



Preaching Philosophy

What Is Preaching?

IN 2 TIMOTHY 4:2, the apostle Paul instructs Timothy to preach the Word. In Ephesians 3:7-10, Paul states that he was made a minister to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. In each case, the Greek word Paul originally uses is κηρύσσω (transliterated: *kērussō*). This word occurs 61 times in the New Testament and means “to herald.” It does not mean teaching. It does not mean conversing. It means heralding.

In the age before telephones and the internet, a person who brought news to a town was called a *herald*. A king’s herald would enter the city’s gate and proclaim the decrees set forth from the king. The herald would not speak on his own behalf; he would speak the king’s words. He would unroll the scroll with the royal seal and declare all that was written. This is what the apostle Paul had in mind when he instructed Timothy to preach the Word of God to the church in Ephesus. He was a herald for the words of Christ the King (2 Timothy 4:2), proclaiming the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

While heralding the great news of God’s Word inevitably lends itself to teaching, it should be understood that preaching and teaching are not the same thing. In 2 Timothy 2:2, the apostle Paul instructs Timothy that “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” In this case, the original Greek word Paul uses is διδάσκω (transliterated: *didaskō*). This word occurs 91 times in the New Testament and means “to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them.” While teaching is about the transference of knowledge or skill, preaching is about proclaiming the words that God has specifically spoken in the Bible. When the Word of God is opened and preached,

the role of the preacher is to bring forth the great news of our King. The words proceeding from the Bible are God’s words, and because they are God’s words, they are immeasurably good, beautiful, and true. Therefore, when the saints gather together, these words must not only be taught, they must be heralded!

Preaching is God speaking in the power of His Spirit about His Son from His Word through a man. The following paper explains the convictions, values, and methods driving the preaching pulpit at The Austin Stone Community Church.

Preaching Principles

A CONVICTION is a firmly held belief that elicits and shapes action. So what are the convictions of The Austin Stone that elicit and shape our preaching?

1. We preach because we are compelled by God's great love towards us.

In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul states, "... the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Like Paul, at The Austin Stone we do not preach out of guilt, greed, or popularity. We do not preach to gain the approval of others. We do not preach to try and control people with religious philosophy. We preach because we are overwhelmed by the goodness of God.

2. We preach because we are convinced that God's Word is true and that God truly is who He claims to be.

Look again at Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "... the love of Christ controls us, because we *have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised*" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). We do not preach as religious speculation or spiritual pontification. We preach because we are convinced of a few great things:

1. **God**—We are convinced that God is the ultimate, eternal reality of the universe, that He created humanity in His image (Genesis 1:26), and that He loves people sacrificially (John 3:16). Because we are convinced of God and His love, we want to proclaim Him and herald this truth.
2. **The Bible**—We are convinced that God has revealed Himself through the inspired, God-breathed Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16). Because the Bible is God's Word, we want to proclaim it in order to make Him known.
3. **The Gospel**—We are convinced that the truth that "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" is the best news that the world could know (2 Corinthians 5:21). So we want to proclaim that message clearly, boldly, and repeatedly.
4. **The Church's Mission**—We are convinced that the church's mission is to make disciples (Matthew 28:18), and we do this through the ministry (demonstration) and message (declaration) of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5).

We do not preach with hesitation, fearing that what we herald might be one day shown to be untrue. No, we preach with courage and conviction, convinced that the all-knowing, omnipotent, uncreated God has spoken. His words are true, and they are glorious.

3. We preach because God has committed this message to us.

Look at the following verses in 2 Corinthians 5:

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to

God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

(2 Corinthians 5:17–21).

In His eternal wisdom, God has chosen to commit the message of the gospel to the church, making His appeal through us. In preaching, we are taking God's commission seriously and passionately. We step into the pulpit and joyfully implore people to be reconciled to God.

We are compelled to preach by God's great love, we are convinced of a few great things, and we affirm that God has committed this message to us. These convictions outline the reason that we preach.

Values and Methods of Preaching

NO TWO PREACHERS are exactly the same, and every preacher is prone to take a sermon in a different direction. Knowing this, the preachers at The Austin Stone employ several distinct values and methods every time they prepare and deliver a sermon.

Christ-Exalting Content

In Colossians 1:28, Paul says, "Him we proclaim." In other words, Christ is our content. Jesus is the one who was born miraculously, lived perfectly, died sacrificially, rose victoriously, and who reigns eternally. All of our sermons are designed to reveal Christ as the true hero. He is our hope.

We do not want to burden our people with religious rules or simply give them a few suggestions that will encourage moral restraint. Rather, we want to exalt Christ in our preaching, the only one who can truly save and change a person's life. That is why we are Christ-exalting in content. We do not want to proclaim our grandest ideas or philosophical rants. Rather, in the power of the Spirit, we preach Christ and herald His gospel. We agree with the great 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon when he said,

Leave Christ out? O my brethren, better leave the pulpit out altogether. If a man can preach one sermon without mentioning Christ's name in it, it ought to be his last, certainly the last that any Christian ought to go to hear him preach."

Gospel-Centered Direction

We endeavor to exalt Christ, and we recognize that there is no more Christ-exalting theme in the Bible than the gospel itself. Therefore, the substance of every sermon orbits the great weight of the gospel by design. Preaching is aimed at more than just an inspirational message, encouraging word, or discourse on an important topic. Our preaching is specifically directed at heralding the great news of the gospel. The gospel is the good news that Jesus lived the life we should have lived, died the death we should have died, and resurrected, guaranteeing His work was finished. He did this as a substitute for us so that God can receive us. Every sermon at The Austin Stone has the gospel at the core of its message. To that end, our sermons are often constructed this way: **God, Man, Christ, Response**.

When gospel-centered preaching on a particular text, a preacher might ask and answer each of these questions:

1. What does this text say about God?
2. What does this text say about the condition of man?
3. How does this text point us to Jesus?
4. What do our people need to know or do to respond to/obey this text?

Similarly, another model of gospel-centered preaching is to preach a particular passage in the context of the larger plot-line of the Bible. The Bible presents the history of the world in four stages:

1. **Creation**—God created the world.
2. **Fall**—The world and humanity fell into sin and decay.

3. **Redemption**—But God sent His Son to redeem the world and create a new humanity.
4. **Restoration**—Eventually the whole world will be renewed. Death, decay, injustice, and suffering will all be removed.

By calling attention to a passage's context in the gospel narrative, we aim to reinforce the gospel's preeminence in all things. The gospel not only changes eternal destinies, but it changes everything. In this we not only implore the lost to turn and be saved, but we implore the already saved to keep turning to Christ and there find a wealth of life and hope. Gospel-centered preaching means heralding the greatest news in every sermon.

Expository Preaching

Expository preaching is preaching that allows the biblical text to determine the direction, organization, interpretation, and application of the sermon. This kind of preaching starts with the text rather than an idea, allowing the meaning of the Bible to determine what will be preached. An alternative to this would be to start with a topic or idea in mind and then find biblical texts to support the topic. While both methods deliver truth from the Bible, expository preaching allows the Bible to determine the topic of the sermon.

We not only love expository preaching, but we also think it best to preach through entire books of the Bible. We believe this for a number of reasons. For one, it teaches our church body how to read, understand, and apply the Bible in context. It allows partners to get a feel for what is going on in each book and begin to understand how preachers get the points they preach. Through Christ-centered expositional preaching, a preacher is more likely to accurately demonstrate what the Bible itself communicates about its message.

Furthermore, expository preaching through entire books of the Bible forces the church to deal with difficult texts. We cannot skip uncomfortable or controversial topics. If the biblical text addresses a topic or idea, then we herald this truth, trusting that the Bible is God's Word, and because it is God's Word, it is true and good. While pastors are often good at sensing what is an appropriate message for the body at an appropriate time, only God knows all. Preaching through books of the Bible leaves room for God to lead the body to sections of Scripture that the body needs to hear, even if leadership does not know the body needs to hear it.

While preaching verse-by-verse through books of the Bible is, on the whole, the most effective method for leading God's church, it is best when complemented with timely, necessary breaks to address specific issues. Occasionally, we will take breaks between books in order to address specific topics in stand-alone sermon series. Stand-alone series allow the leadership to address a needed topic not covered in the book through which we are currently preaching. Furthermore, it provides a way for newcomers to join our story and our conversation. As a general rule, it is best to have expository preaching be the majority of preaching and to insert stand-alone series as needed.

Plurality in the Pulpit

Who is the preacher at The Austin Stone? The answer is that there is not just one person who preaches. Rather, we rotate between a number of qualified preachers who stand up and herald the great truth of God's Word. This is by design. Plurality in the pulpit guards the church from becoming a cult of personality. The church is to be about one person and one person only. That person is Jesus—not the senior pastor. Having a plurality of people proclaiming God's Word serves and protects the church.

Plurality also protects our preaching team. Sharing the pulpit keeps our preachers both humble and accountable. No one individual can make unilateral decisions without the unity of the other preaching elders, as well as the broader elder body.

Conclusion

As a church, we live on every word that proceeds from the mouth of our God. And our God has indeed spoken great and glorious things in the Bible. True preaching is not the mere opinions of man. It is not about clever ideas or cheap entertainment. It is about faithfully unrolling the scroll of our King Jesus's royal decree and heralding all that is written.