Gospel Resilience and the Word of God

(A sermon based on 2 Timothy 3: 14-4: 5)

Introduction

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Today's sermon is based on the 2nd reading, which is appropriately titled as Pastor's duties. This is one text, they use time and time again to tell us, what our (Pastors) job description is, which is the proclamation of the gospel, both in season and out of season. So, prior to listening let us pray:

*Dear Lord, thank you for willing to speak to us through your WORD. For you are a God who is not silent but communicates with us so that we know you, know ourselves and be drawn closer to you. Enlighten our hearts with the truth of your Word. In Jesus name. Amen.*

Self - thou are the problem!

During this past week, I attended Pastor's conference, this was Bishop Greg's last conference as the Bishop of our district. So, he decided to give all pastor's a gift, a book. The book was written by Mark Sayers and is titled, Disappearing church, subtitled: *from cultural relevance to Gospel resilience*, it is an interesting read. Especially, for us living in west, it puts things in perspective as to what is going on with our world.

Melbourne based writer Mark Sayers observes Christianity since 50's and a bit beyond that, analysing the progress of society in the past decades. One of his conclusions is that, church is now living in a post-Christian society. The central problem for why church numbers are going down, why young people are not there in the church, why attendance is so sporadic, is this: we live in a world that is so driven by gospel of 'self.' Springing up from Gnostic thinking of previous centuries, which placed 'humans' at the centre of it all, 'self' is seen as important, 'self-expression', 'freedom of self', 'preference of self', are given highest priority in our world. The words like choice or individual freedom are the key words of our times.

The 'soft power' of self is aided by technology and promises of consumerism. Sayers says, 'through the mythologies of advertising, media, the internet, and the instructive example of celebrity, a vast mental world is daily constructed in our minds, painting the possibility of a godless utopia - a secular heaven on earth in which an individual life infused with pleasure, peace, and possibility is achievable this side of death' (pg11). No wonder Gnosticism and its assertions of self has risen in our world. Are you with me still?

This is not only a trend of the world but unfortunately, similar mood is also felt in the church. As Scot McKnight observes, 'the contemporary Christianity has increasingly displaced the Bible as its foundation for knowing what to think and how to live and supplanted it with experience, desire and preference. In other words, it has surrendered its heart to personal freedoms' (pg12). Seeking a 'relevant' church for the world is not also a strategy that works as it is evident by research of churches that have gone in that direction. So what does this all mean for us? What does Melbourne based author Mark Sayer's response to such challenge? Simple calling people to rediscover gospel resilience. He says, 'to walk the countercultural narrow path in which we die to self and re-throne God in our lives as the supreme authority. In our culture of radical individualism, with its Gnostic hue, no other approach will suffice.' (Pg12). Is this making any sense?
The Word of God and its teaching leads us to the truth!

How do you rediscover the gospel if you are continually bombarded by the media all the time. The print, electronic and social media keeps infiltrating our consciences for the majority part of our lives telling us what is right, what is equal, what is fair, who has the 'best character' amongst politicians (as if the world really will follow an upright leader), no one asks these questions because we live in a world that continues to tell us 'thou shall not...'. If I have to give you one example, some reason media can advertise gambling, promote gambling, at the same time, tell us the dangers of gambling, even give us news reports of how it destroyed a particular person and then promote it again. The world around us will play big brother and continues to displace God and his Word. This is real in our world, isn't it?

Will you be surprised if I say that attempts to displace God and His Word is actually not a new thing. It happened in Paul's time as well. Remember family service sermon, I spoke about Paul reaching out to young Timothy from his chained prison cell. Paul was about to be put to death and so he spoke these words and a scribe wrote it outside the prison cell. Paul from the deep dungeons of prison cell reaches out to Timothy, if that isn't an example of 'resilience' I don't know what else is? So what is Paul's advice to Timothy? Let me read it from the Message version:

14-17 But don't let it faze you. Stick with what you learned and believed, sure of the integrity of your teachers why, you took in the sacred Scriptures with your mother's milk! There's nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.

Let me pause there and reflect on it for a while. Have you taken notice what has been said? Paul, the prisoner, from the prison cell says to Timothy, to treasure scripture. Paul reminded Timothy to stick with what he learned and believed. Resilience! Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice taught him the word of God, back in the day the word of God is mainly OT. However, look at what Paul says, the Word of God shows you 'salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.' This is the Word of God, world is saved through faith in Christ Jesus. You and I have no hope or salvation if it wasn't for what God did through Christ Jesus, the Messiah. When the world says who do you think Jesus is, our confession, like Peter, is this, 'Jesus you are our Lord!'

Gospel resilience is the call for God's people!

Scriptures be it Old Testament or New Testament point to Jesus Christ. So here is one practical example, you can only draw from scriptures. You can draw out truth about God's salvation in Christ Jesus. Let me put it this way for younger audience, the authority of the Scripture is this, you can only download from it everything you need, but you cannot upload anything into it. The world around us doesn't like this and continues the challenge the authority of Scripture, undermining it at every possible turn. Our world and its media continuously speaks of values, morals, what is right and fair, in the name of love, justice, at the same time, ignoring God and his Word all along. But God hasn't given up on the world yet, He continues to speak to the world, calling it back to him. To the world that cherishes individual freedom, choice, Biblical message is clear, sin has corrupted the creation and with Jesus, who is the only way, truth and life (John 14: 6) we have hope with and live in relationship with God. The Word of God teaches, for us informing us about His Son Jesus Christ.
Listen again to Paul, 'Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another-showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.' (1 Tim 3: 14-17)

I can't impress this on you too strongly. God is looking over your shoulder. Christ himself is the Judge, with the final say on everyone, living and dead. He is about to break into the open with his rule, so proclaim the Message with intensity; keep on your watch. Challenge, warn, and urge your people. Don't ever quit. Just keep it simple.

You're going to find that there will be times when people will have no stomach for solid teaching, but will fill up on spiritual junk food-catchy opinions that tickle their fancy. They'll turn their backs on truth and chase mirages. But you-keep your eye on what you're doing; accept the hard times along with the good; keep the Message alive; do a thorough job as God's servant.

This is the mandate on which we Pastor's work. This is the ordination vows we take. Our job, like everyone else job is not to entertain, please everyone, give you short worship services, be super organised with everything - you will be extremely lucky if you get a pastor like that, but our job is to teach the Word of God, in season and out of season. Encourage you to hear the Word of God, not only in the church but at every given opportunity. The reason is simple, whenever you get close to the Word of God, it has the power to reprove (challenge), rebuke (warn) and encourage (urge) you. You know what we (pastors) are up against? Teachers and preachers that will give people spiritual junk food, the popular opinions that has no regard for Christ and His work.

Thankfully, we have some good examples of those who gone before us, for example Martin Luther, who kept calling people back to Christ. At one point during reformation, when Luther was put to trial by the Catholic church, and was given an opportunity to either revoke his writings are face dire consequences, Luther had to stand up and say, 'unless I am convinced by proofs from Scripture, I can't recant my writings.' He ensured the gospel flame is kept alive. The only good news for the world is, 'salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:15). This is the part of the church movement you and I belong.

In our day, the gospel message is entrusted to us. In a week, we receive half an hour of teaching and probably some of you follow other Christian preachers and actually read the Word of God. I cannot but strongly encourage you to keep up with the Word of God in personal devotion. Make use of the home group study opportunity, I sincerely recommend the upcoming series: A Man named Martin Luther: part 1. Grow with fellow Christians. Otherwise, the world continues to bombard us with its opinions, and suffocate us, like weeds suffocate the plants. Christians are given the treasure of the gospel, we are called to guard it. The process will be like this (put hands on a candle and turn on the fan). As I close let me also remind you of one phrase I heard in Mark Sayers book, disappearing church, the church attendance these days is sporadic. People attend every few weeks but not as regular as before. Many churches are experiencing a phase where there are many believers on membership and a few 'belonger's. If you are a believer but not a belonger I would urge you to look at your own situation, assess your priorities. To believe and belong helps us to continue together as 'gospel resilient' church in this complex world. Our Christian future is not a bleak one because death didn't hold our Lord Jesus down, He conquered death, sin and shame and is alive.

The Word of God promises not just this life but life eternal, so yes there is hope.

Keep your lights burning!

Pastor Jaswanth
16 Oct 16