

The Church, part 2

Assorted Scriptures

(preached Pine Grove 6/11/17; Sunday PM)

Introduction

Two weeks ago, I began what will most likely be a whole summer of looking in depth at the church...

The church in general, but we will also examine ourselves at Pine Grove through this series...

I spoke 2 weeks ago about the need for us to be a proactive church in the world, rather than a reactive church...

When Jesus spoke of the church, he guaranteed that the gates of hell would not prevail against his church..

And we believe that, but the thing that can prevail against his church are those churches that are dying or already dead....

Now, I don't think we are a dead church here, but the quickest way to the grave is to ignore your health...

So for the next few weeks and months, I want us to examine the health of our church in a number of key areas...

I introduced the list 2 weeks ago, and you can see it on the screen now..

These are 9 areas or 9 characteristics of what I would call an effective church...

This is not a complete list of what makes a healthy church, but I do think this is part of the foundation of a healthy, God-pleasing church...

And I shared with you my heart 2 weeks ago of why I see a need for us to look at these things now...

In the sense of I hope to have gained a little of your trust as your shepherd...

I pray that you are seeing my heart as a pastor to do what is in the best interest of the church and not serving myself...

With that in mind, let us continue our look at some of these characteristics...

Two weeks ago, I began to looking at what I call the heartbeat of the church...

Now we all know that Christ is the head of the church and a church's love for Him is what gives us life...

But that life is sustained by other parts of the body and the pulpit and the man in the pulpit directly affect the health of a church..

And so I introduced the first characteristic of a healthy church and that is biblical preaching...

For most of you, that sounds elementary...

Well, yes you have to have biblical preaching, but I would remind you that not all preaching is created equal..

Some pulpits become soapboxes for the preacher's latest gripe against society or government...

Some pulpits become places for the preacher to pick a verse, read it, and then give you a self-help sermon...

Some pulpits become places not to hear of your need for holiness but a place to hear how great you are...

You see, a pulpit and an open Bible on it are no guarantee that you are getting a biblical preaching...

You may just be getting the thoughts and ideas of man wrapped in the thin paper of the Bible...

Two weeks ago, I also spoke of my commitment to expository preaching, which could simply be defined as

taking a verse or verses of the Bible and explaining what they mean using the context of the passage and the normal use of language...

Now, let me be clear...

You don't have to go verse by verse chapter by chapter to do expository preaching..

For instance, I could pull out a psalm...

Give you the background of the psalm if that information is given and then explain the meaning of the psalm to you and apply it to your life and that is expository preaching....

I have done that some on Wednesday nights and you can do it with other passages as well..

You don't have to preach verse by verse chapter by chapter to be an expository preacher...

You simply need to use take a passage and explain it to the people....

Now, verse by verse, chapter by chapter is better because you don't have to explain all the background each week...

In other words, when I preached from Revelation 14 this morning, you know where we are at in the book of Revelation if you have been coming regularly...

I may review briefly but the context is clear and we can just jump into our set of verses right away...

Verse by verse, chapter by chapter expository preaching also give you a better feel for the overall flow of a book of the Bible...

You can follow the flow or the argument of the human author as he carries you from beginning to end...

Which by the way is exactly how Jesus taught...

Turn with me to Luke 24:13...

Now let me set the stage for what we are about to read..

Jesus has been arrested and carried to the cross and crucified and laid in the tomb...

But he has also been resurrected when we get to Luke 24:13...

And so he decides to pay two men a visit who are walking home from Jerusalem after his crucifixion...

So, let's pick the action in verse 13..

13 And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was [d]about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. 16 But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. 17 And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You [e]the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" 19 And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. 21 But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. 22 But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see." 25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the

prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary for the [f]Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 Then beginning [g]with Moses and [h]with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

These men had a problem...

They couldn't figure out why the Messiah had been killed..

They thought that the Messiah was coming to rescue Israel from the harsh Roman government and establish his rule right away..

You see their problem was they didn't understand the OT....

It was probably a result of inaccurate teaching and their own laziness...

So, Jesus appears to them, and notice this....

He disguises himself and take them to the Word to explain the Messiah to them...

And how does he do it?

He starts at the beginning of the OT with the books of Moses which are Genesis through Deuteronomy and he

ends with the prophets which are the final books of the OT...

In other words, Jesus moves chronologically through the OT to help them understand the flow and the argument of God from beginning to end...

So, I think there is something to be said for the value of verse by verse, chapter by chapter preaching of the Bible...

But Jesus is not the only one who explained the Bible to his listeners....

Turn to *Nehemiah 8*...

In the book of Nehemiah, the Jews have finally made it back to their land...

They have been under Babylonian rule and Persian rule for some time, but now they have been allowed to return to their land....

God has gotten their attention by keeping them from their land, so in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people are all ears so to speak..

And so Ezra the scribe who has written the word of God is also a preacher of sorts in the book of Nehemiah, and notice how he teaches the people...

Verse 1 of Nehemiah 8...

8 And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they [a]asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had [b]given to Israel. 2 Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from [c]early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. 4 Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand. 5 Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. 8 They read from the book,

from the law of God, [d]translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

Notice the model of biblical preaching and teaching here...

You stand up before the people behind a wooden podium...

You open the word of God...

The people open their ears, and you read the word of God by explaining it to the people and helping it to make sense...

And the point of preaching and teaching is to help the people understand....

I mean this is God's way of preaching...

And it stands in such contrast to what people want today...

Most people in churches have no desire to know what God's Word means...

They have no desire to understand the word of God...

They have no desire to have a preacher who gives help the word of God make sense in their lives...

In fact, most people in most churches simply want one of three things in their preaching...

They either want to be entertained by the preacher or they want to hear how great they are or they want to be told exactly what to do...

Very few folks want to understand the Bible...

That is why I often catch slack for being too much of a teacher and not a preacher...

People don't want to work to understand and read the Bible and be disciplined to study it...

So they want their pastors to do that for them and then tell them what to do...

I will give you the short version of church history....

The downfall and decline of Christianity was always a result of the people removing themselves from the study of the Word of God and relying solely upon the preacher to give it to them...

The Roman Catholic Church was able to change the gospel when the people failed to hold the leaders of the church accountable to what they were teaching...

Listen to me people...

You need Biblical preaching but the foundation of biblical preaching is biblical teaching...

Where the word of God is read to the people, explained to the people so that the people understand what it means by what it says and then applies it to their lives...

Ezra took the word, stood up with the word, explained it to the people in a sensible way, and the people received the word and understood the word and practiced the word...

Jesus took the word, read it to the people, explained it to the people, and the people received the word...

That is biblical preaching...

In the NT, Peter and Paul took the Word, read the word and taught it to the people...

You cannot have biblical preaching apart from biblical teaching...

And you cannot have a healthy church with the word being read in the pulpit, explained by the preacher and received by the people....

Now, you can have a social club...

You can a cult led by a evil man...

You can have all sorts of things that look like a church, but the heartbeat of the the church is a pulpit where the word of God is read, taught, and explained to the people...

A healthy and effective church starts in the pulpit...

And your job is to guard it and keep it that way...

Now, in relation to Pine Grove Baptist church, I hope and pray you see a healthy pulpit...

That is certainly at the center of my ministry...

It is where I spent the majority of the hours of my week...

It is where I spend the majority of my energy in regards to this church...

It is where I show each of you the majority of my love for you and your families and your children...

Look, we could all sorts of programs and activities....

We could add things for you family and host all sorts of things for the youth and the kids...

And I could drive myself silly “doing things,” but I assure that the preaching of the word provides the best benefit for the health of the church and its members...

Now all of those other things are good and they fine to do, but the preaching ministry is the way to ensure the health of a church long term.....

A church that is built on the word is like the person who is built on the rock of Christ...

Storms may come and go by a foundation built on the rock of Christ and his word will not give way...

And that is what you should want for this church...

And I think we are slowly building that foundation here verse by verse, chapter by chapter...

Now, let me be clear...

Expository preaching is not the only to preach biblically...

You can have topical preaching where the subject changes every week and so does the passage that is preached...

Now there is nothing unbiblical about that...

There have been some great men of God who were biblical preachers and who didn't preach verse by verse chapter by chapter...

But I assure you of this....

Even their topical preaching followed the meaning of the Scripture and included an explanation of it to the people..

In a sense, I am engaging in topical preaching now about the church...

But I could preach other topics as well...

Like biblical giving, biblical parenting, biblical marriages, etc...

I could preach about the topics of trials and persecution or other things related to living as a believer in this world, and I will do that at times...

I spent some time when I first got here on the topic of how to study the Bible...

And I spent some time on the topic of the end times..

And we may do more more of that at times...

And so topical preaching has its place, but I think the verse by verse chapter by chapter preaching is the best way to get the whole Bible to you...

Remember, Paul preached the whole counsel of God to his people and I follow his example as a NT preacher...

And I think the best way to preach the whole counsel of God is through verse by verse preaching...

Along those lines, I would let you know that I have a plan as to what books I plan to preach to you...

Do you know the reason we started in Mark?

For this simple reason....

Everybody who is truly saved loves to learn more about Christ...

You can never go wrong by following Jesus in his ministry on earth...

And the joy for us as a church is that we have four chances to do that...

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all give us the story of Christ from different perspectives...

And I wanted you to learn to trust me and you saw Jesus each week in the book of Mark...

A wise seminary professor once told me when I asked about what book to preach first...

“Son, you are an older man but you are still green whenever you walk into your first church, and they all are going to be looking sideways at you.”

So don't go into a book that leads to a lot of controversy or they will think you have come to pick a fight...

You pick a gospel and you show them Jesus each week verse by verse and you help them to love Him more and they come to love you more...

And for that reason, we spent a year in Mark just following our Lord from birth to death to resurrection...

And then on Sunday mornings, we went to Colossians where we see the importance of Christ in all we do...

In other words, if we know and love Christ, we obey Him in all we do...

Then we went to the book of Galatians where we got some help on how to live as Christians in the world, which is helpful to all of us...

And now we are in the book of Revelation because I think the church needs to be sure of how this all ends...

We need to be equipped to answer people who wonder where our world is headed...

And all of us are learning where it is headed, and it not a pretty picture...

But we need to know because we need to learn to share the truth with our families and neighbors...

And before I tell you to go out and share the gospel, you need to know why you must do that...

And so the book of Revelation shows us why evangelism is so important, considering how close I think we are to the end of time...

Then on Sunday nights, I took a long time to give us an overview of the Bible book by book...

You see, you need the big picture before you get into the small details of what to do...

For instance, you need to know that the story of the Bible is how to get God's kingdom to earth...

And you need to see how Israel was God's agent for that in the OT...

How Christ's life, death, and resurrection makes possible a person's entrance into that kingdom....

And then to see that the church is now God's agent for Kingdom work and proclamation in this age...

Without an overview of the big picture, you are like the person trying to putting a jigsaw puzzle together without a picture of the finished project..

And so we spent time there...

And then we looked at the book of Daniel which is the OT's version of the book of Revelation...

We also addressed the study of the Bible on Sunday nights because the Bible isn't helpful if you dont know how to study...

Then on Wednesday nights, we have the majority of our time in the OT...

Which is my effort to preach the whole counsel of God...

For the NT church, the OT gives us previews of Christ...

It offers examples of what to do and not do as part of God's kingdom...

And the OT is also helpful to help us understand the nature of who God is....

So many Christians see the God of the OT as a God of flaming judgment, but that is not the case...

We have looked at Jonah and Ruth and 1 and 2 Samuel and now Joshua and we are seeing the grace and mercy of God as often as we see the justice of God....

And so I am teaching the whole counsel of God book by book under the leadership of the Spirit of God with some sense of order here...

And I will continue to do that and sprinkle in some topical sermon at times as the Lord leads...

In other words, in the big picture of Pine Grove baptist, I assure you that biblical preaching is and will continue to be a priority of mine...

For this simple reason,....

I am not smart enough or wise enough or creative enough to lead this church in my own power...

But I trust the word of God to do that with each passage I study and preach....

And I trust the Word of God to lead this church in the direction we should go...

The Spirit wrote the word and the same Spirit is at work to lead us by the Word....

And though I can make up visions and scream and spit and stomp around up here to cause you to follow me, but like I said last week, that doesn't do anyone any good...

Instead, I want you to hear the word and understand the word and then obey the word...

And if that happens, the Spirit leads the church by the Word of God and not by the words of man...

I know that sounds like such a simple way to lead the church, but I am convinced it is the right way....

When I look around and see what other churches are doing and what are the problems in other churches, most of them stem from men who want to lead their churches by their words and not the words of the Lord...

Now, it is hard to spot a man like this because they typically use the Bible to lead...

But in the end they use the Bible to serve their needs and not the needs of God's kingdom...

And certainly not the needs of the flock that they shepherd...

But men like that can get in pulpits because the people dont know the Bible and have no idea what to look for in a pastor...

Most search committees look at the outward appearance and not at the heart of a potential pastor...

Most search committees want to hear the pastor's vision rather than hear his approach to preaching...

Most search committees want to hear where he can take them not what he can teach them....

Look, I have served on two search committees and I have made those mistakes myself more than once...

But know that I have been on both ends of that, I have come to see that a pastor's view of preaching is more important than his view of the best program for the church...

Or what he can do to increase giving or minister to your kids better...

The most important quality is what does he plan to do in pulpit and why do that matter to him...

Because as the pulpit goes, so goes the church...

Now, I could spend another 30 minutes preaching about preaching because it is such a passion of mine, but we have to move to our second characteristic of an effective church and that is qualified leadership...

Now this directly relates to preachers but it also relates to other men who lead and serve the church....

And we are going to spend some time here over the next few weeks, so you may want to bring popcorn...

You see, we are at a point in the history of our church where we need to be clear on leadership...

There are bylaws in place for leadership but they had not been followed since before I got here...

So, what I want to do over the next few weeks is show you what the Bible says about leadership in the church...

And then present all the models of leadership that other churches use....

And then for us to think deeply about these things and decide what we want as a church...

So that is going to take some time, but we will begin that process next week...

Let me end this way with a final word on biblical preaching...

You always have an open door and an open ear to me in regards to my preaching...

I enjoy feedback whether good or bad and consider all things in relation to my preaching....

Now, that is not to say that I desire to preach what you want to hear, but I am saying that God uses many things to direct the heart of the preacher and the pulpit...

I am not above the flock and untouchable and I never should be...

So always feel free to ask questions about what I preach, how I preach or why I preach...

It is helpful to me but it is also helpful to a church and keeps peace...

There is nothing worse than letting questions go unanswered and assuming the worst in a preacher...

So always feel free to approach me with anything about my preaching...Let us pray...