

Why Preach?

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0:00] Okay, good morning everyone. We good? Yeah, okay, one person is enthusiastic. Love it. Don't know who that was, but I'm glad you are here. If you have a Bible, please come to Ephesians chapter 4. If you don't own a Bible, then there's ones at the back that you can just take this morning for yourself.

You can grab one on the pew. You can look on your phone. Ephesians chapter 4, 1 to 16 is where we're going to end up this morning as we think about this whole area of preaching. Now, if you're not in the habit of taking notes, whether that's the old-fashioned way with a jotter, I don't know if they call them jotters these days, or on your phone, this would be a really good one to take notes in just so you can track where we're going.

So if you have Ephesians 4 open in front of you, here's what I'd love you to do, and this will connect with everything that's going to happen over the next half an hour. I'd love you just to stand. Is that okay? Just as we read this together. Why don't you stand and we're going to read God's word together.

This is something that Christians down in generations across the globe do when they read God's word because we recognize what this is. And so this is a way of showing our reverence and dependence on God's words as we come to it together.

So Paul writes this, This is why it says,

[3:12] Each part does its work. And so, Father, we thank you for what we read today is no ordinary book. Thank you that this is your inspired words.

And when your word goes forth, it accomplishes the purpose for which you sent it. And so, Lord, we pray for our minds today that you would help capture our minds' attention. Father, we pray for our hearts today that you would capture our hearts' affection as we fix our eyes on Jesus.

And it's in his wonderful name that we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen, folks. We'll have a seat. I'm not going to make you stand for the whole thing. Don't worry. Here's what we're going to be doing over the next 30 minutes or so.

We've been thinking, as Jonathan said at the start, about the things that we do as a church when we gather on a Sunday morning. We're going to be thinking this morning about this whole idea of why preach. And maybe related to it, why the Bible?

And so before we zoom in on the details, I want to try and get us to think about the bird's eye view of this topic. And I want to let you in on one of the best images that somebody gave me about preaching when I was starting out.

[4:20] You ready for it? It's the scene from, on the screen actually, from The Lion King. One of you remember this one? Simba and Nala have got lost in the elephant graveyard.

Not only have they got lost, but they've been cornered by the hyenas. And cub Simba, defending Nala, tries, roaring, to frighten them off.

And his first attempt, you can only describe it, is utterly pitiful. The hyenas are in fits of laughter. And Simba goes for it a second time. But no surprises, the exact same thing happens.

And winning full marks for perseverance, Simba tries a third time. And here's the genius of the scene. The viewer is led to believe that the exact same thing is going to happen the third time. But the third time he goes for it, this mighty roar comes through him. But the thing is, it's not from Simba. What's happened is that at the exactly the same moment that Simba opened his mouth, Mephasa is behind him, roaring through him.

[5:36] Now friends, if you take one thing from this, and I hope you take a lot from this, but if you take one thing from this, let it be this. Preaching is hearing the lion roar. This is not a TED Talk presentation full of hot takes.

This is not a TikTok video full of life hacks. This is about you and I, as the Bible is faithfully taught, encountering and hearing the voice of the triune God of the cosmos.

And can I suggest that there is no greater thing in life than to hear his voice? Do you know I feel the pressure off every week? Here's why.

I do not need to make this relevant. Because we will ever be the creature and he is the creator, it is the most relevant thing we could ever hear in our lives.

If you want to think about like this, those kind of old American films where the town crier goes in and says, hear ye, hear ye, there's a message from the king. Friends, that's what preaching is.

[6:43] And just like in Genesis 1 at the beginning of the Bible story, when God speaks into the darkness and the chaos and creation comes forth, friends, when God speaks through his word, he speaks every single time to bring forth life.

And don't miss how enormous that fact alone is, that God would speak not just to make himself known, but to make himself known for the purpose of relationship with his creatures.

That is the mind-blowing emoji moment of the Bible. Because by nature we assume that if faith were a game of cosmic hide and seek, that surely it has to be the case that God is the hider and we're the seeker.

But the gospel tells us that it's always been and always will be the other way around. That God is the great seeker who loves to make himself known to running rebels like us.

And here's the humbling truth that we meet in the pages of the Bible. The truth is that we would be completely in the dark about who he is and flowing from that who we are and what life is all about if God hadn't taken the initiative in revealing himself.

[8:13] In the words of Francis Schaeffer, friends, he is the God who is there. Now we can't know God fully.

Okay? God is holy. God is transcendent. God is eternal. God is outside of time. And yet, but make no mistake that we can know God truly.

Now the question becomes, how has God made himself known? If you're note taking, here's the two ways that the Bible talks about that he's made himself known. Theologians talk about general revelation.

That God has made himself known in all of creation. You get Psalms, like Psalm 19, that start with, The heavens declare the glory of God.

Creation is telling us something about the one who made it. Creation is wearing, if you want to think about it last night, this was my Saturday night. Creation is wearing like the opposite of the invisibility cloak that Harry Potter wears when he wants to go unnoticed.

[9:21] A stunning sunset, mountain grandeurs, when the night sky sparkles with the light of the stars. Friends, if I could put it like this, No one goes to the Grand Canyon, looks out on it, soaks it in and thinks to themselves, Wow, I'm awesome.

We can't help. We can't help ourselves, can we? But be moved. When we see creation doing its thing. And you've got to ask yourself, Why can't we help but be moved?

And the answer is that it's woven into us to worship. God has woven clues about his majesty and his character all over the place.

Friends, have you ever wondered why God made the sun? This ball of light and life that is just always existing by itself. Could it be that he's made the sun to give us a clue as to who he is and what he is like?

He is the source of all life. You can chew on that one over lunch. But here's the thing. It's not enough general revelation to lead us to a saving knowledge of God.

[10:34] And so that's why theologians also talk about special revelation. And this is the thread we're going to run with for the rest of our time together. That God has made himself known truly in the pages of the Bible.

And he's made himself known perfectly in the person of his son, Jesus. And that's why for generations this church has been and is a Bible loving church.

And it's why the Bible continues to be the best-selling book of all time, printing. Get this, 80 million copies per year in the 21st century. And it's why people in our culture who are not just facing a cost of living crisis, but who are facing a lack of purpose crisis, are picking this up today and coming to find life in the Jesus who meets us there.

To quote C.S. Lewis, and I've never done that before here. I've been reading poems, romances, vision, literature, legends, and myths all of my life.

I know what they are like. I know none of them are like this. Friends, let me give you two words that capture what Christians the world over believe and love about the Bible.

[11:49] Number one, it's inspired. Open the Bible at the contents page. If you do it, here's what you'll see. You'll see that in here are actually 66 books written by 40 different authors who are each addressing different people at different points in history.

And you see right there that God doesn't bypass the human personalities, but by his spirit like the wind into the sails of a ship, he speaks through them.

66 books, 40 different authors, but make no mistake, behind all of this is one grand voice. Which means that the Bible, when it's rightly understood and it's correctly applied, is the same thing, get this, as having God in the room.

Second thing, friends, Scripture is inspired. Second thing, it is inerrant, which means it stands up to scrutiny. Secondly, as a historical document, this is reliable.

Now listen, I get that in the age in which we're living, that many of us here will be struggling with that, really. If you want to think more about that, we don't have time this morning. Can I highly recommend Amy R. Ewing, one of the sharpest minds when it comes to apologetics, apologetics about the Bible.

[13:09] She's written this book called Can I Trust the Bible? Other one's out there, but that's just one of the best that I've read. It's not wrong to have questions. Get that right. The day we stop asking questions is the day that we stop growing.

But the very fact that the Bible is reliable means that we can bring our questions to God and to church rather than away from God and away from church. What better place to explore these questions than within a community like this?

And the cash out of all of that is that we can trust it. And so here are three, because I love points, right?

Friends, here are three things that we can do with our Bibles, okay? Here's number one, what we do. We sit under it. Now, if I was not sure if it's reverent or irreverent, but you could almost picture yourself standing on the Bible.

Sorry, rather, we'll get there in a minute. Sitting under the Bible. Friends, hold it above your heads. This is how King Jesus rules his church. Through his words.

[14:15] And that means that we don't shape the Bible according to our logic. We allow the logic of Scripture to shape our minds. Romans 12, right?

Paul talks there about being transformed by the renewing of our minds. And the thing is, in our anti-authority age in which we live, we might grate against that. But can I suggest that that is really good news?

Because there's truths in here that, honestly, I don't think I would believe for a moment if it weren't for the fact that God tells me it is true.

It's almost as if when I sit under this and God speaks to us, his people, it's like he is speaking reality over us. I would not believe things here if it wasn't for the fact that God says they are true.

Particularly about the gospel. I don't think I'd believe that my sin problem, my heart problem, is deeper than I think that it is. That the Bible talks about the fact that my sin is not just me making a few bad behavioral choices.

[15:20] Actually, what I need is the total renovation of my heart. I don't think I'd believe that if God didn't tell me it was true. But I also don't think I'd believe the fact that God loves me as much as he did if he didn't tell me that it was true.

That I read to you about the Jesus who came, sent from the Father who came. And who would have come up with a Jesus like we read about in the gospels? A Jesus who would love, a Jesus who would care, who would show compassion, who would give straight talking answers, who would go all the way to the cross to die for my sin problem, who would take the wrath of God that I deserved on himself.

A Jesus who died, a Jesus who rose again, a Jesus who has ascended. I need the Bible to tell me gospel truths. Maybe think of it like this, friends.

True freedom for a fish is not the absence of water, but the fullness of that water. What then is the water for the human soul? The Bible is telling us that knowing this God and living life under his rule

is the water that you and I were made for.

So we sit under it. And then secondly, what do we do? We stand on it. Again, this is the bit where it's under our feet. We stand on it because it's a solid place where we can stake our lives.

[16:44] We don't hedge our bets. We don't spread the risk. We put all our eggs in the what God has said is true, is true basket. So we sit under it.

We stand on it. And then you can hold it to your chest if you like. And this is what we're going to tease out in the rest of our time. We allow it to work away in us. Because here's the thing, friends. You can believe correct things about the Bible and yet completely miss God's intention for what he longs to accomplish in the lives of his people through his word. Why has God revealed himself? He's revealed himself for relationship. And this is where we connect with that Ephesians 4 passage. If you were wondering when on earth are we getting to that, this is when we're getting to that. Ephesians 4, we'll pick it up at verse 11.

Friends, what does God long to accomplish? Do you see it here in our lives through his word? Let me give you one word. Verse 13. Maturity.

[17:44] Do you see it? Maturity. And how does that happen? Well, let me give you one phrase from verse 15. By speaking the truth in love.

Now, here's a little phrase. And I give you the phrase in the hope that it stays. Here it is. Friends, God's goal is our growth. And God's means is his word.

God's goal is our growth. And God's means is his word. Now, here's the thing. When you become a Christian, it doesn't matter how old you are age-wise. The Bible says that we are all babies.

And God's desire is that we would grow up by drinking the milk of his word. And so when we tap into verse 11, do you see that description there of people?

God's given his church apostles. He's given them prophets, evangelists. And then we get pastors, teachers. I take it what connects these gifts. These are the kind of word-speaking people.

[18:44] And pastors and teachers, here's this awkward bit of the sermon. Here's my job description. And everyone else who is up here.

Why has God given these word-teaching gift people to equip you? And that's a workout at the gym word.

To equip you for the works of ministry. How? By preaching, teaching, and unleashing his word. And giving it to you straight.

You know, I was listening a few years ago. We often do long car journeys from down south of England back up to Edinburgh. A few years ago, I remember going on one. And the thing is, when you get in a car with Alex and the kids, within an hour, they're all asleep.

And so to make sure it's not just me and my thoughts for seven hours, turn on the radio. So listen to the radio. And here's Ramesh Ranganathan, the comedian. And he's talking about life as a stand-up comic.

[19:51] And what he's saying in his interview is that he's really jealous of bands like Oasis.

Because when somebody goes to an Oasis concert, what is it they want to hear? They don't want to hear your new stuff.

Right? They want to hear the best of. They want to hear your old stuff. I mean, why did people pay thousands of pounds to go and see ACDC at Murrayfield earlier this year? Was it for their new stuff, was it?

Right? Give me back... Was it Back to Black? Is that the one? Give me all these... Give me the ones that we want to hear. And he's saying I'm jealous of them because in my line of work as a comedian, I've got to come up with new stuff all the time.

And it struck me in that moment listening to the guy. I was like, you know, my job is to do neither of those things. And everyone who's up here is to do neither of those things. It's not just to give you old devotional thoughts from 10 or 15 years ago.

Neither is it to give you novelty, to try and come up with new stuff all the time. Friends, I could not imagine facing the pressure of that. What is the job description? It's to be like the Deliveroo pizza guy.

[20:59] Drops it off and delivers exactly what was promised, what was said, and get it to the person. In other words, what is the job here? It's to give you this straight.

And so that's where your job comes in. Because you as the congregation for the generations to come need to make sure that whoever is up here is saying the things that are written down here.

And see the minute that they're not. You have to say something. Because the minute that we go off peace, the minute we start saying what are just our thoughts, friends, this church will go south very quick.

Because we long to hear the voice of God. Because God builds his church through his word. There will be up here, certainly for me, an unapologetic commitment to unoriginality.

Because here's the assumption of this passage. That we so often miss because of the individualistic culture in which we live. See, speaking the truth in love. Friends, what does it assume?

[22:10] It assumes that there's a group of people close enough to you that you can do that with and they can do that with you. Think about it. I'm not called to speak the truth in love to a believer who's living their lives in Nepal.

They're not called to do it to me. But I am called to do it to you. Here's what that means, friends. Listening to sermons online.

Good. Listening to Christian podcasts. I listen to lots of them when I'm out running. Good. Reading your Bible and praying individually. Good. All these things good.

But do you know what's better? Being part of a church family where people will share with you, not just the truth from the Bible, but who will share with you their entire lives as well.

And who you know are invested in your growth in godliness. Who want the best for you, who are going nowhere, who will speak to you the hard things that you need to hear, who will speak the encouraging words that you need to hear.

[23:15] Surely that is what church membership is all about. People who will have you into their home. People who will meet up with you for a coffee.

People who will know your name. People who will notice when you're not here on Sunday. See, all of that, dear friends, the church, that is absolute gold dust.

Let me encourage you, if you're sitting in the periphery of church, as my friend Paul Rees at Charlotte says, friends, of your showing leg, can I encourage you to make yourself known?

Fred, there is an entire world of blessing to be had in coming to the center of a church community, committing yourself to a group of people, and that group of people committing themselves to you, and saying, masks off.

What do we need? We need his words. What do we need? We need the gospel. I need you to tell me it again. I need you to love me enough to tell you when I'm drifting off course.

[24:23] I need you to love me enough to speak encouragement into my life when I need it. And of course, friends, speaking the truth in love, do you see how countercultural that is?

In our world where individual is king and says you cannot do both of those things. If you love someone, you'll simply affirm what they want to hear.

If you love someone, you won't challenge them. Not true. Not true. God calls us to be a community who do both truth and love.

So here are some quickfire questions. You know, in Would I Lie to You to Give You the Quickfire Lies, here's the quickfire questions. Okay, you ready? Friends, who is close enough to us, who we have allowed into our lives, who will tell us from the Bible the hard things we need to hear and the good things we need to hear often when we doubt?

Who's close enough to you? Who is perfectly placed to specifically speak God's truth into your life as we walk together through the ups and downs of life?

[25:28] God calls us to be a community of word sharers. Remember, God's goal is our growth and God's means is his word. And let me just pull out two points that Paul makes when it comes to what preaching does in the life of the local church as you see it here.

Friends, number one, if you think about it like the defense, what does it do? Friends, teaching combats drift. Do you see it in the passage? Maturity looks like us developing the ability to discern what is true and what is false.

Again, do you see it? Between what is right and what is wrong in God's eyes. Do you see what he's saying? Don't be tossed to and fro. Grow up to maturity as you are transformed by my word.

And of course, remember Ephesians, Paul's writing to a group of believers who he knows are living in a city that are just peddling false narratives to them all the time. A city where money is easily made.

A city where the occult is massive. A city where superstition is mainstream. And of course, right at the heart of it, of the city, this massive statue of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and all the sex worship that went with it.

[26:47] These Christians are breathing in false narratives of what life is really all about, what you should be chasing all the time. Friends, can I suggest we're swimming in those circles as well. The narratives might be different from Ephesus, but we are surrounded by false narratives about what life is all about, who God is, how we should live all the time.

You know, I read a stat recently that said, and get this, do you know what we spend seven and a half years of our lives doing? Watching TV.

Get this, 400 new hours of content are uploaded to YouTube every minute of every day. We are a generation quite literally swimming in information and opinions.

And we are a culture that is swimming also in cliches. And what does God call us to do here? How can we help each other grow in discernment?

By being familiar with the word of God and growing in the knowledge of Christ. That's how we're going to stop being like a lilo in a stormy night at sea. Get the image on the screen.

[27:57] That's the image he's using. That the waves will come and they will just knock you totally off course. You'll start on one track and the waves will force you another track. Paul is saying, ditch the dinghy.

And become like an oil rig. Steady, firm, growing. Nothing's going to move it. Friends, do you spot somebody here?

Do you spot somebody who's not here today? Do you see someone struggling? Who are you uniquely placed to get alongside?

Whose shoes have you walked in? Who do you look at and think, Oh gosh, I remember what it was like and how hard that was. And yet, here's what I know now that I wish I knew then.

I remember being a final year student and having that fear of not knowing what was next after I graduated. I remember being a young parent and feeling like I've got absolutely no idea what I'm doing.

[29:04] I remember having that relationship break down and struggling with loneliness and sadness and purpose. I remember having older children who just didn't seem to be interested in the things of God.

And I remember how through all of those things, God spoke to me and taught me through his word in those seasons. And do you know what? I love you enough just to want to meet you and pass it on.

Friends, in my experience, rarely does someone have a crisis of faith. What's way more common is that slow drift that comes when a hurting heart becomes a doubting heart, becomes a hardened heart.

And that happens, to be honest, well before anybody leaves it off the pew. And if we spotted it in each other and lovingly sought to listen to each other and speak God's truth into each other's lives, what a difference that would make.

That's why growth groups are so important as smaller groups of people where you will be known. It's difficult in a group this size, isn't it? But in a growth group, that's exactly what we've designed them to do.

[30:16] Friends, teaching combats drift. Do you see what Paul's saying in the passage? But here's the flip side. Playing the offense. Teaching enables growth.

Picture the church as a body. Christ as the head. And we're all different body parts. And the end of verse 16, Paul is saying we need to help each other grow. Imagine if all of us, as a normal part of church life, were caught up in a web of Bible reading relationships.

In formal settings. Our Sunday gatherings. Our growth groups during the week. Our women's and men's groups. But also imagine if we were all involved with them informally as well.

Digging into the word privately. Trying to create cultures at home where our families can be saturated and led by the word. Reading it with your spouse. Reading it with your kids.

Reading it with a non-Christian colleague at work. Reading it with someone who's new to faith.

Reading it with a friend over coffee. Friends, here's the point as we begin to draw this to a close.

When God speaks, things happen.

[31 : 26] And his word never returns to him void without accomplishing precisely what he intends to accomplish as his word goes forth through the power and the work of his spirit.

Friends, when this book is opened, the lion roars. And the reason is that they're part of the gospel partnership as well.

And this is one of the things that we're trying to do is just support each other with pulpit supply. And Andy Prime is a really good friend of mine. If you know him as the pastor of the church, I'll tell you about his story in a minute. Undergoing chemo just now.

Just had to take a bit of time off. And so we're trying to help just with pulpit supply and things. But Grace Mount Community Church. I just love those guys. And here's why.

I love the story about how that church came to be. If you know it's on the south side of the city. It's in a real area of deprivation. And what happened is that Andy's wife, Sarah, used to work in that area up in Grace Mount.

[32 : 39] And she hears a sermon. She reads it in her own time about Romans chapter 10. Here's the verses on the screen. Where the apostle Paul is saying this.

How then can they call on the one who they've not believed in? And how can they believe in the one whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

And of course Paul is talking there about new lands. About new people groups to reach with the gospel. Anyway, Sarah hears this and she can't get it out of her head. And so she shares it with Andy who's down at Charlotte Chapel at the time.

He says, why don't you come up to mine. Walk the area. Open your Bible. And just let God speak to you. And so he does this. He just walks around the area with his Bible open. He looks at the people. He reads the passage.

He looks at the people. He reads the passage. He looks at the pub. He looks at the bookies. He reads the passage. And he thinks, who is going to preach to these people? Do you know what? I think God might be telling me.

[33 : 40] It's me. And so what Andy does is he leaves this comfortable row at Charlotte Chapel. He moves to the south side of the city because he believes that people need to hear this word.

And he says, I'm the guy to lead the church. And so they get this church together. They start working in the area. They start meeting every Sunday like we do. They start preaching the Bible. Some people think it's absolute nonsense in the area.

And yet other people hear the same word and come to have faith in Jesus. And how has God done that, friends?

It is not purely because a church has been planted. Actually, it's probably more accurate to say the word has been planted. And as the word goes forth, people respond in faith.

And what I love is that next Easter Sunday, 2027, Grace Mount Community Church are celebrating 10 years as a gospel church. They've had their challenges and everything like that.

[34 : 42] But let me tell you, it's thriving. God accomplishes his work as his word goes forth. That old saying, the old motto of Glasgow, before they shortened it.

Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of your word and the praising of your name. Friends, let's pray. As if I just echo what Jonathan prayed at the start, we just praise you, Lord, that you're a God who has revealed yourself.

And, Father, the awesome privilege that we have the Bible in our own language. That we can pick up, that we can read, we can discern. And by your spirit, we can come to have life with you as we put our faith in your son.

And, Father, our heart breaks for so many different people, groups around this planet, who do not have access to the Bible in their own language. We thank you for Bible translators who are doing wonderful work to get your word in their language.

And we praise you for that. But, Lord, we thank you so much that this has been a church down the generations who have built their existence on your word. And so, Father, I pray that as we leave here today, that we wouldn't simply just leave here having had a good time.

[36 : 07] But, Father, we would leave here having met with you as we've heard from you in your word. Father, thank you that you're in the business of transforming lives, about speaking light into darkness, about bringing order from chaos.

And you do it through your word. So, Father, we thank you for our time together. We just commit it to you, Lord, as we draw it to a close. In Jesus' wonderful name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.