

# Why Preach?

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Date: 23 October 2016

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, very good evening to you. It's lovely to be with you. I've heard a lot about you guys as a church family. All good. I know it's nervous when you hear that sort of thing. But it's been great getting to know Graham over the last couple of years at ETS. From St. Andrews, a big hello. We love our partnership in the gospel. We have with you guys as a church family, even though we're a little bit distant, separated by the water, we were praying for you at our last church family prayer meeting. So a range of people say hi and it's a joy to be with you here. Not least to be thinking about this wonderfully important, central, foundational topic of preaching. But because it's so important, because we're coming to God's word, let's pray again and ask for his help. Let's pray.

Our great God and heavenly Father, we come before you this evening, Lord, and are very conscious of the wonder that you, the one who spoke all things into being, the creator God of the universe, all that is visible and invisible, that you would speak to us.

That not only have you made us, but that you address us. That you haven't left yourself hidden behind clouds and darkness, but have spoken supremely in your Son, wonderfully and ongoingly in your scriptures and in our hearts by your Spirit, that we might understand what you say. Lord, please, we pray, would he be at work in us this evening? Would your Holy Spirit grant us light, might see, soft hearts that we might receive the good seed of your word, ears to hear, and lips and hands, feet and faculties ready and willing to obey, to put into practice that which you say to us? Lord, be with us, we ask it, not for any sake other than the glory of your Son, that he would be exalted, and that we would grow more like him, both individually, but also as a church family here at Brunsfield, and in your service. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, I wonder who you are this evening. It's quite nice when you're a visiting speaker and preacher, because I know very few of you well at all. So I'm going to trade on my anonymity and ask you an impertinent personal question. What do you think of preaching? What do you make of preaching?

Not, what do you think of John's preaching, or what do you think of Graham's preaching? Come and tell me that afterwards if you'd like to. But what do you make of preaching itself? What place does it hold in your own life? And also in how you think the life of a church should be ordered? You see, my hunch is that there's probably a range of different positions among us, just speaking from, I guess, my own experience at home and around the place. There'll be those who are fully persuaded that preaching is absolutely central to the healthy life of a healthy church, that it's something that you need, that it's something that is non-negotiable. And yet, in such a high view, can come an element of assumption. The possible danger is that we come week in, week out, and we take for granted what we hear. We take for granted what goes on, Lord willing, as we're hearing God's word spoken. And so our own relationship to preaching might start becoming a bit distant. So theoretically, preaching's great. But myself, as I sit under the preached word, well, I start receding a little bit.

[ 3 : 2 3 ] That might be you sitting there. It may be that you're someone who loves church. You love the people. You love the worship. You love the community aspect. You love the preaching. But it's one amongst many different things. And you don't quite get why people bang on so much about preaching.

Maybe you're new to Edinburgh or to the different places that you find yourself. And everyone's saying as you look, as you look for a church, find somewhere where the preaching is good, where it's clear, where it's central. You're not quite sure why that is such a big deal. Maybe, again, you are someone who is here tonight who is thoroughly unpersuaded about preaching. This might be a minority of us here tonight. But it may be that you always have wondered, well, what all the fuss is about? Surely, actually, in our day and age, sitting and listening to something for 25, 30, 40 minutes is passé. That actually the time has come to set aside a monologue delivered by someone nearer to a university professor than a real person. And just get on with living life as God has called you to live. Why all the instruction? Well, hopefully, whoever you are here this evening, there is going to be something for you as we dig into this question, why preaching? My hope and prayer is that together we would come up with a renewed and deepened love for the Word of God. Not only the Word of God out there, but the Word of God as declared in the preaching of Scripture in our local churches and in any context that we find it, such that wherever we are on the spectrum, we're going to be more attentive listeners to God's Word, more attentive students under God's Word, and I sincerely hope, more attentive speakers of God's Word one to another.

Because preaching is never something that stays just out there in front and above me, but rather is something that actually equips me to serve my fellow Christians. Now, hopefully, you've got a handout in front of you that Graham has printed off. Graham, this will just help you if you are someone who likes taking notes to follow along with where we're going, and if you wanted just to know the structure, this is where we are. Please turn with me if you've got a Bible back to Isaiah 55. That'll be really helpful. I want us to begin just by considering those two passages that were read so beautifully for us, because our understanding of preaching is absolutely controlled by and informed by how we understand God's Word to be, what we understand God's Word as, and what we think God's Word is doing. We're not going to chase down every reference on this handout. Don't worry if you're having a bit of a panic attack. We're not going to go there.

A lot of the references are going to be there for you to chase down in your own time if you would like to, to be Borean, to test what it is that I'm saying against the standard of God's perfect Word.

But we'll begin in Isaiah 55, and maybe you noticed as it was being read for us, the stress from the very beginning. Take a look down with me. At hearing. God is speaking to his people Israel. The whole first half of Isaiah up to the end of chapter 39 has been about the judgment that is coming on their sin, and you may well know that in Isaiah 40, the book pivots, and the Lord declares comfort to his people.

[ 6 : 41 ] So these words in Isaiah 55 sit within this book of comfort, but look at what God is saying. He's inviting people to come to him. Come all you who are thirsty. You have no money. Come buy and eat.

There's this picture in verse 1 and 2 of lavish provision from the Lord. Instead of famine and covenant curse, there's going to come blessing and rich provision from God. But look where the Lord goes in verse 2. Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good. It's interesting, isn't it? Listen to me, the Lord says, and you will feast. He goes on, give ear and come to me. Listen that you may live.

You see, God is saying to his people as he promises comfort that there is something critical about what he says to them, such that actually his very words become nourishment and life itself to them, if only they would listen. Now we are just dropping down here in Isaiah 55 into the middle of rich truth right through the Old Testament about God's word. If we were to try and do a biblical theology of the word of God, we would be here for weeks. Begins in Genesis 1 verse 1, where from nothing, God speaks all things into being. From the very start, God is a speaking God. And all that has life and breath that moves and has their being in God has that because he has spoken. You sit here tonight.

I speak here tonight. We feel our chest going in and out tonight as we breathe because God is a speaking God. Life is only found in his word and it becomes explicit here. He goes on that this isn't just for Israel. This is for the nations, verse 5. Then you have these glorious verses. Verse 6, seek the Lord, Isaiah says, while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. Salvation is at stake, the pardon of God in verse 7. And then God explicitly spells out what is going on with his word and why it is his word is necessary for life. Why his word is necessary for salvation. Look with me at verse 10.

It's this beautiful image of what God's word is. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater. So in the same way is my word that goes out from my mouth.

[ 9 : 19 ] It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Now we might have a slightly abusive relationship with rain and snow in Scotland.

It's one of those things isn't even as I parked the car and got out and it started raining on me again I thought oh more rain. It's been chucking it down in St Andrews for a week and you just feel drenched to the bone. But bear in mind in this context, in this climate, both spiritually but physically and geographically in Israel, rain and snow are wonderful, wonderful things.

Without it there is no life and God says that is what his word is like. It's like life giving rain and snow that comes down from heaven. You see what it does? It waters the earth. It makes it bud and flourish so that it bears a crop. Well God says that is what his word is like. He says it will not return to me empty. It will do what he purposes for it. And what is that purpose? Well verse 12, it is his people, those who hear, those who come, those who eat, those who drink, going out in joy and being led forth in peace. Verse 13, instead of the thorn bush will grow the juniper. Instead of briars, the myrtle will grow the thorns that are the mark of the curse of a world that has been cursed by God into futility. Well as the life giving word of God goes forth, it is like rain on dry desert ground, rolling back that which would cling and choke and destroy, such that life might come. The trees of the field clapping their hands, an everlasting sign that will endure forever. See God's word goes out that life might spring forth. Here in Isaiah, it's exactly the same there across reference to 2 Timothy 3 verses 15 and 16. Famous verses aren't they to do with the inspired word of God. You may well know it, all scripture is inspired by God. But just before that, in verse 15, Paul says to his protege,

Timothy, who we're going to return to in a little while, that God's word is able to make anyone who hears it wise for salvation in Jesus Christ. The life that God's word brings is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We're going fast here over lots of ground, so do come and chat with me afterwards and chew this over together. But the life giving word of God in Isaiah is precisely the same as the salvation bringing word of God in the New Testament through faith in Jesus Christ.

And notice that it isn't just a word out there that has to be intuited or figured out. It is a word that is proclaimed by God himself that people might hear and believe and respond.

[ 12 : 25 ] We're not left to figure it out grubbing around in the thorns and the dust, but rather from outside ourselves, God breaks into sin and death with the life giving word that he himself speaks. And as we'll see, that becomes critical because God is always a preacher. And he then ordains people to follow after him in preaching that same word.

That's the idea that lies behind Luke chapter 8. Flip with me there, if you would, as we scoot through a few thousand years of history and we come to Jesus teaching about his word.

Jesus, the preacher par excellence. If you read Luke's gospel and Mark's gospel, Matthew's gospel, Jesus has come to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. It's what he does. He says, I've come that I may proclaim in the different villages of Judea. He's traveling around teaching the people and teaching his disciples about the good news. And here in this famous parable of the sower and of the soils, Jesus says the central importance in coming to faith, the foundational thing on which fruitful discipleship depends is how we receive the word of God.

How we receive the words of Jesus. You can see that there in the parable. There's this sower who seems rather careless with his seed. Do you notice that? He goes everywhere he can, scattering it as best he can. The seed, we're told in verse 11 by Jesus, is the word of God. And so Jesus is the sower, wherever he goes, he proclaims, he scatters, he reaches into his bag of good seed and just flings it such that anyone and everyone might hear. And it's the response then to that word, which is absolutely critical. We don't have time to walk through all the different responses, but some are chilling, some are thought provoking. There's one, isn't there, that is wonderfully encouraging. Verse 15. The seed on good soil, the one that bears a hundredfold that which is sown, stands for those with a noble and good heart. And look at how this is described.

This struck me. I was actually preaching on this a few weeks ago at home. This isn't some grand heroic vision as we might think it, some great effort of faith. It's very, very mundane.

[ 14 : 50 ] Look at the noble and good heart. They hear the word. They retain the word. And by persevering in their hearing and retaining, they produce a good crop. If you would know the secret to a fruitful Christian life, it is to hear the word of God, to hold onto it, to not let it go, to, in the midst of the distractions of life, hold it in your heart. Speak it one to another that you might do that.

And persevere in so doing. That's where true fruitfulness comes. Jesus goes on to say in verse 18, consider carefully how you listen to the word that is spoken. Verse 21, he says that his true family are those who hear God's word. There we have it again. And put it into practice.

Let me say this evening that there is nothing more important to the Christian life in following after the person of Jesus and hearing and responding rightly to the word of God.

There's lots of unpacking we could give that. It's a bold statement to make potentially. But one implication amongst loads is to simply ask yourself, perhaps over coffee afterwards or in the quietness of your own heart, what is of the greatest foundational importance to you in your own life?

Is it to hear, to retain and persevere with the word of God? Or is it the various things that clamor for our attention? Now, if it is to hear the word of God, there's an obvious question, isn't there?

[ 16 : 35 ] If God's word matters this much, if it's this good, if it brings this sort of life, well, how do we hear it today? How do we hear it today? It's something that people write theological papers about. It's something that people would disagree on.

There are all sorts of different ways to answer it in part truth. And what I want us to do very quickly in our second point here is to trace through, if you like, the line that runs from the word of God spoken by Jesus to ultimately the Bible we have in our hands and the words that we hear from the front, from the preacher, before we apply that more in point number three.

So, whistle-stop tour. Anything that sounds odd here, make a note of it. Come and chat to me afterwards. I hope that won't be too much, but do push me on any of this stuff. The first place that we go to to hear the words of God that have been spoken by Jesus is in the inspired testimony of the apostles.

If you were to flip up John chapter 14 and John chapter 17, you would see Jesus speaking to his disciples about the coming Holy Spirit, the gift of the helper who Jesus is going to pour out once he has ascended to the Father.

And he says to those eleven gathered around him that one of the chief functions the Spirit will play is to remind them of all that Jesus has said so that as they go into the world to be his witnesses, they're going to be speaking the words of Jesus himself.

[ 18 : 06 ] And there's a staggering little bit in John chapter 17, verse 20. Jesus is praying to the Father before he goes to the cross. And he's praying for the apostles. And then it's as though he turns, as it were, and faces us.

Because he says, I pray not only for these, my eleven. Judas has gone out by this point. He says, but I also pray for those who believe on account of their testimony.

Every single one of us here tonight who has their faith resting in Jesus believes ultimately on account of the inspired testimony of those eleven, and then Paul, the apostle untimely born, as it were, converted on the Damascus road.

The particular word of the Spirit to those twelve, such that we now might in no lesser way come into the life-giving contact of the word of God and of Christ than if we lived in that day.

It's a staggering thought, isn't it? That the Bible you have in your hands, or on your phone, or whatever media is your preferred way, is the unedited, unabridged, and totally powerful word of God, such that even if you had been there when Jesus spoke, you would have been no better off then than you are now.

[ 19 : 34 ] It's an amazing thought. And what gets even more amazing is that it is then those words that are entrusted to people who aren't apostles, to people who might speak the same pattern of words to those who hear.

It would be really helpful if you turn with me all to 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 13. We're going to try not to hop around too much, but there's a few where it's so important that we go there.

2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 13 and 14. You'll know probably that Paul is encouraging Timothy, one of his closest protégés, in his own ministry of teaching the word and of raising up others who are going to teach the word after him.

And look at the chain, if you like, of the authority of God's word that runs from ultimately God himself through now to Timothy. What you heard from me, Paul says, chapter 1 verse 13, keep as the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you. That is the good deposit of the truth. Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

[ 20 : 55 ] See, Paul says, look, the words that I've heard from Jesus, that the Spirit has taught me, I now entrust to you. Guard it yourself. Make that the pattern of your own teaching. Now, Timothy isn't an apostle.

He's one removed. In that sense, he's actually quite like us in many ways. And Paul says, there's your pattern. Chapter 2 verse 2, just cast your eye down.

And the things you have heard me say, the gospel that Paul preaches, in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

Now, I don't know how many of you have ever had experience of writing academic essays or even, I suppose, it doesn't have to be an essay. It could just be a letter. You know when you're typing something and you're not quite sure how to finish the sentence, you just go dot, dot, dot, little ellipsis, sort of imply something continuing.

There's a sense in which there, 2 Timothy 2 verse 2, is the dot, dot, dot of the transmission of scripture through preaching. We've gone from God's word, spoken in Jesus, entrusted to the apostles and reminded by the spirit, to then someone like a Timothy who then in turn is to pass that on to others who are going to teach it and so on and so forth.

[ 22 : 17 ] Right there, we get the biblical skeleton, if you like, of not only why we preach in the local church, but of why it is of foundational importance.

Actually, when it matches up with this pattern of sound teaching, and that's a crucial caveat, when the preaching of God's word is in line with the truth of God's word as received and delivered by the apostles, then it is the very word of God to his people in any and every day and age.

And the main theater in which it's going to be worked out, little sub-point number three there is in the local church. There are all sorts of references there which show us that the local church was the place there where God's word was preached and around which the people gathered.

You get it in the Old Testament as well actually, in Exodus as the law is given, Deuteronomy before Moses dies, Nehemiah as the people are back in the city. God's people are always constituted around the declared word of God.

Always. Acts chapter 2, what do the early church do, those who come to faith? Well, they devote themselves along with the sharing of all their goods to the teaching of the apostles.

[ 23 : 43 ] Acts chapter 6, as the Greek widows are worrying because they're missing out on some provision, what happens? Well, deacons are appointed. Why?

So that the apostles might devote themselves to the ministry of the word and prayer. From the earliest days of God's people, preaching the word of God has been at the very center, literally and metaphorically, of the life of the local church.

And it goes on and on. 1 Corinthians chapter 3, the assumption is they're gathering regularly and the word is being preached and taught. Likewise in Colossians and in other places that we could go.

We're going to turn shortly to Ephesians, which is the great place where we see this. But an implication of this for us. Again, big statement to throw out there. Without the preaching of God's word, in accordance with the sound pattern of teaching that's been given to us, there is no church.

Church in the sense that we understand it in this way, gathered together. There is, of course, the church, all of those who trust in Christ at any point in any age. But the local expression of God's people is gathered together around the red, sung, and supremely declared word of God.

[ 25 : 02 ] So let me encourage you to pray for the preaching of the word here in Brunsfield. Not only now, this evening, not only in the coming weeks, but in the coming months and years.

Not only Brunsfield, but all the churches that would seek to be gods here in Edinburgh and around our nation. That at the center of what they do, immovable, amongst all the many excellent other things a local church can do, would be the faithful preaching of the apostolic gospel entrusted by the person of Jesus and God himself.

That is why preaching, again, matters so much. And it is why the Lord Jesus has ordered his church, as we'll see now in Ephesians, such that his word is right at the center of it.

Final flipping of the pages in your Bible as we move towards a close. Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 4, if you would. Ephesians is, the great letter, if you like, about the local church that Paul writes.

The church matters in all his letters, but here he lays out, if you like, the cosmic importance of the church. Chapter 3, in verse 10, Paul says that the church is the expression, the declaration of the manifold wisdom of God to the watching universe.

[ 26 : 27 ] Have you ever thought of that, about Brunsfield Evangelical Church? that as we gather here and now, the wisdom of God in saving people by grace through faith in the death of his son is being displayed to a watching universe.

But actually, spiritual rulers and authorities are looking down at us this evening and saying, God is wise. how else would such a diverse bunch, and you know, like I said, I don't know you well, but I imagine you're diverse.

Even as I look around, I can see some diversity have been gathered together by Christ. That is what the church is. And as we get into chapter 4 and Paul starts to apply this stuff very practically to them, we see in verses 7 down to 16 the central importance of the preached word.

We actually sang it there that Christ has ascended into heaven, leading captives in his wake. And here, as Paul quotes that very psalm there in chapter 4, verse 8, he says that the risen Christ, as he ascends, gives gifts to his people.

And the gifts, we're told, are people who teach the word of God. Look down with me there at verse 11. So Christ himself, the risen, reigning Jesus, gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.

[ 28 : 00 ] Those who teach the word of God to Christ's people, we're told, are genuinely the gifts of God to his people. Now that might just sound like a ridiculously overweening thing for a preacher to say.

And believe me that if you were to ask anyone who regularly preaches the word among you, we would be staggered at this truth ourselves. That jars of clay full of brokenness and challenges and sin, visible and invisible, might be used by God to teach his word.

Paul says that's what the pastor, teacher, is doing. The apostle then, the prophet, we can talk about what a prophet is, the evangelist. Teaching the word of God, but not as a full stop end in itself.

Do you see how he goes on? The word teacher is not a gift of God who then is to puff himself up. Look at verse 12, to equip his people, Christ's people, the church, for works of service.

Some translations have works of ministry. ministry, so that the body of Christ may be built up. See, here's where preaching hits the road. It isn't, like I say, just out there, which we consume and then go away with.

[ 29 : 23 ] It is actually given so that every single one of us as God's people may be equipped for ministry, for works of service.

Do you know that? Every single one of you is a minister of the gospel. You might want to put a small M instead of a big M depending on where you've come from in terms of a church background or not.

But the whole point of the declaration, the announcement of God's life-giving word, is that all of his people together may engage in works of service.

Here, the supreme work of service, you can see there in verse 15, it's not being blown about by false teaching. Rather, verse 15, it is to speak the truth in love one to another such that as the word is preached morning and evening, week in and week out, as you study the word in your small groups, it isn't just hovering and kind of pushing and nudging you in different ways.

Rather, it is dwelling richly among you as God's people, as Paul says in Colossians, and then being spoken in turn one to another. all of us gospeling each other, speaking that truth which we have heard from God, why?

[ 30 : 43 ] So that the body might reach maturity. Do you know, as a church, you will never reach maturity if you do not speak the truth in love one to another.

You will never reach maturity in the Christian life on your own. So many people speak about so-and-so as a mature Christian. Well, so-and-so on his or her own is not a mature Christian. Maturity is something that God's people together attain to as they speak the word one to another, as the word is declared to them by God through those whom he has gifted to his people.

It's a wonderful, beautiful picture of this dynamic building site as the whole body, we're told, builds itself up in love, verse 16. All playing our part.

You could look at 1 Corinthians 12. Yes, the preacher matters, but no more than the person who cleans the loose. No more than you as you over a cup of coffee ask someone how they're going in following after Jesus.

No more than you as you take what you've heard and apply it one to another in love. preaching in action if you like. God's word dwelling among us richly.

[ 32 : 00 ] So three implications as we close. Listen, test, and speak. I guess the first one is perhaps self-evident from where we've been. We are to listen to the word of God that is preached to us.

We come back to Luke 8. Jesus says hear. He says hear. He says hear. Consider carefully how you listen. Luke 6, Luke 11, he says that true blessing comes as we hear and obey and do the word of God that is spoken to us.

So another personal question, are you a careful listener to that which is preached to you? Too many of us are armchair critics, at least I speak very autobiographically here, particularly as someone I guess who has the blessing of preaching quite a bit.

I can find myself sitting in a sermon thinking, oh that's interesting, why did he do that? And why did he structure it that way? And oh gosh, I wouldn't have used that illustration. Or oh, my phone's buzzed, let's see what's happening with the rugby.

We can have all sorts of distractions. God says no, you are to listen to that which is spoken to you. There are lots of ways that might work itself out among you.

[ 33 : 16 ] Do you read the passage that you know you're going to be hearing on a Sunday morning before you come to church, that you might consider it beforehand and meditate on it? Do you speak it one to another, ask what someone made of the sermon over Sunday lunch, not to critique but to apply?

Even if you're hearing a sermon that you think, I'm not too sure about that, what is it that God is saying to you? even if it's one thing that you might apply and retain and obey.

Listen to the preaching that God gives you. Secondly, though, we are to test, this is an implication, a secondary thing, if you like, from the truth that all of God's preaching now must accord, must line up with the sound pattern that has been given to the apostles.

Paul encourages the Berean church in Acts 17, he says they were of more noble character than the Thessalonians. Why? Because they eagerly searched the scriptures to make sure that what Paul said to them was accurate.

So test, be Berean. It doesn't matter who it is, whether it's a stranger like myself, or a loved regular like a John or a Graham or someone from the church's past, whoever is preaching, as you listen carefully, listen with your Bible open.

[ 34 : 39 ] Such that you can see where his words match up with God's words. The authority of the preacher extends precisely as far as God's word and no further.

It's one of the key insights of the Reformation. That any authority within the local church is governed by and circumscribed by God's word and not man's.



No one sits above scripture, no one. We all sit under it, no matter who it is, no matter their pedigree, no matter their impression, their rhetoric, whoever they might be.

Listen carefully and test what you hear. And then, if it accords with the word of God, I'll speak it to others.

Do it, in Jesus' words. Obey. apply that which you hear one to another and to yourself. No matter how costly, no matter how painful, but you know, it's regularly going to be joyful.

[ 35 : 49 ] There is a sweet pain to the rebuke that scripture brings. The words and wounds of a friend are a blessing, we're told in Proverbs. How much more the words of God himself.

So, as a church family, as you listen to God's word, as you test God's word, may it dwell richly among you, working itself like a good yeast into every corner of your church life.

My prayer for you, a prayer I pray every week for our church family in St. Andrews, is that we would be saturated in the life-giving word of God. That there wouldn't be conversations happening each week that is devoid somehow of the spirit-inspired truth about who Jesus is and what he's done and all that he's doing and all that he will come to do.

And as that happens, as we listen, as we test, as we obey, as we speak to all and sundry, believer or unbeliever, well, so we're told Christ's church is built.

But why preaching? How could it not be? How could it not be in the life of any healthy church that would seek to glorify Christ? Like I say, there's so much more we could say.

[ 37 : 03 ] I'd love to chat with you afterwards. I'm not dashing away. If you've got any questions, please do come and chat. But my prayer for you as a church family is that as God's word is preached, you will be built up and that you will be engaging in works of service one with another as you hear the words of Jesus.

Shall we pray? Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. Lord, thank you for your son, the word incarnate.

Thank you for your spirit who shines light upon us that we might see him and that we might hear you. Lord, please, as your son, the risen king, Christ himself, addresses us as the word is preached to us, would you make us those who hear?

Lord, for my brothers and sisters here, whatever the trials and sorrows are, whatever the joys and the cares that pleasure and riches can bring, would you make them individually and together single-minded in carefully considering what they hear?

Help them to listen, to obey. Help us, we pray, Father, to be those who do test what we hear, that it might match up with your word.

[ 38 : 23 ] We pray for the preaching of the word here in St. Andrews and in our sister churches, that in every way the sound pattern of your gospel would be taught. And make us do as we pray, Father.

Not only hearers, not only those who look in a mirror, but those who act in accordance with what we see. Help us to be those who speak. Lord, would this be a church family where your word would dwell richly in every member, where it would ring out from this church right across Brunsfield and Edinburgh, that your church might be built, that Christ might be glorified, and that in every way we would be built up into his image, the one who perfectly heard and obeyed your word.

Truly, would we go out in joy? Would we be led forth in peace? Would the mountains and the hills burst into song before us? And would you, by your word, through your spirit, in the name of your Son, bring junipers instead of thorn bushes, myrtles instead of briars, for your everlasting glory.

Amen.