

Why Do We... Preach Through Books of the Bible?

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody. It's good to see you. If you're new-ish to Watermark, my name is Kevin. I'm one of the leaders here. And Echo's going to come read the scripture in a few minutes, but Echo, before you do that, I'm going to just introduce our theme.

If you are new to Watermark, I wonder what you think the Sunday service is all about. And in particular, what is up with preaching?

What's the point with sermon? You've got some guy up there, and he speaks for hopefully 30 minutes, sometimes a little longer. I wonder what your expectation is of the sermon, of preaching.

Well, churches can do some really interesting things when it comes to sermons. These days, for some reason, it's fashionable. We all do series, right? We take six or eight weeks, and we do something that's all joined together.

And I found a couple of interesting series. I think we've got them up on the screen. Here's one. Okay, I think it should be coming sometime. One church did a series on you drive me crazy, dealing with difficult people.

[1 : 0 4] Okay, that maybe is a good topic. Some of us think we should do that. What about It's Your Time? It's Your Time to Shine. COVID is done. Time to shine. Relationships. Okay, that's It's Complicated.

Do you know how many series there are called It's Complicated from Facebook, right? And then Game Changers. I don't know what that's about, but that looks interesting. I'd be interested to find out what that is about.

Well, if you've been coming to Watermark for a while, one of the things you'll know is that we don't really do that. Our series aren't very hip and cool. And the next series we're going to do starting next week is simply called Ecclesiastes.

It's about as creative as it is. And then after that, we're going to do Matthew. And then after that, we're going to do Ephesians. And nothing spicy like Sex and the City or Keeping Up with the Corinthians.

And part of the reason for that, if we're honest, is, sorry to speak for Chris and Niels, but certainly for myself, I think we're just not smart enough or cool enough to do that.

[2 : 1 2] And I think we all know there's nothing worse than someone who's not cool trying to be cool, right? That just doesn't go down well. But actually, there's a deeper reason than just our personality or our personal preference.

And that is actually, it's a matter of conviction. See, ever since Watermark started 12 years ago when Tobin was here, right from the earliest days, one of the founding principles of Watermark Church is that we're going to be a church that is rooted on God's Word, that our Sunday services are going to center around God's Word and God speaking to us from His Word.

And generally, what that means is what we call expositional sermons or expository preaching. I know that's a big word, but the word expositional or expository simply means to open something up, to make something that's maybe not that clear clear, to expose something.

Think of a journalist that writes an expose, right? They find some scoop, and they dig in, and they find the story, and they write this expose exposing what's hidden.

They bring it out into the light. But, well, expository preaching is when we preach, we go to a book of the Bible, a passage of Scripture, and the goal is to say, what is in here that maybe is hidden or hard to see?

[3 : 31] Or let's find out what was the author trying to say in this passage, and therefore, what is God saying in this passage? And we try and open it up to make clear what God is saying so that we can hear God's Word.

So expository preaching has the main point of the sermon, generally, is the main point of the passage. And the opposite of this, of course, is a topical sermon, where I come up with a topic or a theme, like how to deal with your baggage, or how to deal with difficult parents, or how to win at life.

And I come up with some ideas and some thoughts and some points. But then, because I'm, you know, this is a church, we've got to find a Bible verse. So I go to my Bible, and I find a verse to back up what I'm saying.

Okay, well, there's a place for that from time to time. But generally, what we want to do is come to God's Word and say, what does God's Word say so that we can hear from that? Okay, now, why do we do that?

I mean, surely we're in the 21st century. Surely we want to be more relevant, more modern, more attractive than that. Why do something so old-fashioned, like just preach through Ecclesiastes?

[4 : 45] Well, I'm so glad you've asked that question. And we're going to hear from Echoes, going to come and read God's Word, and then we're going to find out why. Okay, so let's listen to the reading of God's Word.

As we consider why we usually preach through entire books of the Bible, we'll read from three passages of Scripture today. Isaiah chapter 60 and 6, 2 Timothy, and 2 Corinthians.

Please follow along on the screen or your bulletin. Starting in Isaiah chapter 66, verse 1, we read, Thus says the Lord, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.

What is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, so all these things came to be, declares the Lord.

But this is the one to whom I will look. He who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. Then in 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 14 to 16, But as for you, continuing what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through facing Christ Jesus.

[6 : 13] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. Lastly, in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 1 to 6, Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways.

We refuse to practice cunning or to temper with God's word. But by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in face of Jesus Christ.

This is the word of God. Echo, you did so well there. That was not easy passages to read, so well done. Great.

[7 : 44] Why do we do this? Why do we as a church choose to preach through books of the Bible like this? Well, there's a couple reasons. The first reason is because of what the church is.

Because of what the church is. Look at the first passage in the bulletin with me. And look at what God says here. Now, the context is, the book of Isaiah kind of chronicles the nation of Israel.

And the first half really deals with their problem. They're in a bad way. They get taken to exile. What's speaking about them going to exile? And the second half talks about the way that they're going to return to God.

They're going to come back. God starts off Isaiah 40. Comfort, comfort to my people. And at the end, it's kind of talking about the resolution to what has been their problem.

And in chapter 64, Israel repents. They turn to God. And they say, God, we are committed to following you. And look at how he responds in chapter 66. He says, Thus says the Lord, Heaven is my throne.

[8 : 44] The earth is my footstool. What is the house that you would build for me? What is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made. And all these things came to be.

So what's God saying here? Well, he says, Heaven is my throne. He's saying, All these things came to be through my hand. God is saying, I am the creator, the sustainer, of everything and everyone.

You look at the night sky, you see the stars? My hand brought them about. The galaxies, the Milky Way, the universe, the multiple universes, however many there are. All these things came to be because I brought them about.

And you look at the minuscule things. If you could, you know, down in 600 BC, see atoms and molecules, if they're telescopes. You see all those things? Those things, my hand brought them about.

And so, he says, The gold that you want to use to build the temple, the silver that you want to use, all these things came about by my hand. Verse 1, You see, the people of Israel are running around.

[9 : 51] They're thinking, Oh God, God's in a bad way. The temple is ruined. 605 BC, the Babylonians smashed the temple. God is restless. He doesn't have a place to rest.

He must be in anxiety in heaven. So, let's build him a temple, a really good temple. And if we can build him a great temple, a house, finally, God will be at rest.

And then, things will be okay. And God says, Actually, everything that you want to use to build my house, actually, I'm the one that brought it into existence.

And so, before you get too excited about thinking about building me a house, just remember who it is that built me a universe. It's me, says God. God says, Don't you see, I am the sovereign God, the creator.

Everything around you, I brought it into being. And it's the same thing that Solomon says in Psalm 127, a very famous song. Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

[10 : 52] Unless the Lord watches over the city, his people, the watchman stays awake in vain. Friends, the church, God's house, is not simply a human organization.

It's a divine, even a supernatural organism, an institution. It's not the product of human ingenuity, of human wisdom. God, himself, is both the foundation, and the head, the builder, and the sustainer, of everything, but including his house, his body, the church.

In the church, if there's any real life that happens, any real change, supernatural change, it's not because the leaders are great, or because the leaders are smart, it's because there's a great God, who's at work in that church.

The church is God's building, it's his house that he establishes. So Israel is saying, we're going to build you a house. And God says, I don't need you to build me a house, you need me to build you a house.

I, all these things my hand has made, says the Lord. John Piper very famously said this, you can build a great big church, by human wisdom, and human ingenuity, but all you'll do, is build a monument, to your own futility.

[12 : 12] Think about that. You can build something wonderful, and big, and impressive, and people say, wow, look at that. But if it's built on human wisdom, human ingenuity, in 20, and 30, and 50 years time, people are going to say, remember there's that church, Watermark?

Those guys thought they were so good, they were so impressive. Whatever happened to that church? All it will become, is a monument, to your own futility. You see, the nature of the church, it is God's church, it's God's people, it's a family, with God as the head, and the center, and the foundation, of the church, and its leaders, are merely its servants.

Which is why, one of the reasons, we've said this before, I really struggle, when people call me, Pastor Kevin. Right? If you're new to Watermark, don't call me, Pastor Kevin. Okay? Because I feel, it kind of like, elevates, like there's the regular congregation, normal Christians, and then there's the pastor.

Right? And then there's God, just above them. Actually, no, we're all sinners, we're all broken. Okay, yeah, sure, I've got a role, the other pastors, have got a role, that's right, but this is God's church.

It's one of the reasons, why often, we'll introduce ourselves, and say, Kevin, I'm one of the leaders here, Nielsen, one of the leaders here. Yeah, okay, my job description, says senior pastor, but actually, Jesus is the senior pastor, it's his church, and we are its servants.

[13 : 34] Think about this, when I go visit my parents' home, in Cape Town, right, so I go there, I know, my dad's going to say three things, when I walk in the door. Firstly, son, it's so good to see you, welcome home.

Secondly, make yourself at home. Okay, he's going to say that. And the third thing, he's going to say, you know where everything is, right? Here's the fridge, there's the chocolates, there's the snacks, there's the Cape Town wine cabinet, make yourself at home, right?

So imagine, two weeks later, my dad walks in, and I'm repainting the one wall, and then I knock out the one wall, I just want to make my room a little bit bigger there, and then I can bring in a contractor, we're going to change the bathroom.

He says, what are you doing? Hey, you said, make yourself at home. I don't like the wall here, and I don't like that, I thought I'd just change it. What's he going to say? He says, hey, when I said, make yourself at home, I didn't say, this is your home, okay?

It's still my home. I get to determine how I want this home. Well, friends, the church is God's house. It belongs to Him, to God Almighty.

[14 : 41] And we, the leaders, we're servants here, but we don't own the church. It's not, Watermark isn't my church, it's His church. We are servants here. And so, that means that, this is God's family.

He's the one who determines how we build, and what happens in here. This week, I was reading in my devotions, Exodus. And, if you've read Exodus lately, the second half of Exodus, it can be a little challenging, okay?

There's chapter after chapter, about lots of instructions, how to build the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the precursor to the temple. And so, for chapter after chapter, it says, you know, the curtain must be this many cubits, and this many silver clasps, and they must be fit into the base, and the base must be made of this material.

And then the priest's clothing, they must be made out of this, and you must have little patterns here, and bells over there. And after a while, you think, okay, I get it. Just tell us there was a temple, tell us there was a church, and there was a curtain, and just give us the basics, okay?

Do we need all this detail? And you read on, and on, and on. Sometimes you think, what's going on here? And in chapter 40, about, I think it's about 15 times, it says, and Moses did what God commanded.

[15 : 50] And Moses did what God commanded. And Moses did what God commanded. And Moses did. Until you get to the last paragraph of the book of Exodus, and what does it say?

The glory of God filled the temple with such power, and such authority, the priest could hardly minister. In other words, God came down, and filled it, and suddenly you realize, God knew what he was saying, all along.

God had a plan for his temple, how he wanted it, because he wanted to meet with his people, and bless them there. And God coming down, was contingent upon Moses building, how God wanted him to build.

Okay? The first thing is, the church is God's church. And we build according to the maker's instructions. Second thing, why do we do what we do?

Why do we do things this way? Because of what the Bible is. Okay? I wonder what you think of the Bible. I mean, what is the Bible really? Yeah, sure, it's a collection of 66 ancient documents written between 2,000 and 4,000 years ago.

[17 : 00] Different genres, different authors, different languages. Some poetry, some history, some wisdom literature, some biography. But what is it really, in its essence?

What is the Bible? Maybe you think, the Bible is great wisdom. It gives us direction, how to live a happy, and meaningful life. Maybe you think, the Bible is a book of inspiration, encouragement.

You're feeling down, you're feeling overwhelmed by life. Well, you go to the Bible, it's going to give you some promises and some encouragement. Maybe you think, the Bible is a religious manual to guide you in your religious search through life.

Well, those who come to the Bible will certainly discover all those things. Great encouragement, great direction. But actually, the Bible is more than that. The Bible is God's word to us.

Look at our second passage, in our bulletin here, in 2 Timothy. Paul writes, and look at what he says here. He says, I know, Timothy's writing to this young man, this young pastor. He says, I know how from childhood you've been acquainted with the sacred writings, that means the Jewish scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ.

[18 : 13] Okay, now, pause here. That's the primary purpose of the scriptures, to lead us to salvation, saving faith in Jesus Christ, to reveal to us our need for God, and the good news that Jesus has gone to the cross so that we can find salvation in Him.

That's the main purpose of the scriptures. But notice here, Timothy only had the Old Testament. The New Testament hadn't been formed or finished, formed by the stage. And so, Paul writes, he says, even the Old Testament is meant to lead Timothy to saving faith in Jesus.

So, the whole Bible, New Testament and Old Testament are all about Jesus, right? Do you see that? It says, the scriptures, the Old Testament are meant to lead you to faith in Christ.

Verse 16, for all scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for reproof, correction, training in righteousness.

Paul says here something amazing. He says, the scripture is breathed out by God, which is his way of saying the scripture is not just inspired by man. It's not like the apostles or the prophets sat down to write and said, God, I really need your inspiration or they found some inspiration from the mountains and the weather and God and they wrote this very inspiring book.

[19 : 32] That's not what he means. It means that actually when the authors write, the human authors are actually God's mouthpiece. They're God's spokesperson as it were.

And the apostle Peter writes, he says, no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke by God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. And so what that means is that, yes, there's a human author, but actually behind the human author there's the divine author using that human author's personality, his giftings, his vocabulary, his style to actually say what God wants him to say.

And so this book, yeah, it's got lots of human author personality and style, but it's God's word, to us. The scriptures, you could say it like this, when the Bible speaks, God speaks.

I once heard somebody say, slightly cheekily, but anyway, if you want to hear God speaking, read God's word. If you want to hear God speaking audibly, okay, you want to hear an audible voice, read God's word out loud.

Yeah, slightly cheeky, but now, now of course, the Bible isn't the only way that God speaks. He can speak through nature and creation. Psalm 19, the heavens declare the glory of God.

[20 : 50] But even Psalm 19 goes on to say nature isn't enough. That's why we need God's word. God's law is perfect, reviving the soul. God's word is just opening the eyes.

God speaks through nature. But God also speaks through the Holy Spirit, right? If you're a Christian, you've got the Holy Spirit living inside of you. Sometimes God the Spirit will speak to you and guide you, put an impression on your heart, maybe give you a picture.

That's true. But the most authoritative way, the most direct way that God speaks to us, the way we can be sure it's God and not just me, is through His word.

And what that means is God's word is profoundly meaningful. When we engage with Scripture, when we search it and explore it and mine it and open it up, we get to hear what the sovereign, eternal, uncreated, forever existed being thinks and what His heart is.

Friends, when you read Scripture, the one who made you or knew you before you were even conceived, the one who knows everything about you, the best of you and the worst of you, the one who knows you better than you know yourself and who loves you better than anyone loves you, reveals His heart to you in Scripture.

[22 : 09] And so this isn't just a manual or a guide or a book of wisdom. It is profoundly personal because it's God revealing His heart. It's not only meaningful, it's powerful.

God's word actually accomplishes stuff. It actually has the power to it. In the Bible, the Bible uses many metaphors to describe the Scriptures. Paul says, it's like a sword that cuts through the fog and the confusion.

You're kind of not sure, who am I? What is my purpose in life? The Scripture is like a sword that can cut through there and go straight to the matters at hand. Jeremiah says, the Bible is like a hammer that breaks open hardness and hard hearts and can speak to our hearts.

Jeremiah says, the Bible is like a fire bomb that is about to combust and is bubbling below the surface and can change your whole life. The writer to Hebrews says, the Scripture is like a surgeon's scalpel that cuts straight through the flesh and the muscle and gets straight to the heart of the matter.

I remember, let me show you the Scripture. One Thessalonian says this, Paul writes, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the Word of man, but as it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you.

[23 : 30] See, God's Word is not just profound, it does something, it changes you, it's at work in you. I remember about 10 years ago, I was leading a congregation in Cape Town and a friend of mine who leads another church, Ian, was preaching at our church and he was preaching from John chapter 21.

Now if you know John chapter 21, it's the end of the Gospel of John, Peter and his friends, Jesus died, he's risen again, Peter and his friends are fishing and Jesus comes to them and Jesus says this interesting thing to Peter, he says to him three times, Peter, do you love me?

Peter, do you love me? Peter says, yes, I love you. Jesus says, Peter, do you love me? He says, yes, Lord, I love you. Third time, Peter, do you love me? And my friend Ian is saying, why does Jesus ask Peter three times, do you love me?

And I'm sitting in the front row, I'm the pastor, I'm in to know the answer and I think, that's a great question. I've always wondered about that, why does God say that? Three times, do you love me? And just ask him once, right?

And Ian says, well, let's just go back to John chapter 19. You remember how Peter says, Lord, I'll never betray you. Everyone else will deny you, but I'll die with you. And a few hours later, Peter denies Jesus.

[24 : 42] But how many times does he deny him? Not just once, not just twice, three times. And so Peter denies Jesus three times. And three times, Jesus comes and he elicits this response from Peter, saying, Peter, I know you love me and I've still got a calling on your life.

Just because you sinned doesn't mean I've written you off. And as Ian opened that up for me, it was like this fire bomb in my heart exploded and it was like, God spoke to me and said, Kevin, I know you're a sinner.

I know you mess up. I know you deny me, but your sin doesn't write you off in my eyes. I still love you and I know you love me and I haven't written you off.

I can still picture sitting in that chair today how God's word spoke to me so powerfully because it wasn't the word of man, it's the word of God. I remember a few years later, listening or watching a video of John Piper preaching Isaiah 46.

And he just works through Isaiah 46 comparing the sovereign God to the gods of Babylon. And he opens up and he shows what God is saying. And as I sat there, tears rolled down my eyes and as I realized, this God that we serve is completely unlike any other God.

[26 : 00] He is sovereign and glorious and majestic. But you know what's happening? In those moments, that wasn't just human wisdom. That was God.

As his word was opened up, God spoke to me and changed my life. And that's what Paul, that's what was happening. And Paul says, this scripture is at work in you. It's powerful.

It changes you. God's word is powerful. It's meaningful. But it's also deeply personal because it's where we encounter the personal God who knows us and loves us.

In other words, in God's word, God shares with us not just his instructions, not just his rules, not just his good news, but also his heart.

His heart. When the Bible speaks, God speaks, which is why God takes the way that we take his word very seriously.

[26 : 57] Look at Isaiah 66 with me again. God says this, heaven is my throne, the earth is my footstool. What is the house that you would build for me? What is the place of my rest? All these things, my hand is made and so they came to be.

But then look what God says. He says, Israel, you're not going to build me a house. I'm going to build you a house. You're not going to build me a temple. I'm going to build you a temple, says God. But what kind of people is God going to use?

I mean, who does God trust to do the work of building his temple? Sure, he's not just going to use anyone. He's going to use specific people. Well, look at what he says. This is the one to whom I will look.

What he means is this is the one that I will esteem and honor. He who is humble and contrite in spirit. Okay, that makes sense. God's going to use humble people. But how does God define humility or contrition?

What does it mean to be humble before God? Well, look at the next line. Those who tremble at my word. Those who don't sit in judgment over my word is those who come to my word and say, God, what do you want to say?

[28 : 06] Friends, the reason why we in Sundays want to work through God's word and come to God's word and say, what does God have to say to us is because it keeps us, as God has presented it, we don't want to hear the opinions of man.

We want to hear what God has to say because of what the Bible is. The Bible is God's word to us. And that leads us to the third thing which is what is preaching.

What is the church? It's God's church. What is the Bible? It's God's word. What is preaching? It's God speaking to us. Look at a passage. I'm afraid it's not in your bulletin.

I'm sorry, but it should be on the screen. Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 2 with me. The Apostle Paul writes this and he says, When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or profound human wisdom.

For I decided to know nothing amongst you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. And my speech and my message were not with plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power so that your faith might not rest on the wisdom of man but on the wisdom, on the power of God.

[29 : 23] Paul says here that what is preaching? Preaching is not giving a religious pep talk. It's not saying, come on, you can do it. It's not just a bit of inspiration or encouragement.

Hopefully it should be a little bit encouraging. That's what a TED talk is, right? I like TED talks. Nothing wrong with TED talks. But that's not preaching.

Preaching is when we as a church come to God's Word and we open it up speaking for God on behalf of God to make clear what God has said. So that as a body we can encounter God in His Word as He has revealed Himself.

Look at the third passage in our bulletin today. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4, he says, Having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. Okay, just side note there.

All ministry, Christian leadership, is by the mercy of God. It's God's gift. It's not because we are brilliant or smart or amazing. It's the mercy of God. It says, But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways.

[30 : 29] We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word. Rather, by the open statement of truth, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. Paul's writing here and he says, When he left Corinth, a whole bunch of other preachers were coming and they're saying, No, you can't trust Paul.

I mean, he doesn't speak very well. He's not that clever. Don't trust him. Come on, I'll tell you what you really need to believe. And what they do, they bring the Scriptures and they say, Oh, Paul, he wasn't really speaking the truth.

What you need to do is if you really want God to love you, you've got to be circumcised. You've got to serve like this. You've got to give like this. You've got to do a whole lot of religious hoops. They were adding to God's Word.

And what does Paul call that? He says, Disgraceful, underhanded ways. Look at verse 5. He says, Rather, we proclaim not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants.

Now, just side note here, Paul makes an interesting argument. He says, When I come to you and say, Okay, Watermark, listen to me. I've got a wonderful message for you. Okay? It's not in God's Word, but listen to me.

[31 : 39] What am I doing there? I'm actually setting myself up as Lord. But Paul says, We didn't do that. We didn't proclaim ourselves. We proclaimed Jesus Christ as Lord.

And how do you know we did that? We proclaimed His Word. So in other words, the authority that you speak from is the Lord of that church. Does that make sense?

Okay. Not really. Should I explain that again? If I come in my own authority, who's the Lord of this church? It's me. But when I come and say, Listen, don't listen to me.

I'm just a servant here. But this is what God is saying. Who's the Lord of this church? Jesus is. Because we're listening to His Word, not the Word of man. Friends, Can I confess something?

It is so easy, so easy, for pastors to tamper with God's Word and to make it say what they want it to say. Because if I want you to do something, all I need to do is just come to it and say, Find a Bible verse and take it out of context and twist it and say, God says you need to do this.

[32 : 44] You need to serve me. You need to do this. And how are you going to argue with God? If I pull off the God card, it's pretty hard to argue with that. But Paul writes and he says, That's not what Christian ministry is.

We refuse to tamper with God's Word that is disgraceful and unhandled. Rather, we proclaim not ourselves, but Christ Jesus. So imagine this. Imagine you're a businessman, you're a businesswoman, and you've got an important client somewhere in Asia, in Japan.

And you've got a big deal, and you need to go and negotiate and handle this deal. And you're going to fly there, you're going to come back, do the one-week quarantine. But just before you fly out, you get COVID.

And so, oh boy, okay, you're in lockdown. You can't go. But it's an important transaction, and so you send a messenger to go and represent your interests. And so you say, Listen, this is what we need to do, this is what we need to say, go and represent our interests.

And the messenger, the representative, goes there and says, Actually, I don't really like what that guy was saying. I think I've got a better idea. And so he goes to speak to the client with his own message and his own ideas, and he changes the terms, right?

[33 : 57] He says, listen, scrap what he was thinking. I think actually this. How are you going to feel about that? Okay, you're going to be a little bit upset, right? Why? Because he's meant to represent you, but he's coming with his own message.

Friends, do you know how easy it is for pastors to do that? To pretend to represent God's word, but to come with my own word. It is so easy for us to use God's word to manipulate people.

But look at what pastors is. We have renounced such disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to tamper with God's word. Rather, we proclaim to you, Christ is Lord.

So, how do we protect the church from doing that? How do we protect the church against manipulation? Well, one way is we come to God's word and say, God, what do you want to say in your word?

And so, we open up at Ecclesiastes chapter 1 and say, God, what is your word saying here? What's your message to us as a church, and how can we apply that? And the next week, we say, okay, well, what is Ecclesiastes 2?

[35 : 01] What are you saying here? What is the author saying? What are you saying? And how can we apply that? And the next week, well, what is God saying here, and how does that speak to us as a church?

Friends, when you come to church on Sunday, you don't want to hear what I have to say. Who cares what I think? Okay? What I think is completely irrelevant. When we come to church on Sunday, we gather because we want to hear what God has to say.

And how do we do that? Well, we come to His word. We open up His word. We expose His word and say, God, what are you saying to us as a church? Okay. Well, practically, what does this mean?

Let me suggest four very quick practical applications of this. First thing is this. When you come to church, come ready to hear God speak. Okay? It's very easy to come to church on Sunday and you're still mourning the loss of your soccer team the night before.

Okay? Or you come to church on Sunday and you're thinking about the stock price and you're hoping that things are going to rebound and things are going to hopefully pick up. Or you're thinking about that meeting you've got tomorrow and you just go through the motions.

[36 : 07] So, friends, come to church ready. Say, God Almighty, the creator of the universe, God, come and speak to me today. In the call to worship, in the songs we sing, in the communion, God, speak to me through your word today.

I want to meet with you. Each Sunday on the way to church, on the bus, as you walk down the ramp, God, I want to encounter you today. Speak to me today. Secondly, bring your Bible.

We here brought the biggest Bible I've ever seen in my life today, right? Bring a Bible to church. Now, the reason why is this. There's a verse in Acts chapter 17 and listen to what it says.

It says, the Bereans received the word of God that Paul preached with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if the things that Paul said were true were really true.

So, Paul's in the synagogue and he's preaching and he says, remember how God said this in Isaiah 53 and they say, wait, wait, wait, let's just check Isaiah 53 and they're searching that what Paul said is true is actually true.

[37 : 07] Friends, bring your Bible to church. I promise you, I'm not going to lie to you, but just double check and actually flick there and say, okay, 2 Corinthians, what's the context? What's actually going on here when Paul says that?

And search that what we say is in God's word is actually in God's word. Bring your Bible to church. Third thing is this, when moving churches, find a church that will teach you God's word.

Now, this is more applicable to us than any other time because so many people are moving, right? You want to go to the USA? Okay. You want to go to England? Okay, Chris and Fiona, I was going to say find a good church, but I guess they don't have too many choices.

They're going to go to the church that they're working at. But if you're moving overseas, find a church that is going to teach you God's word. Now, just a quick hint, don't find a church based on their social media.

Okay, that doesn't help. Or how cool the pastor is or how amazing the music is. And just because their website says they believe in the Bible doesn't actually mean they're going to teach you God's word.

[38 : 07] Okay, no church is going to say we don't believe the Bible, we think it's rubbish, don't come here. Every church is going to say we love the Bible. Okay, find a church that is going to teach you God's word week by week, chapter by chapter through His word.

Find a church that's going to teach you God's word. Finally, be a man or a woman of prayer. Oh my goodness. Be a man or a woman of prayer as well. Be a man or a woman of the word.

Okay? Friends, you will only become a man or a woman of God to the degree to which this book owns you. If you want to have a, if you want to be anchored in the storms of life, if you want a rock that is going to build your life upon, when the storms come, if you don't want to be blown over, make sure you're a man or a woman of the book of God's word.

Day in autumn, one of my heroes says like this, to read the scripture is to read Christ. To read the scripture is to hear Christ. Make the worshipful reading of scripture your central daily habit without which you have not lived a normal day.

Friends, it may be that if you get to the end of the day and you haven't even gotten to God's word, there's something off about that day. There's something that doesn't feel right because you're so used to feasting, starting off your day, having your heart mesmerized by the wonder of God in his word.

[39 : 36] Friends, God's word is living and active. It's meaningful, it's powerful, it's personal, it's true. It's the life source of Christians and it's the life source of the church. That's why you and I must become people of the word.

That's why we must be a church of the word. That's why we preach through books of the Bible. Thus says the Lord, heaven is my throne, the earth is my footstool, what is the house that you would build for me?

What is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made and so they came to be. But this is the one that I will look to, he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

Let's pray together. Oh, heavenly father, as we, as we as a church family, revisit some of these foundational truths of why we do the things we do.

God, I pray, I pray God that you will put the fear of God on us, on us as a church and particularly us as leaders, that God, we will never do what Paul says the other leaders were doing.

[40 : 39] Twisting God's word, tampering with your word, playing fast and loose with your word. God, I pray you put the fear of God in us, that we will be a church that will sniff that out, that will reject that and renounce that, and will be those who tremble at your word.

God, make us men and women of your word. But I want you to anchor us in the word, that when the storms of life come, when things are difficult, we will know what our rock is. We will be firmly rooted, that the foundations of our lives will be so deeply fastened into you because we are people of your word, that we will not be shaken, we will not be blown over.

God, I pray, help us. In your great and awesome name we pray. Amen.