

A True Missionary Church: 3. Proclaims the Truth

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[0 : 00] Well, do turn with me, if you would, back to that passage that we read in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and 4.

And tonight our subject about the true missionary church is this. It proclaims the truth. It's a few weeks since we started this short evening series on what it means to be a true missionary church today.

And we found that the good news is that we don't have to go and read lots of long and complicated books about the extraordinary peculiarities of mission in the 21st century. You know, the kind of thing that gives you the idea that unless you've got a PhD in post-modernism, you've got no hope whatsoever of being any use to the church today.

There's lots of those books around. They depress me enormously. But thankfully, the Lord himself had the foresight to leave his church, actually, with everything that we need for mission.

Everything we need right up until he comes again. First of all, of course, he personally trained his apostles, didn't he? Taught them what mission was about and how to do mission.

[1 : 18] And then, of course, towards the end of their earthly lives and ministries, they passed on everything that Jesus had taught them personally to the others who would come after them.

And that was a true apostolic succession. Not because they transmitted some sort of tactile magic through their hands on these people's heads, but rather because they taught them the true gospel and true mission.

And they laid that on their hearts, preserving it forever. And preserving it, moreover, in the scriptures of the New Testament for us to read. And so, you see, the pastoral epistles in particular, these letters we're looking at, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, as well as 2 Peter, these letters have a real focus on looking to the time that was to come after the apostles were gone.

And the time when the true apostolic faith and the true apostolic ministry was to be preserved in the church for the future and for the world. Remember, we saw one of the key verses is 1 Timothy 3, verse 15.

That's where we get the little motto that's on the bottom of our service sheets every week. Paul writes, he tells us, so that you might know what it means to be the household of God.

[2 : 39] Not a building, that is, but the real church, the family of God. Which is, he says, the church of the living God. That is, it's where God dwells himself among his people.

Remember the temple. The temple was the place where God made his name to dwell. It's where he presents himself among his people. Well, says Paul to the church in Corinth, you, the people of God, are that temple.

God dwells in the midst. And in 1 Timothy 3, verse 15, he tells us that that means it's our job to be a pillar and a buttress of the truth in the midst of a world of lies, falsity in belief as well as falsity in living.

And so the first thing that we saw in these letters about what it means to be a true missionary church, pillar and buttress of the truth, is that it must exhibit these things in the church's life.

A missionary church must live the truth. Now that's an emphasis that we see running through all of these letters, but we looked at it especially in Titus, which talks in that lovely phrase about adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour.

[3 : 51] God's truth is visible as well as being audible, isn't it? Because God's truth is living and personal, and therefore it's not just a theory. It's a vital relationship.

It's a living thing. It's a relationship with the living God. And therefore it needs a living church of people living out the faith in order to show that power of truth, to change people's lives.

But of course you can't have that reality and truth in your life if you don't also have it in your doctrine. And so we saw that the second thing about a true missionary church is that it must guard the truth.

That's a constant refrain, isn't it? We saw it. Oh Timothy, guard the good deposit that's been entrusted to you. We must preserve the true gospel against all the pressures in the world around to change and to pervert the truth of God.

And there are so many of them, aren't there? We looked at the pull of sensuality to descend into the ways of the world. Or the temptation to separatism, almost the exact opposite, and yet just as dangerous.

[5 : 01] Or the lure of superiority, of rationalism and intellectualizing the faith so that we remove it right out of the hands of the ordinary person. No, we must preserve the gospel against all of these tendencies.

And of course we'll preserve the gospel not by putting it in a glass case in a museum, but rather by propagating it as a gardener propagates his plants. That's how you preserve a living thing, and the truth is living.

And it's preserved by passing it on. That's why Paul says in 2 Timothy 2, verse 2, that Timothy is to entrust the gospel to faithful men who will be able also to teach others to pass it on.

And that means, as we saw last time, that a true missionary church must have in practice both an evangelism priority and a training priority. That must be at the heart of a missionary church's life.

It's something that we're all called to be involved in, preservation of the gospel. It's not a spectator sport that most people look on while just a few people do.

[6 : 11] It's not something done by passengers. No, it's something done by partners in gospel ministry. And all of us have a part to play in propagating the truth of the gospel, to preserve the truth.

Of course, some people have specialist roles in that. They're called to spend all their time devoted to teaching, perhaps. But all of us within the church, whoever we are, all of us have a role and a place to play.

We're to be partners. Do you remember Paul says to the Philippians, we're to be standing side by side for the sake of the gospel. Well then, what are the means of doing that?

What does that look like in practice? What are the skills and the resources that we need? What's the secret, if I can put it this way, of successful preservation of the gospel and propagation of the gospel in our day?

Well, as I said, if you go into the Christian bookshops, you'll find all sorts of how-to books of every conceivable kind. What the church needs today is this thing, or that thing, or the next thing.

[7 : 19] There's every conceivable analysis of the church, of psychiatry, of society, of sociology. Every conceivable new insight that is guaranteed to make your church go with a fizz and a bang in 2007.

But I find that I only have to read one or two of these books before I plunge into despair, because you read the lists and lists of things that you must have and things that you must do and things that you must be, all of which seem totally, utterly unreal and beyond the possibility of most of us normal people and normal churches.

But I want to encourage you, because that's not what the Apostle Paul does in these letters. He doesn't discourage us and lay upon us hundreds and hundreds of things that if we can't do and don't have, we'll never be able to be a faithful missionary church.

Now, he just tells us in three words, three little words, what is absolutely central and fundamental and above all, sufficient for the task that we're called to of being a true missionary church that will be able to preserve the gospel.

Three little words. Do you see them there in 2 Timothy 4, verse 2? Do you? Preach the word.

[8 : 49] That's his message in a nutshell. A true missionary church proclaims the truth. It preaches. It proclaims the word of God. I want to look at that under three headings, three commands that Paul gives Timothy about how and when and why he's to do this.

First of all, he says, a true missionary church is to proclaim the truth continually against the wisdom of the culture of the day.

Timothy's to take the Bible everywhere, even though it means suffering, even though it means people don't want it. In fact, if you look at verse 3 of chapter 4, he's to proclaim God's word precisely

because people don't want it.

Do you see? For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching. They'll turn away from listening to truth. They'll wander off into myths. But as for you, do the work of an evangelist. Proclaim the word of God. It's a very peculiar notion, isn't it? That you do the very thing that is the opposite of what people actually want. It seems a very feeble approach.

[10:00] It seems a very futile approach, doesn't it? That's certainly how it seems today and certainly, apparently, it seemed to be the same in Timothy's day.

That wouldn't look very impressive in a bookshop, would it? You go in beside all these weighty tomes on missiology in the 21st century. You're alongside all these how-to books with the glamorous covers and the recommendations about strategy and all sorts of things.

And in amongst them all you just have one little tiny thin sheet of paper. And the author is Paul. It doesn't even have a surname. And it just says preach the word.

And then there's a PS at the bottom from chapter 3 verse 14. Keep on doing what you once learned. Remember who taught it to you. And chapter 4 verse 5.

Keep the head, keep at it, even when people persecute you. Preach the word. That's the only way to preserve the gospel.

[11:04] That's the only way to preserve the church. But that is what Paul says here, isn't it? He says that to Timothy precisely to reassure him because he needs reassurance.

Because people were saying exactly what they were saying today. But that's not what we need. They're still saying that. It's not what we want at the heart of the church's life.

It's old-fashioned. It's passé. There's nothing special about just proclaiming God's word. And it's very hard, isn't it, to make a focus of your ministry something that's going to make people dislike it and dislike you.

Something that's going to bring real suffering for doing things the way that Paul tells you to do it. When doing things a different way and an easier way would alleviate all that suffering and make things a lot easier.

See, that's why in chapters 3 verses 10 to 14 Paul reminds Timothy of what he has seen and what he's known and what he's experienced already of genuine apostolic ministry in Paul's own life.

[12:18] He says, you've seen, Timothy, that true apostolic ministry is never fettered by people. You know that it just brings persecution. You've seen it in me.

But you know those whom you learned it from. And you know that you've fully believed in it. And you know it's the way of truth.

So keep on doing it. Keep at true apostolic ministry which is true biblical ministry which is whole Bible ministry.

A true missionary church will always be focused on proclaiming God's word. word. That's where your priority will be. And that'll only be your priority, won't it, if that is actually where your confidence lies.

If you really believe that it is God's word that does God's work. Not just that we believe God's word is authoritative and inspired over all that we do as a church, but much more than that.

[13:24] That we believe God's word is truly sufficient to accomplish everything that he will do through his church. So not just that God's word is a guide and a critique to our strategy for mission.

God's word is his strategy for mission. Now that's a hugely, hugely important distinction that we've got to get clear in our minds because it lies at the very heart of what it means to be an evangelical believer in the truly biblical sense.

It's at the heart of what it means to be a truly evangelical church in the truly apostolic sense. An evangelical church is not a church that submits to the authority of scripture.

Not just the church that believes, 2 Timothy 3 verse 16 here, that all scripture is inspired by God. It's much more than that. It's one that understands that this passage isn't essentially about the authority of scripture.

It's about the essential activity of scripture. It's about the assurance of the sufficiency of scripture as God's strategy for his church and for his mission.

[14:41] So that we put the word to work all the time in our ministry because that is our ministry. We preach, we proclaim the word in every possible way at every possible opportunity.

That is our ministry. Being evangelical isn't just what you believe about the Bible. It's what you do with the Bible. It's possible to have a Bible based ministry, to be totally and utterly orthodox in your

belief.

But for the driving force of what you actually do in mission, to be anything other than the real and pervasive proclamation of the word itself because your real confidence in fact lies somewhere else. You may not realize that, but that's the reality. It might be in the latest strategy for church growth. It might be in the latest ideas for youth ministry or whatever it is.

It might simply be that what's really important is having the best music or the most sparkling presentation skills or oratory or whatever or even having a snazzy new building or having the right view of church government or the sacraments or spiritual gifts or whatever else it might be.

[16:04] Anything at all that we begin to think is so essential to mission that we can't really do mission properly unless we have it or unless we do that. You see, when we see that clearly, I think we have to recognize that there are many folk, many churches perhaps, who think of themselves as evangelical, but they're not being truly evangelical at all.

Because regardless of what they believe about the authority that the Bible demands for itself, they don't trust the Bible's sufficiency as God's strategy for mission.

Therefore, they're not majoring on the chief activity that the Bible demands for itself. And that is its constant and continual proclamation in every sphere of life and activity in the church and all around the church.

See, if I can put it this way, if evangelical, the word evangelical isn't really a noun, it's a verb, well, it is a noun, but it should be a verb.

Because it's not, listen, it's not what we believe about the Bible's truths. It's whether you put the Bible's powerful truth to work really decides whether you are an evangelical, whether you believe in the power of the gospel.

[17:33] Because the Bible isn't just for believing, the Bible is for proclaiming. That's why in chapter 4, verse 5, Paul says to Timothy, do the work of an evangelist, do the work of an evangelical.

That word, euangelistis, is not a believer of the gospel, it's a proclaimer of the gospel. Evangelical is a verb, it's those who proclaim, it's a work of proclamation.

You see, in evangelical churches, in evangelical people, are those who proclaim the gospel of God, who do it continually, and who do it with confidence, because they know that whether it's in season or out of season, whether it's in fashion or out of fashion, that is what accomplishes the work of God in the world.

So I want to ask you, is that what we really believe? Do we really believe that taking the Bible's message everywhere is the key, is the very heart of what mission really is?

Do we really believe that that is what is most vital for the mission of the church in the year 2007? Or maybe the next two points will help us to see where our confidence really does lie in these matters.

[18:57] Let's see if we can accept Paul's understanding of what that means in terms of our evangelism strategy and our training strategy. That's what we have to focus on, as we said, if we're to preserve and propagate the gospel.

But what is at the very heart of these things? Well, it still amounts to just this. Proclaim the word. Proclaim the word outwardly to the world, that's what evangelism is.

And proclaim the word inwardly to the church, because that's how you train and equip people for mission. Look back at chapters 3, verses 15 and 16, and let's think about these two things.

First of all, we are to proclaim the word outwardly. We are to take the Bible to the world, because, verse 15, it's the scriptures, it's the sacred writings, says Paul, that are able to make wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

So to evangelize means to proclaim the word of God, to teach and to herald the message of the scriptures. And here in particular, he's talking about the Old Testament.

[20:07] Well, of course, verse 14 makes it clear that he includes in that the apostolic deposit and teaching. But that's an emphasis that's so clear throughout these letters.

So 1 Timothy 2, verse 2, to be saved is to come to a knowledge of the truth. Or 1 Timothy 4, verse 16, it's the truth, says Paul, the truth of scripture that will save both you and your hearers.

If you look at 1 Peter chapter 1, as we read this morning, he talks about being born again through the living and abiding word of God. So to evangelize is to take the Bible and its message to the world.

That's what evangelism is, nothing else. I'm emphasizing this because it's an area where we find it so hard, don't we, to have real assurance of the sufficiency of something that seems so weak, that seems so feeble, that seems frankly so despised in our world today.

How can that achieve anything? And people do say that, don't they, even within the church. They're always saying things like that. Oh, our world's so different now.

[21 : 22] The culture's so different. We can't just reach out to people the same way. People have no background. They have no knowledge of Christianity. So we can't just present the word to them like that.

We can't just go explaining the Bible to people. That's no good. That won't be any good today. We need new strategies. But friends, that's just totally to misunderstand reality.

Paul was proclaiming the gospel to people who had absolutely no cultural background in Christianity, in first century Gentile Greece and Turkey.

It was a multicultural world. It was a multi-faith world. And his message, we're told, was a stumbling block to the Jew. It was foolishness to the educated and sophisticated Greek.

But nonetheless, it was that foolishness of that proclaimed word that brought salvation and life to everyone that God was calling out of darkness into light.

[22 : 26] You think about it, there really is an extraordinary arrogance, isn't there, in our age to think that we're unique, to think that we face consummate problems that no other age of the church has ever had to face, as though evangelism was easy at other ages, but suddenly it's got very hard for us.

That's just nonsense. Evangelism has always been hard. Tell that to Paul, when he was being beaten and put in the stocks, put in prison.

Evangelism has always provoked scorn and ridicule and rejection and persecution. It's like that for Paul, it was going to be like that for Timothy, and it's going to be like that for us, for everybody, always.

Jesus himself was met with exactly the same hostility and scorn, wasn't he? And that's why he trained his disciples also to expect it, but not to give up, sowing the treasure of the seed of the kingdom.

Even when they saw, often the seed seemed to fall on the path or the stony ground or among the thorns and the thistles. I really am getting extremely bored and fed up of hearing people go on and on about the challenge of post-modernism and how it means that we've got to rethink everything that we do in church and in life and so on.

[23 : 49] Because none of the right conditions apparently seem to exist for evangelism now. What rubbish! Just read the Bible. There's never been an easy time for evangelism and there's nothing new about post-modernism either.

Best comment I've ever heard about post-modernism is this from my friend Rico Tice. He said, I went to a seminar all about post-modernism. He used a lot of long words and complex words I couldn't understand.

But eventually the penny dropped and I realized, I think post-modernism is just another word for sin. And that's just about right, isn't it? People aren't hard to reach with the gospel because we're post-modern.

People are hard to reach with the gospel because we're post-Eden. We're fallen and we always have been. It's post-Edenism that's our problem, not post-modernism. And that's been around for a very, very long time.

But what is it that breaks through into the fallen, darkened, post-Eden heart of man? Well, it's the power of God that makes wise for salvation as it's proclaimed in the truth of Scripture.

[25 : 05] It's baffling for the world. The world can't understand that. It's foolishness to the world. It's feeble. It always has been, even feeble to the church so often, alas.

But from the beginning God has chosen that which appears feeble and foolish to the world to shame the wise. So that, he says to the Corinthians, no human being might boast in the presence of God.

either the recipients of salvation or the messengers of salvation either. God will not have us boast as though there was anything we ourselves could do to bring about a work of saving grace in people.

He won't do that. And that's one reason why he asks us to commit, to believe and trust in the foolishness of proclaiming the word of Scripture opened up from the Bible, teaching his truth, to simply do his work in the heart of men and women.

And it does take trust, doesn't it? It's very hard to believe in something that just seems so weak. It always has been hard. That's why he writes to encourage Timothy to stick to it even though, no doubt, he was sorely tempted for more immediately impressive ways of doing things.

[26 : 25] Timothy, remember, was no feeble guy. Don't get that idea. Read the New Testament. He was a constant colleague and co-missionary of Paul. He co-wrote seven of Paul's letters with him.

He'd been through tough times, very tough assignments. Read 1 Corinthians 4, you'll see Paul sent Timothy to knock the Corinthian church into shape.

And that was a church that was deeply unimpressed with the foolishness of the gospel. Deeply unimpressed with Paul's feeble methodology. Much, much more impressed with grand things, eloquent, spectacular things.

Oh yes, Timothy was tough. And he was trusted by Paul to go and sort out these kind of issues.

And yet Paul knows that just because real ministry is tough, and people will not endure sound teaching, that there will always be temptations, even for tough men like Timothy, and certainly for people like you and me, to look for an easier way, a more acceptable way.

It's true in our own day, isn't it? Ministry that focuses relentlessly and continuously simply on opening up the Word of God in Scripture.

[27 : 44] Well, it's not in season in our day, is it? This is not an age for mere words, we're told. We live in a visual age. The church must go that way as well.

People don't know the Bible, so we mustn't put them off by too much Bible teaching, too much proclamation, especially unpalatable things they don't want to hear. No, no, no. People need to belong much more than they need to believe today.

So we're to try and make them comfortable in church, not to put them off. I've told you before, I think, Rico Tice said to me that he was preparing to go to a university mission and the student said to him, we don't want you to mention hell or judgment, otherwise we're not going to bring any of our friends to hear you talk.

Douglas Kelly, who teaches at the Reformed Theological Seminary in the States, I heard him say that one of his students was seeking an appointment to a church in America and he was told, well, if you come to work in this church, you're never allowed to mention the word sin on Sundays.

I wonder what days are right for mentioning sin? Wednesdays? Tuesdays? What's a good day for mentioning sin if it's not Sundays? I was at a conference a couple of weeks ago in Ohio with Edward.

[29 : 01] One of the speakers was a man called Vody Baucom, a black preacher who comes from Texas. And in one of the question and answer sessions he was asked this question, how do you feel about the whole seeker-sensitive, seeker-friendly movement about church?

And he said this, I don't want people who are not believers in Jesus Christ to feel comfortable when they come into my church. I want them to feel really uncomfortable because they don't know Jesus. They need to know that they haven't got Jesus and they need Jesus. The last message they need is that it doesn't really matter much either way. You can feel very, very comfortable here, whatever you believe.

And I thought that was absolutely right. Well, you see, are we evangelical in the real sense? Are we missionary in the real sense? Do we see that evangelism means not just being friendly to outsiders?

Well, what else would we be to outsiders, for goodness sake? Not just getting to know people or being friends with people. Those are good things and lovely things. But evangelism means proclaiming the Bible's message to people.

[30 : 12] opening their eyes to understand it, getting it across to their minds and their hearts, because that, says Paul, is what is able to make them wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and that alone.

Well, if we do believe that, we'll understand, won't we, all sorts of things about what we do as a church and why. We'll understand that when visitors come into the church from 12 to 2 or 2 to 4, what they need isn't just a good Glasgow welcome, even a good St. George's Tron welcome, which, by the way, is famous for being warm and friendly.

It always cheers my heart when visitors say to me what a great welcome they get when they come to our church. It's really wonderful to hear that. But they need more than that, don't they? They need to encounter the Bible, the message, the way of salvation, to make them wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

It's what our friends and family too need, isn't it? More than anything else, they need an encounter with the open Bible, with the message of the Gospel. You'll only bring your friends and your family to church, won't you, for something as unimpressive as having the Bible's message explained, if you really are evangelical.

That is, if you trust the Word of God and Scripture to really have the power to make people wise for salvation. Whether it's John's Gospel or Leviticus or Ecclesiastes or Revelation or wherever.

[31 : 49] But only an evangelical like that would bring somebody, wouldn't they, to an ordinary church service. Not feeling you have to wait for some special event where you actually hope that it will be something other than the Gospel that will really attract people and impress them and perhaps make them a bit less dismissive of church.

But you have to have real confidence, don't you, in the utter foolishness of the proclamation of the Bible. To just trust that that alone may bring people to salvation.

Well, are we true evangelicals? It's a real question, isn't it? I have to ask myself that question every time I stand up to just open the Bible and do something as foolish as to proclaim its message every week.

But if we are evangelical, we'll trust Paul's strategy for evangelism. We'll take the Bible, the whole Bible, to the world. We believe that it's Bible ministry that brings salvation.

And we'll proclaim the Bible to the world outwardly. And also, we'll proclaim the Bible inwardly, too, to the church. We'll take the whole Bible to the church because, as verse 17 says, it's Bible ministry that equips the church for service.

[33 : 07] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

See, it's teaching the Bible that makes people competent. It's teaching the Bible that equips Christian people for every good work. That is, it's the ministry of Bible teaching that is the training strategy for the mission of the church.

Not just because that alone will shape a truly biblical message in our mouths, but also because that alone will shape us into truly biblical men and women. We need the rebuke and the correction of Scripture all the time, don't we?

Because constantly we're drifting into danger. We need the consistent teaching and training in righteousness that the Bible gives us. Because it's these things alone that can truly equip us for the task of ministry to which God has called us.

All of us, every one of us, whatever capacity in particular that might be. So I want to ask you, do you really believe that? That it's Bible ministry, that it's whole Bible ministry, searching Bible ministry that alone can really equip the people of God for the work of mission.

[34 : 38] Well, if we do believe that, then we are real evangelicals. But alas, many don't really believe that. They might think of themselves as evangelical, but they don't really believe that it's the Bible's ministry above everything else that really equips the church for every good work, as Paul says here.

Many colleges clearly don't believe that. Of course, they have biblical studies and so on, but what is it that you really need for ministry today, for mission today? Well, it's psychology lessons.

It's sociology. It's theories. Communication theory. Homiletics classes. All sorts of other things.

Well, of course, these things could be useful. But that's not what Paul says equips the man of God for every good work.

Or take youth work. The adverts that I get through the post coming my way for training programs and so on, well, there's virtually nothing in them about Bible training, learning to read and grasp the Bible, learning to teach and trust the Bible.

Now, they're all full of things about youth culture and music and celebrity culture and all these things that are essential to have before you can begin to be any use in youth work in the church today.

[36 : 03] Now, Paul wasn't a fool. He wasn't a hermit. He wasn't out of touch with the world. Of course he wasn't. Of course we can learn useful things from observations of the world and the learning of the world.

But towering above and beyond all of these things is simply this. It's Bible ministry alone that will equip the people of God for every good work, for the work of mission.

That's what this verse says. Plain as the nose on my face. Which is very plain indeed, as I've often said. And if you believe that, then you are truly an evangelical.

You trust the power of the Word of God to change, to shape, to train, to equip. And therefore, you don't just believe it, you do it.

So, for example, in the church's youth work, you know that it's Bible ministry alone that makes young people wise for salvation. And it's Bible ministry alone that will equip young people for service.

[37 : 10] And therefore, Bible ministry will be at the heart of your youth work. Not that difficult, is it? And your student ministry. And your children's ministry.

And every other ministry, for that matter. But I'm emphasizing the young people's work because so often what is said today is just the opposite. Is that young people were a different species from the rest of us.

We can so easily be led into thinking that actually what we need is something quite different. Something much more attractive to the world. I mean, listen, for example, to a piece that I'm quoting to you from a soundly evangelical journal written by a soundly apparently evangelical pastor. Telling us that we need to be with it if we're going to reach young people and train them today. He says, most people like to be with it from TV, friends, to fashion, Jennifer Lopez, from sport, David Beckham, to music.

Generation X sets the trends. And everyone else follows suit except the church. And of course he criticizes the church for not following suit. He goes on to say, this is the generation who sense the ambiguity of life.

[38 : 24] Therefore, worship should focus on the mystery of God and will be rich in symbol. Rather than rationality with words, worship will be multi-sensory.

Heavily dependent on images. And he goes on to quote, very approvingly, a writer who's writing contemporary songs and says, this is the way forward. Quote, the lyrics have dropped biblical language and allowed the message to become more oblique and at times deliberately vague. The meaning comes through pictures more than principle. And above all, the music is passionate. That's what we need. Ever going to reach young people today, he says.

And Paul says, no. No. A thousand times no. That's not evangelicalism. Doesn't matter what you call yourself. That's actually a return to medieval Roman Catholicism.

Images and pictures and sensuality. Anything but the Word of God. That's locked up for special people. To be more blunt, in the Bible's language, it's actually idolatry.

[39 : 34] It's Baal worship. And God says, no. You're not to look at the pagan world around and its way of doing worship and worship me that way.

Don't be taken in by the world. Because it's the Word of Scripture that leads to salvation. And it's the Word of Scripture that equips the church for service.

Friends, as I close, Paul is under no illusion on just how counter-cultural that is going to be in these difficult days that we live in.

In the world and in the church. Because the church so often is just engulfed by the thinking of the world. He knew that we would face difficult days. Terrible days.

Even within the churches. And that's why he warns us like this. He knows that many won't endure sound teaching.

[40 : 37] He'd rather gather around themselves teachers to teach them what their itching ears want to say. Soothing things that won't cause any offence to anybody. No sin on Sundays and all that.

But that's why he reminds us what God's strategy is for mission. His Word. The Scriptures. They are God's strategy.

And they must be ours. A true missionary church is evangelical in the true sense. It proclaims the Word however scorned that may be in the world and in the church.

It takes the Bible to the world. It takes the Bible to itself. It takes the Bible everywhere continually against the culture of the day.

Because it knows that only the ministry of an open Bible leads you to be wise for salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[41 : 39] Christ. And only an open Bible can equip for service. It's only the Scriptures as they're taught that will transform the church and it's only the Scriptures as they're opened up that can transform the world.

A true missionary church proclaims the truth. My friends, that must be what we must be always and everywhere if we're to fulfill our calling here in the year 2007.

Let's pray. 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 preach the word.

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelical. Fulfill your ministry.

Lord, in difficult days and days of ridicule and days of persecution and there are so many easier ways for us to turn, please grant that we may have confidence and assurance in the power of your word to accomplish all that you desire of it.

[43 : 04] And may the open Bible be ever our joy and a delight as we seek to proclaim it outwardly and inwardly until the day you come.

And may many, we pray, be made wise for salvation even as we also are equipped to bring your gospel to the world.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.