

The Purpose of the Church: Proclaiming Truth

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Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[0 : 00] We turn to 1 Timothy chapter 3, verses 14-16 will be the text for this morning's sermon.

! Last week we began this new series of sermons answering the question, the church. And so today we continue on with that study, this time focusing on another aspect of the church's purpose, which is to proclaim the truth. So if you have your Bible, turn to 1 Timothy chapter 3, verses 14-16. If you don't have a Bible with you, there's a Bible in the pew that you can use. And if you don't own a Bible, please take that Bible home with you today. It's a gift from our congregation to you in hopes that you'll continue to be reading the Word of God. 1 Timothy 3, beginning in verse 14, if you would please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together.

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness. He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated?

There's a number of things that I believe from Scripture that make up the purpose of the church, and as again we saw last week, the Bible is the source that we go to to tell us what our purpose is, remind us of what our purpose is. And it's a great purpose. It's the greatest purpose because it's a purpose that comes from God Himself. Last week we looked to Scripture to answer what is the church, and who is the church. If you remember, the Bible says we saw that the church is the body of Christ, not a building, a body we belong to, not a place where we go, and that each member of the body serves an important function. Therefore, we should care for one another and think of one another as a unit of which Christ is the head. The church we saw also is universal and local. So week to week, we join together in serving the church on both levels, universally and locally, joining with a local group of believers or body of believers who collectively serve one another as we advance the gospel together throughout our community and to the ends of the world. Today's sermon will focus on the church's God-given purpose to proclaim the truth, the truth that is contained within His Word. Because when a church loses sight of the truth, it will quickly lose sight of the purpose and the truth for which it is called to proclaim. So our Scripture today contains instruction from Paul to Timothy, a young pastor serving in a local church in Ephesus. This church had started to drift away from the basic truths of the Christian faith. And so Paul is writing Timothy to encourage him and provide him with instruction as to how individual members of the body of Christ must conduct themselves within the church, which he says is the household of God. Though centuries have passed since Paul's inspired writing to Timothy took place, things haven't changed all that much. Churches and professing believers are still tempted to drift away from the truths contained within God's Word. This past Sunday, a week ago, Emmanuel Cleaver, a member of the House of

Representatives delivered a prayer to the 117th House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. Emmanuel Cleaver served for many years as the mayor of Kansas City, of which is basically my hometown.

[5 : 00] And for 37 years as well, he pastored a church there, St. James United Methodist Church. And so this is a man who for decades has served as a pastor and a reverend. And as such, he should, as pastors are called by God to do, proclaim the truth of God's Word boldly and unashamedly.

And while much of his prayer, if you heard it, contained Christian themes and Christian terminology, he closed his prayer by saying this, we ask it in the name of the monotheistic God, Brahma, and God known by many names and by many different faiths, a man and a woman. That is the prayer of

someone who has tragically and dangerously drifted from the truth. If they knew the truth to begin with, but Cleaver's prayer from an ordained minister of a Christian church reveals at least two problems that are plaguing the body of Christ and causing it to drift from the truth that God has commanded us to proclaim. The first problem is the problem of wanting to be accepted by the world, which we've been called out of. We're the church, the ecclesia. That word means we're the called out ones, the separated ones. And so this problem often comes in the form of syncretism. Syncretism.

Syncretism is the lumping together of different faiths into one faith. It's the all roads lead to heaven a way of thinking which contradicts the truth contained in Scripture that Christians are called to proclaim, doesn't it? John 14, 6, Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. That's pretty exclusive, isn't it? Jesus says He is the way to the Father in exclusion of all other ways. He is the truth. He says in exclusion of all other religious claims. And He says He is the life in exclusion of all other systems of belief about salvation. When Peter and John were brought before the council of the Sanhedrin in Acts chapter 4, they were charged by the council to stop preaching in the name of Christ. They wanted that message of exclusive salvation through Christ alone to come to an end. It offended them. They didn't like it. If Peter and John, though, cared about the opinions of men, if they were trying to get in with the world and climb up the social ladder, they would have listened to them. But they knew that doing so would have meant that they would have been drifting from the truth. It would have meant that they would have become false. And so they responded in Acts 4, 11 through 12. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. And if you think about it, if syncretism was true, if we believed that, or were tempted to shut our mouths so that we don't rock the societal boat and offend people, if that was true, then what purpose would there be for us to fulfill the Great Commission? There'd be none. If all roads lead to heaven, then why would we have to make disciples? Why should we send missionaries around the world? Why should we open our mouths and tell anybody about Jesus? And that's exactly where syncretism leads, to an abandonment of disciple making because we've lost the truth. And no wonder those Christians or those churches who have abandoned it are no longer making disciples and have become empty shelves devoid of life.

The second problem is biblical illiteracy. Biblical illiteracy is the inability to read and write. Now, we are blessed to live in a nation where most people are literate. So biblical illiteracy doesn't address our inability to read Scripture, but that so many Christians, though they can read, don't read Scripture. Amen is not a gender-specific word. It's a Greek word derived from a Hebrew word, or maybe we should say Shebrew so we don't offend anybody.

Amen means truly. It means so be it. It's not gender-specific. And so I know that Mr. Cleaver was attempting to go overboard and not offending anyone by adding a woman, but biblically speaking, that makes no sense at all. It's not a word.

[10:47] It's not in Scripture. A problem in the church today is that a lot of people either don't know their Bibles, or if they do, they lack the courage to speak up and fix bad theology, to correct error with the truth. To know God's Word is critical for us to pursue our purpose as His church. He has entrusted us with the truth, and He expects of us that we not drift away from it, or weaken it, or ignore it, but boldly proclaim it. And so the main idea for this morning's message is that the church is the household of God whose purpose includes the proclamation of the truth. Proclamation of the truth. The church that knows the Word of God will proclaim the truth of God which causes the body to grow in disciples being made. How else are unbelievers going to hear the truth? The media won't share the gospel with them.

Public schools won't. Businesses and corporations won't. Hollywood won't. In fact, most of those places work against it to try to block it out. It's up to us, the church. We must be the ones who proclaim the truth. And it's something that God hasn't just asked us to do. He's commanded us to do this.

In one place, Romans 10, 13 through 14, Paul says, inspired by the Holy Spirit, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. 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 or proclaiming? How are they going to hear without someone proclaiming the truth, the gospel? What spurns the church on then to this purpose? Well, Paul

presents us here with three aspects about the church's purpose that when understood and applied will result in our fulfilling part of our great God-given purpose. And the first aspect that we need to understand in order to spurn us onward to proclaiming the truth is that the church belongs to Christ. The church belongs to Christ. Look again at verse 14, going through most of 15. Paul says to Timothy, I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God. So what's he saying here? The church belongs to God and no one else. I had a good friend growing up.

He was the middle child. He had a younger brother and an older brother. And whenever they would get something new, whether it was a toy, a video game, a baseball glove, a basketball, whatever it was, they would rush to grab a Sharpie and write their name on it as quick as they could. Well, why'd they do that? Because they were constantly stealing each other's stuff and they wanted to mark it out.

[14:32] This is mine. And so whenever there was a dispute, they could look to whose ever name was on that item. They'd even do this in their, with their rooms, you know, putting up signs. This is Mike's room.

Do not pass or do not enter, right? Marking out, this is my territory. This is my space. No one else does this belong to but me. We're guilty of doing that sometimes in the church too, aren't we? We think about it. We may not be scratching our name in the pew we want to permanently occupy. At least I hope you're not doing that. That's vandalism. Or we're not taking a spray paint and going out to the parking lot and putting, you know, our mark on it or our name on it because that's the spot we prefer. Hopefully we're not doing things like that. But don't we sometimes get confused with the difference between what it means to be an owner and what it means to be a steward?

We're called by God to be stewards of what he's given us, including the lives that we have. A steward is a caretaker. It's like a house sitter. You left somebody to watch your house.

You're putting them in a position to take responsibility. But if you came back, you'd expect that they would understand that you're the one who owns the house. You're the one who pays the bills.

You're the one whose name is on the mortgage contract, right? We're stewards. We're not owners.

[16:13] The church belongs to God because it's his house. Now, if you were listening last Sunday, you might be thinking, well, isn't a house a building? And didn't you say to us that the church is not a building?

It's a people. Well, the Greek word here that Paul uses for house is oikos. And while it can be translated as house and refer to a building, the better translation is that of a household. And that really better fits with what the rest of Scripture says about the church and how it defines it as the body of Christ that's knit together to one another like a family. And Paul emphasizes the same truth. And he emphasized it in Ephesians, using household to describe our familial nature to one another in Ephesians 2.19. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. God is the head of this family. He is the head of this household. Everyone in this family then submits to him, especially those whom he's called to serve as its stewards. Look at Paul's instruction to the Ephesian elders in Acts chapter 20.

20 verse 28. He says to them, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all of the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

So there Paul says something that I think we also need to pay attention to as well about why the church belongs to God belongs to God and not to us. It belongs to him because who purchased it? He did. How did he purchase it? He says with blood, with the blood of his son.

[18:26] Through the blood of his son. Through the blood of his son. Through the death of Christ. Through the resurrection of Christ. He has purchased his church. And so hopefully when we understand that this church belongs to Christ, to God, that it's been purchased through the precious blood of Christ, that when we understand that what it should do is prevent divisions within the body. And it should prevent us from drifting away from the truths, the gospel that we're commanded to proclaim. But it still happens, doesn't it?

We still get divided. We still get lost over who we truly belong to. It happened to the church in Corinth. 1 Corinthians 1.11-13, Paul is writing to a church that is suffering from division.

He says, For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, or I follow

Cephas, or I follow Christ.

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? So they're saying things like, I belong to Paul. I belong to Apollos.

Now we may not divide in that way today, but we do divide in other ways. Jesus' parable of the workers of the church.

[20 : 32] In the vineyard in Matthew 20, verses 1-16, suggests that each person, no matter the work they've put in, is equally paid.

They're equally redeemed. The first, he says, will be last, and the last will be first. That speaks of equality. At the foot of the cross, every one of us stands on equal ground.

Equally unworthy. Equally graced by God to receive the good news of Jesus Christ, which as his household, we equally are called to proclaim.

The church belongs to Christ. It's his. We're stewards. And knowing that, I believe, will spurn us onward to achieving our purpose to proclaim the truth to one another and the world that, as we know, is in desperate need of our proclaiming it.

The second aspect that we need to understand from this text is that the church's mission is assigned by Christ. The church's mission is assigned by Christ.

[21 : 44] The rest of verse 15, he refers to the church as the pillar and buttress of the truth. So it's helpful to know some context here. Ephesus was the home of an impressive temple to the goddess Diana or Artemis.

It was known as one of the seven wonders of the world. William Barclay described its impressive pillars. He said one of its most impressive features was its pillars.

It contained 127 pillars. Every one of them was the gift of a king. All were made of marble and some were studded with jewels and overlaid with gold.

So each pillar in that temple acted as a tribute to the king who donated it. Obviously, the honorary significance each pillar had was secondary, though, to the function that a pillar serves, which is what?

To hold up. To hold up. To hold up that massive roof of the temple. Buttress refers to the foundation on which a structure rests or on which the pillars were placed.

[22 : 56] So the picture, the metaphor that Paul is forming in the mind of Timothy is that as the foundation of pillars in the temple of Artemis and how they there served as a testimony to the heir of false pagan religion.

And so he says, likewise, but in a different way, the church serves a similar function as pillars and buttresses of the truth.

That we hold up. We declare. We support the truth of God. It's part of our purpose.

We uphold the truth. While everyone in our society departs from it, being given over to a depraved mind, we uphold the truth. We display the truth like a light on a lampstand, expelling darkness, displaying that light, the life, the truth of Jesus Christ.

Christ. The truth of Christ is the gospel. It's content. The doctrines of our faith.

[24 : 17] These are our truths. It's our God-given purpose and responsibility to uphold them, to uphold His Word, no matter who might be offended by it or what it might cost us personally for doing so.

It's not a truth we've invented. It's not a truth that we alter or a truth that we sugarcoat. It's a truth that we submit to.

A truth we support. A truth that we safeguard. A truth that has saved us and has been entrusted to us as stewards to proclaim.

And so, it's a truth that we should treasure. It's the pearl of great price. It's the treasure hidden in the field that the man discovers and he sells all that he has to obtain it.

Collectively, as the body of Christ, as the church, we have the responsibility to proclaim the Word. But our ability to proclaim it as well as we should is dependent upon each of us.

[25 : 29] Each individual believer being committed to the mission of proclaiming and supporting the truth. Of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

So, how does each one of us become committed to this? Well, there's several things. First, you must trust the Word. You're not going to proclaim the Word if you don't trust it.

And this was our Lord's prayer for us in John 17 verses 14 through 19. And he's praying to the Father. He says, I have given them your Word, and the world has hated them because they are not

of the world, just as I am not of the world.

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth.

Your Word is true. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself, that they may also be sanctified in the truth.

[26 : 39] To trust the Word, you must submit yourself to the hearing of the Word. How many times did Jesus offer that exhortation?

He who has ears, let him hear. We need to hear the Word. Christians cannot uphold what they do not hear, and they will not uphold what they do not believe.

Second, to proclaim and support the Word, the truth, you must remember it, or recall it, through the work of memorization and meditation. Look at some of these scriptures.

Psalms 119, 11, I have stored up your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Joshua 1, 8, this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, God instructs, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 1 Peter 3, 15, but in your hearts, honor Christ and the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet to do it with gentleness and respect.

[28 : 00] And you'll do that if you know the Word of God through the work of memorization and meditation. Trust the Word. Remember the Word, then we are called individually to obey the Word.

Luke 11, 28, Jesus said, blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it. It doesn't do much good to know the Word and remember the Word if you don't obey the Word.

The Pharisees knew the Word. They could quote the Scriptures, but they didn't truly obey it because they didn't truly live by it.

Then fourthly, as individual believers, it's important as we proclaim the truth that we defend the Word. Defend the Word. If you trust it, remember it, and obey it, then you will be zealous to defend it.

2 Timothy 4, 2. Preach the Word. Proclaim the Word. Be ready in season and out of season.

[29 : 11] Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. You know how you know you have a true friend in Christ?

It's when they are willing to do that to you. When they are willing to come to you with the Word of God. When you belong to a church family who defends and guards the truth of God.

When we don't take offense when the truth of God is shared with us because we know that it's the Word of God and that sin is destructive and God's Word protects us from it.

Then finally, we proclaim the Word as individuals. We proclaim the Word and collectively we do that also together. Go therefore, Matthew 28, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

You see, we are a church, not a country club trying to recruit prestigious members to increase our influence. We are a church, not a business advertising a product for sale.

[30 : 36] We are not entertainers seeking to draw a crowd. We are a church and our mission is to proclaim the truth that God has saved us with and entrusted us with to make disciples.

But again, if we're not careful, we can lose our way or be tempted to lose our way. I remember my first ministry position, I was a youth pastor and one of our staff members had gotten in the mail this really nice looking card, this postcard, an invitation from a church nearby, inviting children to come to their Easter egg hunt where there was going to be a raffle to give away a Wii.

And if you remember, now this is old because Wiis are things that you can buy at garage sales now, but that was a hard to find thing back in the day. That was the hot toy for kids.

And I remember being at our staff meeting and we were all kind of passing it around and making light of it, just thinking how could they do that? They're just trying to draw a crowd and thinking about scripture and thinking about how wrong it was for them to do such a thing.

Well, guess what? It was a pretty successful event. It was pretty successful. They had a lot of kids out there. And we took notice, many of us took notice.

[32 : 13] And the tone of the next meeting was a little bit different, along more the lines of what could we do like that to get the same crowd here.

We've got to be careful. We've got to be careful. We've got to be in the word. The gospel isn't for sale. Our purpose isn't to draw a crowd, but to proclaim the truth in hopes that disciples will be made by the Holy Spirit, that they'll be saved, that they will proclaim the truth that we proclaim as well.

The church belongs to Christ. Its mission is assigned by Christ. And lastly, the church proclaims the gospel of Christ. The church proclaims the gospel of Christ.

Verse 16, And by common confession, great is the mystery of godliness. He who was revealed in the flesh was vindicated by the Spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

You know, the Bible is a big book, and we could never plumb the depths of all the spiritual truths that are contained within it. But of all the truths for us to proclaim, the greatest is this truth that Paul shares with Timothy in verse 16.

[33 : 51] which is the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. This is the cornerstone. This is the centerpiece. This is the core of what we teach and what we preach.

After Jesus' resurrection, He appeared to His disciples, and He told them in Luke chapter 24, thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day raise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in all the nations beginning from Jerusalem.

And that's exactly what His disciples did. And that continues to be our task today, to continue to proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ has come as God in the flesh.

That Jesus Christ was sinless, living the sinless and perfect life that we are incapable of living. That He willingly and purposefully was crucified on the cross where He became sin for us.

That He was resurrected on the third day. that those who believe in Him and trust in Him receive His righteousness having been forgiven forever and completely of their sins.

[35 : 17] That the only hope for sinful mankind is that they put their faith in Jesus Christ and Christ alone. We can't forget this.

This is the message that we preach. This is the message that we as Christ's church have been given to proclaim. And the more we understand that the church belongs to Christ, I believe, that our mission is assigned by Christ, the more we will proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Biblical illiteracy leads to syncretism, which leads to falsehood and causes a church to lose its purpose. and the church that loses its purpose will die.

Its lampstand will be removed by Christ. Now, in my personal Bible study time, I've been in 2 Kings. I read this past week, 2 Kings 22. Josiah becomes king. And he's a good king. king. Unlike many, many other kings who preceded him.

[36 : 36] And he realizes, he sees that the temple is in need of repairs. And so he organizes the priests and some secretaries to get to work on fixing the temple that is falling apart.

And it's interesting if you read that chapter because as they go into the temple to do that, guess what they find? Scripture. The people of God had lost his word.

They weren't looking for his word. They stumbled upon it. Oh, look, it's the scriptures. These words from God to us.

We've lost them. And we weren't even looking for them. And they come and they bring them to Josiah. And they read it in his hearing. And guess what he does?

He tears his clothes. He's convicted. He's heartbroken. Why? Because he realizes that his people and he himself as the king of the people, they have forgotten the word of God.

[37 : 48] They have behaved sinfully for generations. And he reads in God's word that that displeases God. That that brings upon his wrath. And he realizes that they are in danger.

They have lost the word of God. They've forgotten the word of God. And so what does he do? He sweeps through the nation. Reforming it.

Seeing idols and tearing them down. Destroying their temples. He even finds some places where prophets of false gods have been buried and guess what he does?

He digs up their dead bones and he burns them to ash. Wants nothing to do with it. We've lost our way, he said.

We've lost the word of God. We are in danger of his wrath. These are terrible things. and we're in terrible danger.

[38 : 52] And God in his grace spares Josiah from having to see the wrath that will come. But it does come. You know, as I was reading that, I was thinking, we haven't lost the scriptures today.

I mean, look, they're filled, they're all in our pews. You have one Bible at least, probably. Maybe, like me, you have a lot of Bibles. Collect them. There are copies of it everywhere. We have them. They're not lost, but do we read them?

Do we read them? them? How many of our Bibles sit on our shelves collecting dust? When's the last time any of us have turned to the Word of God outside of a Sunday?

How much do we desire to fill our minds with the truth contained within God's Word? How much do we actually seek it for instruction, for our lives?

[40 : 09] us? You know, and as I was thinking about that, the thought that came to me was, Bibles that are closed might as well be lost, because they're not being used anyways.

we have a truth to proclaim, and we have a nation in desperate need of our proclaiming it. And the more we are in God's Word, being reminded, being encouraged, being inspired, and convicted by its truth, we will proclaim it.

we have that purpose, and God has only entrusted that purpose to you and I, His church.

And it's a great purpose. You're here this morning because someone was used by God to proclaim His truth to you.

And so I ask you, who will you do the same for? Who will you proclaim the truth to?

[41 : 27] Four questions of application before we close in prayer. And we'll discuss these tonight when we meet at 630 here.

You're invited to come to that, but if you can't make it for whatever reason, I just encourage you to come through and look through these questions either today or later this week as you read your Bible. Because you're going to do that now, right?

If you hadn't before. Or more. More so than you were. Question number one. What are the consequences when a church forgets that it belongs to Christ?

What are the consequences when a church forgets that it belongs to Christ? And this isn't going to be a real hard question to answer, I don't think, because we can look around in our nation right now and see a lot of what the consequences have been for churches that have forgotten that they belong to Christ.

Question number two. How does the church serve as a pillar and buttress of truth? How does the church serve as a pillar and buttress of truth?

[42 : 32] If the truth we have been assigned to proclaim is forgotten, what will the church become? That's a follow-up question to that one. Question three.

What other messages are Christians tempted to proclaim other than the gospel today? What other messages are Christians tempted to proclaim other than the gospel today?

And then finally, again, who specifically is God calling you to proclaim the gospel to?

Who is God specifically calling you to proclaim the gospel to? Let's pray. Lord, we are thankful for your word.

We're thankful that you've given it to us, that we have it, that we have the freedom to read it. You've given us minds with the ability to memorize it and meditate upon it.

[43 : 38] You've given us your spirit who helps us to remember it in times where we are either frustrated or doubting or in a situation where we need to defend and proclaim the gospel.

Lord, you've given us all that we need and more to be disciple makers. Forgive us, God, that so often we avoid this task.

We act as if it's just not all that important or we are just too concerned about our own comfort to open our mouths and declare the truth that you have entrusted us with as stewards to share.

God, I pray that you would convict our hearts. I pray, Lord, that you would change our minds, that we would be people of the word, that we would be serious about your commanding us to fulfill the assignment that you've given us to go and make disciples.

And God, we pray that as we do so, you'd be pleased with what you see and that you would be glorified by what results. We know we live in a nation that's in desperate need of the church to proclaim the truth you've given it.

[45 : 07] God, we pray that we would. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.