

“On Preaching”

October 30, 2016

Brian Watson

A couple of years ago, Kathy and I attended the wedding of one of my good friends. Of course, we knew the groom and I met his family a few times over the years. But we didn't know the bride well; we had met her only once. And we didn't know anyone on the bride's side. So, at the wedding, I noticed that she had a friend from college, and I started to make some small talk with him. I had overheard that he had worked in politics. He may have been a staff member for a state government official, if I recall correctly. I asked him about that and he said that he used to be in politics, but was now in the business world. Then he asked me what I did, and I told him I was a pastor. He then said that he used to do some preaching. This surprised me because I had no reason to believe he was a Christian. Then he told me this: “I used to begin my sermons by singing. I would sing a bit and see how the audience reacted. I would feel out their mood and then tailor my message to that mood.” Those weren't his exact words, but that was his method of preaching. He wanted to feel out the crowd first, and then he would deliver something that would suit the audience. And then I said something like, “Well, I try to explain the Bible in a way that people can understand. I try to show what God's Word means and how it can be applied to life today.” He nodded his head and said something like, “Right,” but I imagine he was thinking to himself, “That sounds really boring.”

I tell you that story today because it raises some important questions: What is preaching? Why do we have it in our worship services? Why do we need preaching? What is the purpose of preaching? What is supposed to be preached? What does preaching do?

Over the last month or so, we've been looking at some important aspects of following Jesus. Specifically, we've been considering some of the things we do in the life of the church. Today, I want to talk about preaching and why it's important. (This message is also, secondarily, about the authority of the Bible.)

I think it's important to talk about preaching. It's important to talk about praying and singing and giving and baptism and the Lord's Supper, because these practices may not be understood by us very well and they may seem very strange to non-Christians. The fact is that we are living in an increasingly post-Christian society. That means that Christianity used to be prevalent in this country, but its influence is fading. Larger numbers of people are growing up

without much church experience. If these people were to come to this church, they might not understand the things that we do when we worship together. Since these are the kinds of people we would love to invite to church, the kinds of people we want to introduce to Jesus, we should be able to explain what we do and why we do it.

Imagine how an unchurched person might view our worship services. We gather together and talk to a Being we have never seen, whose audible voice we have never heard. We sing together about this Being we have never seen. We give substantial amounts of money to the work of the church because this Being has told us to. And this Being has told us to in an old book, written by many dead men thousands of years ago about a quarter of the way around the world. Then the leader of the church gives a long speech, explaining passages from that old book, telling us how we should live our lives in a certain way because the old book says so.

Now, I don't find that such an odd thing to do, and most of us don't. By nature, God is a Being that we cannot see. He is spirit, so he is immaterial. And though the second Person of God became a man, he is not here. Jesus is in the hidden realm of God, heaven. So, we can't see him. And God has chosen to communicate to us through a book—or, really, a collection of books—written long ago. And since we need help making sense of that collection of books, God has given us preachers to declare the contents of the Bible and to explain what the Bible means and how it should shape our lives today. That's not so odd at all, but we must be aware that for some people who aren't familiar with what we do, it may seem old-fashioned and out of date.

So, let me start by asking a basic question: What is preaching? In the Bible, one Greek verb that is often translated “preach” simply means “to evangelize” or to tell the good news about who Jesus is and what he has done.¹ Another Greek verb that is translated “preach” means to herald, or declare, or announce.² The idea is that the one who preaches announces news, like a herald or a town crier.

Perhaps a definition of preaching from someone else would help. Jason Meyer, who followed John Piper as the pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, says that preaching “is stewarding and heralding God's word in such a way that people encounter God through his word.”³ He says that preaching is “stewarding,” because God has entrusted his message to

¹ εὐαγγελίζω (*euangelizō*).

² κηρύσσω (*kēryssō*).

³ Jason C. Meyer, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 21.

preachers. Preachers are not free to edit the message. It's God's message and they are only to handle it faithfully. Preaching involves heralding, or announcing. And it must be done in such a way that people encounter God when they hear it.

To get people to have an encounter with God, preachers must do more than read Scripture. They also must explain what Scripture means. They must teach it. Sometimes, the words “teach” and “preach” are used interchangeably (Rom. 2:21, for example). Jesus' own “Sermon on the Mount” is described as “teaching” (Matt. 7:28–29). Teaching is necessary because the content of the Bible cannot simply be read. It must be explained. The fact that Jesus gave the church “pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11) presupposes that there is a need for teaching. The job description of elders, another word for “pastors,” includes “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2), which means that part of a pastor's job is to teach. When Paul says that pastors should be paid, he writes, in 1 Timothy 5:17, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”⁴

Even in the Old Testament, we see that the Israelites did more than just read the Bible. They had to teach it. The book of Nehemiah tells about a time of national renewal for Israel, after they had come back to the land from exile in Babylon. After the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, the Jewish people came together to worship. And when they did that, Scripture was read and explained. This is what Nehemiah 8:1–8 says,

¹ And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. ⁸They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

In that passage, Ezra, who is a priest and a scribe, reads either the whole of the first five books of the Bible, or at the very least part of it, such as Deuteronomy. He reads it to everyone who could understand it. He read it for several hours. And he “gave the sense” of the Scriptures, so people could understand it. In other words, he taught it and explained it. And in the verse that follows (v. 9), we see that people who heard the Scripture read wept, probably because they had failed to keep the “Law of God.” They were convicted of their sin.

Preaching involves reading, declaring, and teaching the content of the Bible. Preaching involves persuading people it’s true and that it’s important. And preaching involves urging people to follow Jesus.

All of this sounds fine to many of us, but some people don’t like the idea of preaching. Even in the Bible, there were those who rejected preaching. Micah 2:6 says,

“Do not preach”—thus they preach—
“one should not preach of such things;
disgrace will not overtake us.”

In Micah’s day, the people didn’t want to hear a message about God judging the sins of Israel. And some people today don’t like people speaking so assuredly about God and sin and salvation. Instead of preaching, which is a monologue, people would rather have a dialogue, a conversation. Instead of declaring truth, some people would rather ask open-ended questions. Instead of preaching, some people would rather that we actually do things.

These objections lead me to a second set of questions: Do we need preaching? What is the purpose of preaching? Can’t we just have discussions? Why not use our time differently and simply hang out and talk, or go out and serve the poor?

Well, let me make one observation first: I don’t think people are opposed to the idea of preaching. They are simply opposed to the idea of preaching that opposes them or challenges them or corrects them. We still hear preaching in the public square. It’s just that today’s preaching often comes from politicians. Exactly a year and a half ago, *Time* magazine ran an article with the following headline: “Bernie Sanders: The Populist Preacher Runs for President.”⁵

⁵ Bernie Sanders, “Bernie Sanders: The Populist Preacher Runs for President,” *Time*, April 30, 2015, <http://time.com/3841265/bernie-sanders-the-populist-preacher-runs-for-president>, accessed October 29, 2016.

The first sentence of that article says, “Bernie Sanders can kvetch like the great end-of-days preachers of old.” A lot of younger people loved Bernie Sanders, so apparently his preaching didn’t turn them off. If you really want to hear preaching, just listen to one of the speeches delivered by our own senator, Elizabeth Warren, on the floor of the US Senate. So, I would argue that preaching is alive and well, even if it has moved from the pulpit to the political world.

But, getting more to the point, I think that what we think about preaching says a lot about our view of God and our view of the human condition. Throughout the Bible, God is described as King. He is the ultimate authority. He is the all-knowing Creator of the universe. Therefore, he has knowledge that we don’t have. We need to hear from him. Furthermore, the whole story of the Bible is that God created a good world that has been infected by the power of sin. Sin affects every part of our existence, at least in some small measure. That means that we need not only to hear from the omniscient and all-wise God, but we also need to be corrected by him. Preaching is God’s word directed toward people. It’s not a discussion among equals.

Pastor Tim Keller once said that in a real marriage, your spouse will challenge you and even correct you. If you didn’t have that dynamic in your marriage, you wouldn’t have a real spouse, you’d have a Stepford wife. He was referring to the novel (and, later, the movie [and its remake]) *The Stepford Wives*, in which all the men in one neighborhood have wives who look like women but are actually robots and who submit to whatever their husbands say. Keller then said that in the Bible, the relationship between God and his people is likened to marriage. If in a marriage between a man and a woman, each spouse can challenge and correct the other, how much more in the relationship between a perfect God and a sinful, fallible human being should God correct his erring spouse. Keller said if you want a god who always says “yes” to you and never corrects you, you don’t want the real God. No, you want a Stepford god.

So, we need preaching. Preaching is the way that God speaks authoritatively to his people, telling them about himself and also calling them to action. That is why God has commissioned people—elders, or pastors—to preach. And he has commanded them to do so.

We see this in a passage found in 2 Timothy, which is a letter from the apostle Paul to his younger associate, Timothy. In the first five verses of 2 Timothy 4, Paul writes these words:

¹ I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound

teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Notice that Paul doesn't merely suggest that Timothy preach. He "charges" Timothy "in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus," the judge of all humanity, to preach. And here Paul indicates what preaching is. He tells Timothy to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort." Again, preaching isn't merely giving people information; it's correcting people and spurring them on.

Even within this passage, there's an acknowledgment that people won't listen to preaching. There are people who will only listen to whatever "scratches" their "itching ears." These are the people who won't listen to the truth. But Timothy wasn't to worry too much about these people. Paul told him to go on preaching, to endure suffering if necessary, while doing the work of an evangelist, telling people the good news of Jesus.

So, preaching is necessary and preaching is commanded. A Christian preacher has been authorized by God, the ultimate authority, to deliver an authoritative message. If we want to know God and know what he expects of us, we need to hear this message.

Before moving on, I want to acknowledge the objection that preaching is a waste of time. Some people think it's all talk, when what we really need is action. But this kind of thinking ignores a very important fact, which is that God does things with words. God created the universe with his word. God makes covenants with his words. That's why part of the Bible is called the Old Testament and the other part of the Bible is called the New Testament. "Testament" is based on the Latin word, *testamentum*, which means covenant. Most of the Old Testament deals with Israel under the old covenant that God made with them at Mount Sinai. Most of the New Testament centers around the new covenant, made through Jesus. As we'll see, God brings people to faith in Jesus through his word. So, words are important. And we know that. Who would say that Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches were "mere words"? Who would say that other famous speeches in history are "just words"? Words are powerful. They comfort, they motivate, and, at their most powerful, they create new realities. The words of preachers can be very powerful. They are not a waste of time.

And, now, on to my third question: What do we preach? Do we, as the man in the story I told at the beginning of this sermon, preach something that will suit our audience? Do we entertain people with stories? Do we provide a running commentary on the news of the day?

The answer to those last three questions is “no.” Paul told Timothy to preach “the word” (2 Tim. 4:2). In Paul’s letters, the “word” can refer to the gospel message (2 Tim. 2:8–9). But in this context, it seems that Paul means the whole Bible. We know this from the previous verses. Look at 2 Timothy 3:14–17:

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Paul tells Timothy to continue living out what he learned when he was young. What Timothy learned were “the sacred writings.” Clearly, in this context, Paul is referring to the Old Testament. At the time Paul is writing, the whole of the New Testament wasn’t yet completed, and when Timothy was a child, it’s possible that none of the New Testament documents had been written yet. However, I think what Paul says about Scripture here applies to the whole Bible. After all, Peter, in his second letter, calls Paul’s letters “Scriptures” (2 Pet. 3:16).⁶

It seems that Paul gives us three reasons why Timothy should preach the Scriptures. First, and most importantly, the Scriptures are “breathed out by God.” What this means is that God is the ultimate author of the entire Bible. Just as I am using breath to speak these words, God “breathed out” the words of the Bible. But that doesn’t mean that God simply dictated the words of the Bible to scribes who furiously wrote down everything they heard. God used people to write the Bible. We see this in various passages in the Bible, such as in Acts. At the beginning of the book, Peter tells the other disciples that David had foreseen the day when Judas would betray Jesus and would need to be replaced as an apostle. Peter says, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus” (Acts 1:16). Peter says that the Holy Spirit, the third Person of God, spoke through David, who was the author of the Psalms Peter later quotes. We see this same idea in other passages in the Bible, too.⁷ In Peter’s second letter, he says the same

⁶ Peter says that false teachers twist the meaning of Paul’s letters, as they do with the “other Scriptures.” It is clear that Peter places Paul’s letters on the level of Old Testament Scripture.

⁷ A short list: 2 Kgs. 17:37 (God wrote “the statutes and the rules and the law and the commandment,” though such things were written down by Moses); Matt. 1:22; 2:15; Acts 4:25; Heb. 3:7; 4:7; 8:8; 10:15.

thing. He writes, “no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20–21). It seems that Peter is referring to Scripture when he writes “prophecy.” The idea is that people didn’t simply come up with Scripture. They didn’t write it on their own. Yes, people like David and Paul used their minds to write Scripture. They used their experiences and personalities to write what they wrote. But all along, whether they realized it or not, the Holy Spirit was carrying them along. It’s as if they were wind instruments and God was blowing through them to produce the Bible.

One reason we preach God’s word, the Bible, and not our opinions or stories is because only the Bible is authored by God. It is a unique book. And since God is the ultimate authority, the Bible is authoritative in a unique way.

Here’s the second reason that we should preach the Bible. The Scriptures “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). God uses his word to bring people to a saving knowledge of him. There are a number of passages that teach this. James 1:18 says, “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” God “brings us forth,” or brings us to a point of spiritual rebirth, by the “word of truth.” Peter says, in 1 Peter 1:23, that Christians “have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” In other words, God’s word is like a seed, one that will never perish, that is planted in people. When that seed finds good soil (Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23) and is also watered and God chooses to grow it (1 Cor. 3:6), it causes people to be born again.

The most famous passage along these lines is found in Romans 10. Paul writes this in Romans 10:9–17:

⁹ . . . if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has

believed what he has heard from us?”¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Paul indicates how someone is saved from sin and condemnation and is reconciled to God: through faith in Jesus. That’s how anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, can be saved. How does this happen? How can people believe in someone they have never heard about? These people need preachers to preach “the word of Christ” to them. The word of God is necessary for salvation. That’s why it needs to be preached. My opinions and anecdotes can’t save anyone. I don’t preach to entertain you. If I use illustrations, stories, or the occasional joke, it’s to help you understand a point or to keep your attention. But when I read and explain the Bible, God may use that to bring someone from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive.

But, of course, preaching isn’t just for people who need to be converted. It’s for Christians, too. Here is the third reason that we should preach the Bible: Paul writes, in 2 Timothy 3:16–17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” God’s word teaches us. It corrects us. It trains us to live righteous lives. It helps us to be mature, equipped to do all the good works that God has planned for us (Eph. 2:10). One of my main goals in preaching is to help you to think about all of life through the lens of all of God’s world. I want us all to think biblically, or Christianly.

Now, I realize that people have objections to preaching the Bible. Some people think it’s odd that we should refer to an old book. Some people simply doubt the truth of the Bible. They doubt that God actually authored it.

Several years ago, Kathy and I visited an old friend of mine. I knew him when I was studying music at the University of Texas. He happens to be a gay man and he had moved out to San Diego, where he met his boyfriend. Kathy and I made a trip to California and we visited my old friend while we were there. In their apartment, I saw that my friend’s boyfriend had some books about those “other gospels” that were excluded from the Bible, books like the Gospel of Thomas. Now, there are reasons why these so-called gospels aren’t in the Bible: they weren’t written by eyewitnesses in the first century, they are often ridiculous (the Gospel of Peter features a talking cross that follows Jesus out of the tomb), and they contradict what is in the real Gospels. In fact, these “Gospels” weren’t even written by the people whose names they bear. They were written in the late second century and afterwards. So, they’re fakes. They weren’t

kept out of the Bible by some conspiring early Christians. The early church recognized these books as counterfeit works. They obviously weren't authored by God.

At any rate, we all went out to eat dinner, and my friend asked me something about what I thought of homosexuality. He asked because he knew I was a Christian and, furthermore, he knew I was now working at a church. (I had just started working as a worship leader less than a year before this time.) Perhaps I said something about believing what the Bible says; honestly, I don't remember, and I don't think I had the opportunity to say much. That's because his boyfriend said something like, "I don't need an old book to tell me how to live." He was normally a calm and quiet man, but now he was worked up and he even put a hand in the direction of my face as if to say, "Stop, let's not go there."

I think that's how many people think. They don't get why anyone should pay attention to "an old book."

Well, what if God chose to reveal himself through a collection of old books? Why isn't that possible? If God wanted to reveal himself in such a way that generations of people had the same objective message, it makes sense that he would reveal himself in one book. If God spoke to each one of us subjectively, I can imagine that something like this would happen. Someone would say, "God told me to that do X." And someone else would say, "No, God told me that X is the wrong thing to do." Imagine a young man approaching a young woman and saying, "God told me that I should marry you." Now imagine that woman saying, "That's funny, because God warned me about guys like you." Who would be right? It would be my word against yours.

And if we believed that God kept speaking new messages to each generation in such a way, we might wonder if we all were hearing the same, consistent message from God. It would be easy for people to say things like, "Well, God told people that monogamy was his ideal for marriage back then, but now he is saying that we can have multiple spouses."

But if God has revealed himself in his once-and-for-all-time word, the Bible, we can't say things like that. The "old book" that we have is an objective message. We all have access to the text. We can study it. Yes, we will have subjective interpretations of the Bible, but we can sit down together to see if our subjective interpretations are right.

Some people don't object to the idea of an old book being authored by God. They just think that the Bible isn't God's word and that it isn't true. I already mentioned Tim Keller. In a video I watched this week, of him speaking about his new book, *Making Sense of God*, at the

Google campus, he said that when people object to Christianity, they are actually making a leap of faith.⁸ In other words, the objections that people have to the Bible are actually based on faith, not solid evidence or logic. And the thing they are putting their faith in is actually harder to prove than Christianity.

Here are some examples: Some people don't think there should only be one path to God, one way to be reconciled to him. But why is that so? Who says there can't be one way? What tells us there have to be many ways?

Some people reject the Bible because they don't believe in miracles. But this, too, rests on a belief that miracles can't happen. To prove that no miracles have occurred, one would have to know every event that has ever occurred in the universe, and one would have to know the cause of every event. And even then, one would have to know that a miracle in the future couldn't take place. In other words, to prove that miracles are impossible, you would have to be omniscient. But there's only one Being who is omniscient, and that is God.

Here's another type of objection to the Bible. A lot of people think there are contradictions in the Bible because the Bible was not written exactly the way that modern history books or modern news stories are written. But why should a book written between 2,000 and 3,400 years ago be written the way that books today are written? Who says that a book has to be written according to modern conventions in order to be true?

Some people think parts of the Bible are false. I have already quoted 2 Timothy and 2 Peter. Some people think those letters were not actually written by Paul and Peter, respectively. But there is no external evidence that says these letters are forgeries. We don't have copies of 2 Timothy that say it was written by some forgotten apostle. The case against the Pauline authorship of 1-2 Timothy and Titus (along with Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians) is remarkably weak. It seems to rest on a faith that wants to undermine the truth of the Bible. It's no coincidence that the books that talk about the Bible being Scripture and the importance of doctrine are the ones that come under attack.

Finally, some people object to the Bible because they don't like that certain things are regarded as sins. But what standard to people use to determine what is sin and what is not? If

⁸ To hear his comments, go to the 19:50 mark of the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uIvOniW8xA>. See also Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* (New York: Viking, 2016).

they reject the Bible, they are relying upon their own moral intuitions, or they are relying on public opinion polls, or the opinions of someone else, and then these things become their authorities.

You see, one of the inescapable realities of life is that we all put our faith in things we can't absolutely prove beyond the shadow of any doubt. Another, related inescapable reality is we will submit to some kind of authority. If you don't put your trust in God, and you don't therefore allow his words to be authoritative in your life, something else will fill that void. And that something, the thing that becomes your authority, will be something less than God. It will be your feelings, or the ever-shifting views of Americans, or some professor, or someone or something else. Here's something to ask yourself: What is my authority? Whose voice do I listen to? Do I listen to what God has revealed or do I trust more in my own ideas, or the ideas of others?

Jesus said that his people trust in him. More specifically, he said that his people recognize his voice, hear his voice, and respond to what he is saying (John 10:27). You see, Jesus was a preacher. And Jesus thought that the Old Testament was the word of God, that it couldn't be changed or broken (Matt. 5:17–18; John 10:35). He never suggested it was wrong or false in any way. So, if we believe in Jesus in any meaningful sense, we'll adopt his view of Scripture.⁹

But Jesus isn't just a preacher. He isn't just a teacher or a wise man or a prophet. He didn't just use words. He didn't just perform miracles. He gave his life for us when he died on the cross. He laid down his life for his people. He's not just a man of words. He's a man of actions. Actually, he's the *God-man* of both words and actions. It might be hard to trust me, a preacher that you may not know very well. But it's a lot easier to trust someone who dies for you. That's the claim of Christianity: God became man to rescue his people by living the life that they don't live and by dying the death that they deserve. Anyone who does that is worth trusting.

The question is: Are we listening? And are we listening in such a way that we are ready to act? Do you listen to sermons to be entertained? Do you listen to sermons to gather more information? Or do you listen to sermons so that God's word can work on you, causing you to become more like Jesus in both your words and your deeds?

⁹ To learn more about Jesus as a preacher and Jesus' views on Scripture, go to <http://wbcommunity.org/jesus> and find the sermons, "Jesus Was a Preacher" and "Jesus Believed the Old Testament Is the Word of God."