

# Four Pillars of a Strong Church

Pillar 3: “Passionate Proclamation – Be careful how you hear!”

Luke 8:18

## Part 2

As I thought about this sermon, I really tried to imagine the different ways that we can come in here on a Sunday morning and approach the service, and I am going to specifically focus on the preaching and teaching of God’s Word since that is the pillar we are talking about.

But I thought of 3 different ways, there are probably a ton more, but here’s the 3 that I thought of. **The** first way is like going to the movie theatre. We just go. We jump in our cars, maybe grab a bite to eat, pay for tickets, go in and sit down, maybe talk a little...

...and then slip into a vegetative state and watch the movie. Or some of you really like to think about what’s going on so you pay a little closer attention.

But it’s primarily something that is being done to you, yes...it can arouse emotion and thought, but you really don’t have to respond in any kind of depth other than maybe talking about it with someone afterwards.

But it’s more entertainment, right...that’s why we choose to do it (at least I do) when we want a relaxing evening and turn the brain off for a little.

That’s approach number 1 where I think that experience has or can slowly seep into our view and approach to the Sunday morning preaching and teaching of God’s Word and we will flesh that out little more later on.

The second approach **could** be that of a lecture on different types of dirt. Now that might excite some of you with green thumbs, but for the rest of

us who have normal colored thumbs, call me crazy, but it just doesn't compete with batman, OK.

And so for some of us, I wonder if that's how we feel coming in here Sunday after Sunday and having to sit through another long winded boring sermon.

**Or the** third approach, which I pray for all of us to be even more excited about, more than any of that other stuff, and that is to come every Sunday expecting to hear the voice of God through the preaching and teaching of His Word.

That when Scripture speaks we really believe that God is speaking.

That God is talking every time the Bible is opened up or quoted and like we said last week, that's why we want everything around here on a Sunday morning to be soaking wet, dripping wet with the Bible. Martin Luther called the church "The mouth house of God."

We can't be that without the Book being proclaimed.

And so last week we talked about how important preaching the Word of God is to the life of the church. How it is a matter of life and death for the preacher to do this. To Passionately Proclaim the Word of God!

**Timothy**...Paul writes to the young preacher..."Preach the Word..." and "Keep a close watch on **yourself** and on the teaching. Persist in this (and I would make the case for including the persistent expository preaching through the books of the bible that we talked about last week),

...for by so doing you will **save** both **yourself** and your **hearers**." 1 Timothy 4:16.

Listen...God's voice is the only voice that has the power to save and keep a soul, faith comes from God through the hearing of the word of God and so...how will anyone be saved and preserved well if someone isn't preaching and teaching God's Word's to them.

So...it is a matter of life and death Timothy for you to do this...but please don't miss this, Paul also mentions in that passage that's it's not only a matter of life and death for the preacher, **it's also** a matter of life and death for the listener, for the congregation.

Which brings us to our focus this morning which is the life and death business of listening to the preaching and teaching of God's Word Sunday after Sunday. And I want you to please hear me, how you approach this every weekend has huge implications for your life.

Now, I guarantee you that in our churches today there are different kinds of listeners sitting in the pew. It's been that way in every age, including when even God himself in the flesh preached to men.

Turn in your bible to Luke chapter 8, beginning with verse 9. Many of you know the parable of the **four soils**, which he describes in verses 4 through 8 as he's preaching to the crowds.

If you don't know what a parable is, many times Jesus taught spiritual truths using everyday things like farming as illustrations of those spiritual truths. But his closest followers did not understand the parable so he goes on to explain it in verses 9 through 15.

<sup>9</sup> And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, <sup>10</sup> he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'

<sup>11</sup> Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup> The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup> And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. <sup>14</sup> And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. <sup>15</sup> As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing

the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

And then we move down a couple of verses to our key verse for today **which** is verse 18 which says, “Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given (which is what I want for us), and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”

And so the main thing that I wanted to draw out of this text is the fact that there are different kinds of listeners, whether it's unbelieving people who think the Bible is just another human book, or religious book written by mere men who made this stuff up.

That the cross of Christ is stupid, a God who died, what kind of God is that. That's the first soil where the word of God would do the same thing to them as if you were preaching to a wall. Those people are dead in their sin.

It doesn't impact them at all. And Satan snatches away any traces left over of God's Word from their heart.

Or you have the second soil person, who thinks church and the Bible are good things, maybe they grew up with it, religion is a good thing and I believe it will make my life better and when it doesn't get better, they say, what's this all about. Well, I tried it. It doesn't work.

Or we have the third and fourth soils, those who I believe are true believers, the third immature, and the fourth maturing, and that's where I want to focus today because I assume that since we are the gathered saints, most of us are believers.

And I want to get from the third soil to the fourth soil but first and second soil people out there, those who aren't sure of this whole Christian thing...

...don't tune me out because we are still preaching the word of God and it's through the preaching of the Word of God that all of us ever became

born again in the first place and became true 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> soil people...Christians. 1 Peter 1:23 and 25.

“You have been born again, through the living and abiding word of God. This word is the good news that was preached to you.”

Now if you are confused about the Bible, then ask God for help in understanding his word so that we don't have ears that fail to hear. So that we aren't those who ever hear but never understand.

I was once like that when I wasn't born again. At one point even in the disciple's life, at the end of the book of Luke, in **chapter** 24 it says...

...<sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,<sup>46</sup> and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations...

So first and second soil people, there is no other name under heaven for you to be saved. Just Jesus...no other god has died for you in your place receiving punishment for what you did against the true God...

...and so if I were you I would cry out to Him to save you and if I were you I would turn from my sin of anger, and jealousy and lust, and lying...listen we all did because we came to the place where we realized we did all those things and more...

...but we found forgiveness and the fact that all of those things were cancelled from our criminal record through the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross. Without blood and death, there is no forgiveness of sin with God.

Listen, either we pay or we throw ourselves at the mercy of the one who paid the debt for us.

I like that option better than paying for it myself in hell for all eternity. I pray the same thing for you now. I hope you are truly hearing me.

Alright 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> soilers. I guess we are all green thumbs after all. This is for us. How do we become careful listeners to the preaching and teaching of God's Holy Word so that we love it and can't wait to hear it, and produce lots of fruit...4<sup>th</sup> soil people.

I want to talk practically now about our preparation before Sunday morning preaching, and then what we do while sitting here Sunday morning listening, and then what we should be doing with what we heard as we walk out the door.

So let me begin with preparation before Sunday morning. And I'll start with a case study of 2 people preparing for the Sunday morning sermon. This actually comes from one of the books that I read on the subject.

"Adam couldn't really bother with the sermons. There were a number of things he liked about church, especially the friends he had made and the music (when the new music group was leading). But not the sermons. He felt he had to put up with those because it would look a bit off if he walked out when the preacher started. They just seemed dull. Faced with the entertainment choice between 24 and The Sermon, it was a no-brainer: 24 won, any day.

Beth was really looking forward to the sermon. Last Sunday she had gone up to the preacher and said: "I'm so looking forward to next Sunday-can't wait. He looked pleased, if a bit surprised. But Beth wasn't being a creep; she really did look forward to the sermon, with a sense of eager anticipation. She wondered what God was going to say to her. She felt as if someone had told her to expect a telephone call from the President: all week she was, as it were, waiting by the phone. So when the sermon started she was paying close attention."

But then the author said this, "Beth was right. And Adam was a fool."

Now we know which one was the careful listener but why? I would say...

The one who prepares themselves during the week and the night before is the one who is a careful listener and will be the one who will grow in their walk with Jesus Christ...

...because they believe that He has ordained that much of our growth happens through the careful listening of his word being taught and preached. So we must work on how to become careful listeners. 4 things that will help us become careful listeners.

**Number 1**, you heard from Beth that she wondered what God was going to say to her. She came expecting to hear from God. As we hammered at this last week, the overwhelming thought was that when the Bible is preached and taught, God is talking to us.

Paul wrote this to the Thessalonians...

<sup>13</sup> **And** we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

Now those are apostles speaking the Word of God, but Peter also writes that if anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God...1 Peter 4:11. This is in the context of the preaching and teaching ministry of the local church.

Now please understand, not all of a teacher and preacher's words are the words of God...and we will talk about that a little later on when we discuss what we are to be doing as listeners on a Sunday morning.

But for the most part, if the Bible is being preached and taught faithfully, God has given them authority to stand as His representative to preach and teach his word and so we need to come with the mindset that God is going to speak to us through them.

And we should not come nonchalantly like we are going to the movie theatre or to hear a boring lecture. Listen when Nehemiah got up to open and explain the Word of God, all of the people stood up and listened

carefully. Nehemiah chapter 8 verse 3 says “And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.”

The same should be with us. Pastor Cassel told us pastors about the passage that he preached on recently about the people in Jesus hometown who had eyes to see but they really didn't see. They had ears to hear but they really didn't hear...why?

Because instead of seeing the Son of God before their very eyes, they saw the young kid Jesus who was the mere son of Joseph and Mary. They saw him as a mere man and so what can happen is this. Now we are not Jesus but what can happen is this.

We come Sunday morning expecting to hear from Pastor so and so when we should be praying, God what are you going to say to me through the pastor. It's not just the voice of a man, but the voice of God through the man if he is preaching His word faithfully. Expect to hear from God.

**Number 2.** One pastor said, congregations get what they pray for. I guarantee you that Beth was praying for her pastor all week long, for his study, his time with the Lord, and for the Lord's Words to be spoken through the pastor on Sunday...

...which will move her to pray and prepare her own heart to hear from God. And I wouldn't doubt that Beth meditates on last week's message and then reads the passage for this week's message. We could probably do a better job in letting you know what's going to be preached next week.

I am thankful for one family in particular who just told me, and for the many of you who have told me that you pray for the preacher's preparation every week. And that one family who goes to first service now prays in our church during the entire second service. That's huge.

That's what made Charles Spurgeon such a powerful tool in the hands of the Lord if you remember the story I told you a few weeks ago.



Number 3 for preparation. **Prepare** yourself for the Lord's Day the night before. Read the passage if you know it, pray for the pastor with your family. And get enough sleep. At the latest, I go to bed at 10. Make the Lord's Day the epitome of your week.

And offer the Lord acceptable spiritual worship by engaging and renewing your mind and transforming your life. Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. You can't do that if you are consistently tired.

And the last preparation point that I want to tell you about is this. **Please** come expecting to be uplifted and encouraged, the bible does that, but if you remember from our passage last week, we must also come expecting to be rebuked and corrected.

I focus on this because this is the part we don't like, but the Bible does that too.

Yes, we have been redeemed, fully justified in our standing before God through the righteous life and forgiving blood of Christ, and we rejoice and we celebrate and we declare his praises because of that...

...but our on-going sanctification or being made holy will happen all throughout our life which means this.

We still have sin that God is getting rid of and in order to do that he exposes it by His Word and cuts right to it in the core of our being...Hebrews 4:12...and it can hurt big time.

We must understand that we come to the Bible as redeemed, yet still sinful people. We are not all perfectly OK yet in this life and the Bible is relentless in changing us to the very core of our being and making us more and more OK...

...so we must understand that our flesh will automatically react against God's word but as redeemed people, the Holy Spirit within us helps us to take offense of our own sin...sometimes over time...so that we put it off and put it to death...

...and then submit to God's law and love it and we begin to change and grow in holiness.

**“Therefore** put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” (James 1:21). The Bible is always redeeming us, for sanctification too.

One more quick thought before we move on, even if we are not reading the text for the upcoming sermon, just being in the word and prayerfully meditating on it makes you used to the voice of God. You get used to hearing His voice.

And then you will hear it coming through the preaching because it sounds so familiar. It can be like other words that he said. You may think of other verses that the pastor hasn't mentioned. Jesus said his sheep hear his voice and they know it. So be in the word during the week.

Alright time to talk about what we do while **sitting** here listening to the sermon or even sitting in a Sunday school class listening to the teaching of God's Word.

I think the first thing that we should do, and we already talked about the mind, is to fully engage with our heads and our hearts.

That means we don't treat the preaching and teaching of God's Holy Word by falling asleep, or daydreaming, or thinking about what I'm going to do after the service. Again, God is talking, we should not treat him that way.

**I think** this is why many people like to take notes. It helps them to stay engaged. It's not required, but it's helpful. Many of you tell me how you take lots of notes and then go back over them, pray over them, or you discuss it with other people later.

Some of you have notebooks with all of your sermon guides in them. And that's great, now I have to say for me, the best way again for me to

learn is to make notes in my Bible and I've gotten away from that, I've got to get back to that and it's hard with little margins sometimes...

...but my deepest growth has been when simply jotting down thoughts or notes when studying myself or listening to someone else. Whatever's best for you. Some of you have even printed off my manuscript. That's awesome. That blows me away.

But God will bless that kind of diligent study of His preached Word.

What's also helpful when you **have your Bible** with you is this, not only can you read the passage when it's read to you but you can go back over the passage..

...and ask yourself, is the preacher's point the point of the passage? It's helpful to have the text right there before you.

Or you can ask questions like, "Where did the preacher get that from?" Is that Biblical? You see, you're doing what the Bereans were commended for doing when listening to Paul.

<sup>11</sup> Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Now that's not being lazy listeners and I guarantee you, they were growing Christians. And listen, it helps to be like that if you have your Bible with you on a Sunday morning so you can check what the preacher is saying.

Another important aspect to listening to sermons on a Sunday morning is this. **You do** it in a local church with other brothers and sisters, as the gathered people of God sitting under the teaching of God's Word.

Many times, letters from Paul were written to the churches, corporately, but we as American individualists tend to read everything through that lens. Many times we see the word "you" on the page, so we take that as meaning just me, not the church.

The Greek vocabulary didn't have a plural word for you, but that's what it often means.

Paul would write to the Colossians, And when this letter has been **read** among you, have it also **read** in the **church** of the Laodiceans....

The corporate sitting under the Word of God is one of the things that he wanted for His people.

We read back in Deuteronomy that God said to Moses, "Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words..."

Here is why this is important. In our day and age we have technology that allows you to hear myriads of sermons from the super star preachers or even to be a part of an on-line church (which I think is very dangerous).

Now please don't misunderstand me, listen to all the preaching you want, I do. I love it...and I'm not talking about those who can't make it to a Sunday morning service...

...but what you don't get from the radio or the TV is the accountability that comes when you sit under your local church's preaching that my friends have also heard, or my spouse, or my children that will bring sharpening and discussion hopefully after the service.

One author brought out an important point to me last week. He said, Many times God wants to shape his people by His Word, together, not just ourselves. I think you see this in Acts 2 when the believers gathered around the apostle's teaching.

We tend to think of our growth as only between me and God, that's it.

So the author said, "The first question to ask ourselves is not: What is God saying to me? But rather: "What is God saying to us?" And then we ask, and hopefully ask each other "What does He want us to do?"

Which leads us into our last aspect of listening to sermons. What will we do with it when we walk out of those doors?

Because our God is always asking for a response to His Word. We are not only to listen, we are to do (James 1:22). And you remember what the parable said about the **fourth** soilers.

“As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.” They hear it and do it. Not those who say Lord Lord but don’t do what the Lord says.

So right now, we could be asking ourselves or writing down in our **notes**, “What is one thing that I can do from what I heard today?”

We don’t want to be like the world of listeners in Jesus day when he said, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.” Because he did preach to them and they didn’t do anything about it!

So one person said, “to hear a sermon and not respond is worse than not hearing it at all.”

So I began to brainstorm a little bit with Pastor Dick this past week about how we can do this better for each other in order to sharpen one other and grow together under the teaching and preaching of God’s Word. What are some things we can do after the sermon?

We can certainly talk about it as a family, or husband and wife, or with friends. That’s good. I also understand why some pastors have implemented further study of the sermon into their small groups where you can go deeper.

Or they have created blogs for their people to discuss the sermon. Or they reconvene Sunday night to talk about it, share testimonies of how the Word of God has changed them or moved them to do something.

If you have picked up one of our prayer sheets lately, we have included a prayer focus for the week based on the sermon. I think these are good things to do and to think about doing because one of the big ways that God wants to shape us is through the preaching of His Word.

It's too easy for many of us to walk out of here and not be held accountable to the preaching of the Word, but I will also say that the ultimate honor of responding lies with the hearer.

If you have more ideas of how we can help one another do the preached word, I would love to hear it.

One last thought, I hope some of this has been helpful to you, but one last thought that I had about sitting under preaching. Be careful that your heart doesn't elevate preferences over content, especially when it comes to your church's pastor. It's ok to have preferences but content is more important.

Maybe your pastor is boring. I'm not sure how Paul preached, but one guy fell asleep and fell out of a window for Pete's sake while he was preaching. You can read about that story in the book of Acts, chapter 20.

But try with God's help to still be open and seek one Bible truth from the passage or from what the guy has said. You can always get something out of a faithfully preached sermon even if it's boring or way over your head. Take one thing away with you.

Be careful with this because...

It can be extremely tempting in our day and age of entertainment to be attracted to the eloquent or animated preacher who is more exciting. Or it can be extremely tempting to find the guy who only does encouragement in our tolerant age, and never rebukes, corrects, or trains.

They are not so popular but Paul told Timothy to do it all. So always be appreciative of that if you have it. That's a person who seeks to be faithful.

So may God help us to be careful preachers and listeners of His Word.

Let's pray.