind.

That is where we live today. And the great challenge is then to hold to the sufficiency of the Scripture in a context that not only in the secular realm, but in the ecclesiastical realm, is tottering on the brink of capitulation. Now, there are all kinds of things that contribute to it.

I don't want to digress and get myself in trouble immediately. Perhaps they will come out as I go along. In fact, I can pretty well guarantee they will.

Now, with that rambling introduction, the question is, what is the safeguard? What then is the safeguard in view of such a danger? Well, a renewed commitment to the sufficiency of the Scriptures. Because, unlike other religions of the world, when you take away this book, and the one of whom this book speaks, and the one to whom this book introduces us, we're done. We're left with moralism and platitudes and religious ideas and agendas and notions for the well-being of a culture, but we are devoid of authority, we are devoid of clarity, we have nothing really to say to our environment.

And therefore, the antidote to the threat from within and to the threat from without is to be renewed in our conviction regarding the matter that Paul conveys to Timothy here in these verses. Now, what Paul does is simply what Jesus himself had been doing. I'm sure all of us have decided that we have favorite points along the journey of the life of Christ, that if we were able to go back in a time-space capsule and be dropped down into that existential moment, we could tell one another where we would like to be.

Of all encounters and all occasions, in my estimation, one stands out more than any other, apart, of course, from the events of the empty tomb and the cross. And that is the encounter between Jesus and the disciples on the Emmaus road. If there is one sermon that I would like to have heard preached, it is the sermon that is there in summary form.

In Luke chapter 24 and verse 27, after these poor souls have said, you know, we thought that this Jesus of Nazareth was going to be the Savior of the world, we thought that he was going to fulfill the claims, but everything has come to a grinding halt in a cul-de-sac of a Palestinian tomb. And Jesus looks at them lovingly and he says, Oh, how slow of heart you are to believe all that the prophets have written of me. And then, beginning with Moses and the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

In other words, to his followers, torturing on the brink of unbelief, he did not pump them up. He turned them to the Bible. He turned them to be aware of the absolute sufficiency of the scriptures which were theirs, namely, of course, the Old Testament scriptures.

Now, in light of that, I want to say three things. And I'm telling you what they are so that you would have a sense of where we're going, because that can help you, I think, as you move toward lunchtime. It's always good to have something to look forward to.

I want to say three things. That the scriptures are sufficient, first of all, for salvation, they're sufficient for transformation, and they're sufficient for proclamation. And I think if you look with me at the text, you'll see that I'm simply saying what Paul is saying to Timothy.

2 Timothy 3, verse 14, he says, As for you, in comparison to the imposters, who will go from bad to worse, the deceivers, who themselves are dreadfully deceived, and then deceive others, unlike those individuals, Timothy, I want you to continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of. Now, you see, this is foundational. And the underpinning of this is on the basis of two things.

One, because he says you know from whom you learned it. And secondly, because you know what it was that you learned. Timothy would have been on the receiving end of all kinds of instructions coming from the home that he did.

The influence of a godly grandmother and a godly mother and all the benefits that would have accrued with that would surely have found him in his early days learning the things that God had given to his people as he walked along the road and as he lay down and as he got up. Learning the necessity of binding them on his heart and talking about them through the pilgrimage of his life. And Paul has already mentioned to him how the benefits of a godly heritage are something for which he must be tremendously thankful.

But underpinning that which was conveyed to him is the very truth that was conveyed. And from his infancy, according to verse 15, he had known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. What are the Scriptures for, first of all? To make men and women wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

In other words, the Bible is a book about Jesus. In the Old Testament, Jesus is predicted. In the Gospels, Jesus is incarnated.

In the Acts, Jesus is preached. In the Epistles, Jesus is explained. And in the Revelation, Jesus is expected.

But when we go into the Bible from the beginning all the way to the very end, we are encountering a book which comes to us in our foolishness, which comes to men and women in their lostness, which comes to folks whose minds have been darkened by the god of this age who are blind to things, and it is the Scripture which is able to make dumb people wise. It is the Scripture that is able to make blind people see. It is the Scripture that is able to make deaf people hear.

And it is totally sufficient. You see, that is why it is a call to the proclaiming, to the disbursing, to the conveying of the Bible that we are called. You know, you go to some of these restaurants across America and they have various people doing all kinds of things.

In Chicago, some places, they come out on roller skates with the food. And I find that very alarming. Because my initial thought is, what are you covering up for, you know? Why are you trying to impress me with your skating ability? I only came in here for a hamburger.

I don't want to see you skate. And I have the sneaking suspicion that if we just walked out in a normal fashion, we might focus on what we were getting to eat. And if we found out what we were getting to eat, we probably wouldn't want to eat there again.

But when you go away, you go, Hey, I was at this great restaurant, they came on roller skates and served us the food. Well, why didn't you go to a roller rink if you're so excited about roller skating? But if it's food you're interested in, who cares about the roller skates? And it is such an exciting thing, is it not, to see a company such as this gathered at this point in history under the express concern to preach the Word of God. For preaching is in the shadows.

The world does not believe in it. But it is to this that Paul calls salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

So we have it not only in apostolic precept, but we also have it in apostolic practice. From the very beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, what do you have in the Apostles? You have preachers. Man and brethren, he says, these folks are not drunk in the way you've been suggesting.

No, that's not the case. He says, this is to fulfill what was said by Joel the prophet, that in the last days I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. He says, let me tell you what the Bible says.

And he preaches the Bible to them, and as a result of his preaching of the Bible, the people are cut to their hearts. How do men and women get cut to their hearts? What cuts to the hearts? Oh, you can have a sharp tongue and cut people. You can cut people's hearts as a result of emotional manipulation.

There are ways to tell stories and induce tears. That will produce no lasting benefit at all. But when the sword of the Spirit cuts to the heart of a man or a woman, then they will ask, what are we supposed to do? Then we will say, repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

What did that Peter? Peter? Peter who capitulated when the lady asked him if he had been with Jesus? Peter who was walking on the water? Peter who was drowning? Peter who was walking on the water, drowning? You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, get thee behind me, Satan, that guy? Now, there couldn't have been anybody more surprised at the end of his sermon when the folk started crying out, what are we supposed to do? He looked around at his friends, and they must have said, just go ahead and tell them what Jesus said. And 3,000 people were added to the church as a result of the preaching of the word of God. It's no surprise then, by the time you get to Acts 4 and they are called before the Sanhedrin, and those folks are not particularly pleased with what's going on, they are asking a variety of questions, by what power or what name did you do this? And Peter stands up and he says, By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

He is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone. What is he doing? He is preaching the Bible. Why would he be quoting the Bible? Because of the sufficiency of Scripture.

Not his ability to talk about the Bible, but his ability simply to proclaim the Bible. Let the Bible go. The people said to Spurgeon on one occasion, how do you defend the Bible? He said, I don't defend the Bible.

He said, why would you defend the Bible? You don't defend a lion. You just let the lion out of its cage. Can you imagine what it cost Peter to stand before this group, who came from the same background as did he in Judaism, who were his people whom he loved with a passion, and to say with all of the passion of his heart, Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved.

And that you see is the challenge in our day. Hinduism says that God has incarnated himself many times. We say only once, we cannot both be right.

Judaism says that Jesus was not the Messiah. We say he was. We cannot both be right.

Buddhists say if we would clean up our act and do a little better, God will accept us. We say we cannot clean up our act, and God will not accept us on the basis of what we do. We cannot both be right.

So we are stuck with the particularity of Jesus Christ. And it is in that essential truth that all of the sufficiency of Scripture is conveyed. Philip does the exact same thing with the Ethiopian eunuch, who is doing what? Reading his Bible.

Why was he reading his Bible? Because God prompted the seeker to look in the right place. About whom is this man writing, he says. Is he talking about himself or someone else? Then Philip said, do you know anything about Judeo-Christian ethics? Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture, and he told him the good news about Jesus.

That's what our friends in McDonald's need to hear. They need to hear the good news about Jesus. Where is the good news about Jesus? It's in the Bible.

Now, I must move on, but let me say this. In each case, in the Acts of the Apostles, the gospel was preached for its own sake. Or if you like, the gospel was preached for Christ's sake.

There is a subtle distinction here that I want you to notice. The gospel was not preached as a means to an end. The gospel was not preached in order that the culture of Ephesus might be changed.

The gospel was not preached so that the temple of Diana would be pulled down. The gospel was not preached so that Christian people could have a kind of better lifestyle for themselves as a result of the benefits of the gospel message spilling out into the culture. No, the gospel was preached for no other reason than that men and women might be saved.

And as a result of the transformation of individual lives, families, communities, and cultures were radically altered. Is there a reason why so much preaching, apparently, of the gospel yields so very little in our day? Yes, and I think this is part of the reason. Because men are not convinced of the absolute necessity of proclaiming the Bible between the reality of eternity and the experience of time in order that the most important transaction might take place in the life of this individual.

It's been seen in the British Empire and it's now seen in the American Empire. The gospel is not a means to the advancement of a socio-political agenda. Preaching which offers men and women a set of Christian ideas to appropriate and to assimilate in the hope that they might be better citizens in the long run is not what Paul is referring to here in these verses.

Perhaps the most amazing illustration of it all to me is Paul himself in Acts chapter 24 when he goes before Felix and Drusilla when he's down in the basement of the White House of the day. Felix and Drusilla have played enough games of Scrabble that they're bored with it. Having run out of things to do, they decide that they'll bring the apostle up and let him perform for a little while.

So in Acts chapter 24, Felix came with his wife Drusilla. Verse 24 says, she was a Jewess and they sent for Paul and they listened to him as he spoke. What did he speak about? Faith in Christ Jesus.

Why? It's the only thing to speak about. Why would you use your time talking about something else? If you're a dying man confronting dying men and women, if your life has been transformed by the power of the gospel, if you know that it is appointed unto men once to die and after that comes judgment, if you know that God has set a day when he will judge the people and he will separate the sheep from the goats, surely you wouldn't go into a context like that and simply try and ingratiate yourself with Felix and his wife. Surely you wouldn't go in there and simply say, well, you know, if I could get out of here and use this little tete-a-tete this evening as a means to get back on track, then I can go and get back about the business of the preaching of the gospel.

No. Instead, he spoke to them about faith in Jesus Christ and he had a three-point sermon. He discoursed on righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come.

You say, well, that was easy. That was the first century. They liked that stuff then.

They were into hellfire and brimstone and lions and tigers and people getting their heads chopped off and everything else. Bogus idea on your part, if you hold it. Felix stole Drusilla from her husband by the aid of a Cypriot magician called Simon.

At this point, the program continues on side two. By the aid of a Cypriot magician called Simon. They were living in an adulterous relationship.

Paul stands up and says, my first point this evening is righteousness. Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly or stands in the way of sinners or sits in the seat of the scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. Felix is going, okay, skip that one, go to the next one.

Okay, let me go to my second point, self-control. Maybe we can move directly to the third one. Glad you asked.

I want to talk about the judgment that is coming. Now, I haven't heard Brad preach very much of this crusade, but I do rejoice in what I've heard. Because there is no equivocation in these matters and loved ones there cannot be.

The times are too perilous. The depth of human depravity is too deep. The means of proclamation is too powerful to clown around with anything else.

Then a sufficient scripture, sufficient through faith in Jesus Christ, to bring men and women to salvation. You see, the great drag on Christianity today is not where the majority of people think it is. They think it's coming from the outside.

They think it's coming from secularism. No, the great drag on Christianity today is coming from within. From the propounding of religious generalities and psychological theories and political agendas.

We're killing ourselves, we don't need anybody to do it for us from the outside. Why? Because of a lack of confidence in the sufficiency of the scripture. That's why people are told on television call-in shows and on radio shows, you don't need to go to your pastor, you need to go to somebody who has a white coat and who understands about how you were locked in a box when you were seven and how your grandmother used to trap you in the back of the car and all those kind of things.

And so go to the people with the long white coats and the tiny wee Bibles. Now what is that saying? I'm not saying it's an indictment on the health that comes by means of all kinds of agencies. What I'm saying is that the whole thing is shifting.

So people's last thought is that you would go to the scriptures because they are all sufficient for the needs of a life. We've done that to ourselves in the last course of a century, without any help from outside. Now I'm going to spend less time on the second point, and say that with your encouragement.

Sufficient for salvation and sufficient for transformation. Because is it not transformation that he's referring to here in verses 16 and 17? All scripture is God breathed. And you'll notice at the end of verse 17, so that, what's the purpose? So that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Paul is not teaching here, incidentally, on the doctrine of inspiration. Not that these verses teach us nothing about inspiration, but in terms of his purpose, he's not giving a discourse on the inspiration of scripture. This great summary statement on the part of Paul is showing that the Bible is absolutely essential to both maturity and Christian usefulness.

He is not informing Timothy of the fact that scripture is inspired. That wasn't in any doubt in Timothy's mind. Instead, he is reminding Timothy that the basis of the profitableness of scripture lies in its inspiration.

The reason, he says, that you can use it in this way is because of the nature of this book. It is unlike any other book in all of the world. Because, he says, it is theopneustos.

It is God breathed. Now what that means is mysterious and wonderful. It is not that the scriptures existed and God came along and breathed life into the works of a man or men.

But rather it is that God breathed, He spoke, and He spoke out the very scripture. And that their very existence by means of ordinary men in extraordinary times, by means of their personality and in the environment of their historical context, writing as ordinary men, inspired by the power of the Spirit of God, God was actually breathing out His truth. In order that through it man might come to salvation.

And in order that by means of it God's people might be transformed. Now the transformation that takes place is delineated for us there in the 16th verse. It is useful for teaching, for teaching the faith.

As I move around the country now as an old man, and you remember Greg told you that we are both old men, at age of 46 I now find that young men come and seek me out. Younger men being anybody in their thirties and some in their late twenties. And their questions are always the same questions if they are involved in the possibilities of pastoral ministry, if they have already embarked on that.

And they want to know, what do you think I ought to do? What's the key? What should I endeavor to accomplish? My answer is always the same and fairly boring. Teach the Bible, what I say. But there must be more than that, you know.

There's got to be a secret, a hidden spring, a lever, you know, something you pull. No. The Bible is useful for teaching the faith.

You know about the young man who wrote to his bishop as an Anglican clergyman, he was a curate, and he was excited because it was his first opportunity to preach in the parish church, and he wrote to his

bishop who had ordained him, and he said, Dear Bishop, on Sunday I will preach my first sermon, what should I preach about? And the bishop wrote a postcard back that simply said, Preach about the Bible and preach about 20 minutes. I suddenly got the first part clear in my mind, I'm not sure I have the second part, so let me move on. It's useful for teaching the faith for rebuking.

Rebuking. In other words, correcting error. Pointing out where things are wrong.

You go to these churches, and they tell you, Good morning and welcome to our church. We're a very positive, progressive, and peaceable, and palliative, and we just want you to know that everything's okay. Are you feeling okay? Everything's okay.

You're going to be okay. And I'm sitting back there, and the one thing I know about myself is, I'm not okay. So this is a major pain in the butt to start with.

If we believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, then we will proclaim the Scripture in such a way that it teaches the faith, and it rebukes error. Not that we become those whose agenda in life is to be constantly searching out error, and turn our exposition of the Scriptures into a shambles, into nothing other than simply taking the high road and pointing out that this chap's wrong, and that's wrong, and this church doesn't do it right, and we're nothing other than a cantankerous rascal. That is not what he's referring to.

He's saying that in the balance of the exposition of Scripture, not only will people be engendered in a love for Christ, and stirred in a renewed commitment to the faith, but they will also have their lives brought in line with the truth of God's Word. Errors in belief, errors in behavior, must be pointed out. And must be pointed out in a spirit of love and of genuine kindness.

Paul, if you read the pastorals, is very willing to identify the dangers, very willing to identify the deceivers, because he understands how crucial it is that not only is the faith taught, but that error is rebuked, and also that correction takes place. Some of us are good at rebuking, we're not good at correcting. Remember the school teachers that had that big red pen, or whatever it was, they would call you out the front, well, come out now, and let's have a look at what you did.

Uh-huh. And you come out, you pull your chair up, at least this was in Scotland, and they would lay it down. They were always very nice at the beginning.

And they'd sit. Here it is. Uh-huh.

Uh-huh. Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh. And they'd say, take that home and show it to your mother.

And be encouraged. It looks like the map of Sudan for the fire in a, fire in a Scud missile. with X marks the spot in red.

That's no good. It's not enough for a pastor to be warning of the wrong path, he needs to be directing on to the right path. It's no good if we're constantly harping and carping on people's problems.

They understand they have problems. Now what's the key to this? Don't preach topical sermons. Preach the Bible.

Because in the balance of it all, incidentally that is not a categorical statement, don't preach topical sermons. Let me rephrase it and say this, the danger in preaching topically is that we will preach what

comes easiest to us or our hobby horses and we will neglect the broccoli, we will neglect the liver and onions, we will neglect the kidney, we will neglect all that stuff. How will your people ever have some spiritual haggis? Now someone next to you will tell you what that is.

You poor ignoramus. But if you go to a golf teacher, you go to a golf teacher and he says, just make your grip, take your stance and make a swing. And then he looks at you and he goes, well your grip is wrong, your stance is wrong, your takeaway is wrong, your follow through is wrong.

That will be \$75. Thank you. No, it won't do.

Correcting, rebuking, training in righteousness. Resetting the direction of our lives. So that the man of God will be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

That's the great challenge of our day. And what is the answer to fully mature believers? Let the word of Christ dwell in your literary, says in Colossians 3. Let the scriptures be your guide. Let them be your food.

Let them be your map. You have all that is necessary in this book. The word that is used here for thoroughly equipped or the phrase was used to describe a rescue boat that was fitted out with all the necessary materials so as it could go out on a voyage.

Alas, how many professing believers are so poorly fitted out that when we go out onto the voyage of the high seas and we meet the mariners who are in difficulty and are shipwrecking and are taking on board all that deprives them of the enjoyment of life and the opportunity of faith, we're not there to speak. Because we're not men and women who've embraced the sufficiency of the book. Jim Packer on one occasion said, if I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop folk digging in the Bible.

And this conference is so timely, because for all of the emphasis of the last quarter of a century, and I've been here for 15 or 25 years, for all of the emphasis and all of the push, we're really not making a tremendous dent in the cause of the gospel. And along that journey, there has been at the same time as an overarching emphasis on all kinds of things, an accompanying loss of conviction in the sufficiency of the Bible. It's sufficient for salvation.

It's sufficient for transformation. And finally, to simply pick up on where Greg left things last night, it is sufficient for proclamation. That's why as he goes into chapter 4, he says, I want you to preach the word.

It's a very stirring charge that he gives him, is it not? Jesus is going to appear, he says. His kingdom is going to be ushered in, in all of its fullness. Men and women are going to face the judgment.

Therefore, he says, in light of these truths, I give you this charge. Preach the word. Isn't that interesting? This is his last letter.

If you were writing a last letter to somebody, surely you would put in the things that were most pressingly urgent in your mind. You wouldn't fill it up with trivialities. You would want to ensure that whoever it was that was on the receiving end of the information would grasp the nettle of what was being conveyed.

And now as he moves into the final section of the letter, he says, in light of all that is about to unfold, and in light of all the confusion that you're facing, and in light of all the temptations that are before you, Timothy, as a young man, for power and for passions, and for all that accompanies your young life, he says, listen, devote yourself to this. Preach the word of God, because it is sufficient not only to see people

equipped and to see them saved, but it is also sufficient for the building of the church. You see, you can raise a large crowd by all kinds of means, but the building of the church is something that God does.

And those who have been called to the privilege of preaching have been called to a high task. And we'll return to something of its power and something of its pitfalls tomorrow morning, God willing. But let me note, in drawing this to a close, that it is the word that we're supposed to preach.

It's referred to elsewhere as sound doctrine, as the truth in verse 4, as the faith in verse 7. Jim Packer came to Scotland some years ago and addressed a group of Scottish preachers, and in doing so he gave this definition of preaching. He said, Christian preaching is the event of God bringing to a congregation a Bible-based, Christ-related, life-impacting message of instruction and direction from himself through the words of a spokesman. From himself through the words of a spokesman.

Now, when we use this as a standard, it becomes very quickly obvious that not every performance from behind a pulpit is preaching. I'm not talking now about style, but the cool, chatty approach, which sounds as passionate as a man reading from the Yellow Pages, trivializes the matter and erodes any sense of expectation on the part of the congregation, that God is about to speak through his word. So congregations, instead of heading for worship in the expectation that they're going to hear a word from God, an opportunity to give him praise, to hear him speak, the average congregation sits out in a spirit of detached passivity.

They come as observers to measure the performance, rather than as participants, waiting on the word of God. Instead of sitting up and expectantly praying, Master, speak thy servant, heareth, waiting for thy gracious word, they sit back, they relax, and they wait to see if anything that the preacher has to say tickles their fancy at all. And as a result, many churches are being brought up under knowledgeable fellows, speaking with emphasis.

That's all they are. They're just knowledgeable chaps that get excited about stuff. But there is no sense of the accompanying power of the Spirit of God.

There is no sense of that arresting of the lives of individuals. There is no experience of being cut to the heart, and saying, men and brethren, what are we supposed to do? And at the very heart of it, in encountering such individuals, and in seeing myself reflected in them, and so readily drawn to that approach, I identify a missing element. That is, in a conviction regarding the absolute sufficiency of God.

See, ultimately I don't care if you think I was long, short, good, bad, funny, or whatever it is. I care not if I am judged by you. I do not even judge myself.

My conscience is clear, but that doesn't make me innocent. I'm going to stand before Almighty God, and answer for every occasion, including this morning, when I stood before a group of people, standing in the gap between a holy God and those to whom he has chosen to communicate his truth in the very sufficiency of his word. Therefore we mustn't be trivial.

And it takes an expectant, praying congregation, along with a preacher who is equally expectant and equally prayerful, to make an authentic preaching occasion. So he says, I want you to be prepared. So you're prepared to do it when you're supposed to do it, and when you're not supposed to do it.

I would like to have said no when they phoned me up and said, John MacArthur's sick, could you fill in? But I couldn't say no. Why? Because of the sufficiency of the Bible. It says you've got to be ready to

preach the word when you're ready, and when you're not ready.

So I wasn't really ready. You're going, you're nudging your wife, going, I can see I told you he wasn't ready. I'll leave the rest for the homework.

People won't choose churches on the basis of the truth. They won't first listen to the preacher and then decide whether what they've heard is true. They'll first decide what they want to hear, and then they'll go and select teachers who will oblige by towing their party line.

That's verse 3. They'll gather around them a great number of teachers to say what they're itching ears want to hear. Tell me lies. Tell me lies.

Tell me sweet little lies. Tell me it's all right. You're fine.

That's how they say it in the South. You're fine. I was down in Dallas.

I was practicing that. You say you better practice a little more. I understand.

But that's what they say. I want you to know that you're a fine group, and you're all fine. People love that.

Tell me I'm handsome. Tell me I'm cute. Tell me I'm fine.

Tell me what I want to hear. No, he says, today they'll turn their ears away from the truth. They'll turn their sight to myths.

There'll be people coming out of the churches saying the most unbelievable things. Where do they come up with this stuff? When people stop believing in the Bible, they don't believe in nothing. They start to believe in everything.

If you've seen people who set out on the journey of the faith, who were in group one of the parable of the sower, and you've met them now along the journey of their spiritual pilgrimage, good and as great as their heads are full of whistles and all manner of stuff, what did they do? Turned aside from the truth. Turned to myths. Well, then what's the pastor to do? Run down this avenue and chase this? Try and correct that? No.

It's there in verse 5. But you, Timothy, number one, keep your head. Number two, endure hardship. Number three, do the work of an evangelist.

And number four, discharge all the duties of your ministry. Some of you are here and you're pastors. You've been going at it hard and long.

You're a wee bit weary. You came here for a word of encouragement. Maybe you thought you'd get a lever, you know.

The secret. If you read golf books, everybody wanted to know what Hogan's secret was. They had it on Life magazine about 30 years ago.

The Hogan secret. Sold like crazy. Everybody read it and when they finished they said, I couldn't find any secret.

Because there wasn't really a secret. Actually, there was, but it's still a secret. I know what it was.

Here's the secret. It's right here. Get down on your knees and ask God to fill your heart with a love for Christ through his word.

Let's stay on our knees till he fills us with a passion concerning the absolute sufficiency of this book. And then let's take it and don't let's be giving it to our friends and neighbors like this. No force feeding.

Let's go in amongst all those lonely people. Where do they all come from? Father McKenzie, writing the words to a sermon that no one will hear. That's also from the same song he was quoting.

I don't know if those of you musical aficionados out there also probably caught the fact that Alistair not only quotes the Bible, he not only quotes the Beatles, but now he quotes Fleetwood Mac. Tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies. Great job.

I have to tell you in all honesty, though, that this whole Scottish thing with Alistair is an act. He's from, I think it's Oxnard, I'm not sure. And because of that guy, that's why he never acknowledged it.

He came in with his face painted blue earlier, and I said, you know, I think that's going too far. That's a brave heart reference. Okay, enough of that.

Well, we're going to break now for lunch, and then we're going to be back here at 130 for the Q&A session of all time with some pretty darn good preachers. Chuck Swindoll will be joining us for the first time for that. And then we're going to have a three o'clock session with Chuck Swindoll as well.

So looking forward to it. Go out and have a good lunch. Don't be late.

Be back here at 130. God bless you guys. That concludes this program.

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