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by: DJ ~ Mike McKenzie

Recently, I was in a restaurant with some friends, and the TV was on the 700 Club with Pat Robertson. Pat was answering questions that viewers had Emailed in to his show. One of the Emails was from a woman concerning recent changes in their church. It read something like this: "A few months ago the church I attend completely changed the way the services are conducted. Now the whole service is only praise and worship, and the pastor no longer preaches any sermons. Should I be concerned?" Pat's reply was, "You better believe you should be concerned? Any church that eliminates the preaching of the Word of God has ceased to be a New Testament church."

We are now well into the 21st century, and a "Wall Street" mentality has taken over the thinking in many areas of American life, and bigger is perceived as better, and nowhere is this "Wall Street" mentality more evident than in the modern church. Many ministries feel pressured to sacrifice the preaching of the Word of God on the altar of man-centered promotionalism.

A new way of "doing" church has emerged. In a very radical shift, the exposition of Scripture is being replaced by entertainment, preaching with some kind of performance, doctrine with drama, and theology with theatrics. The powerful preaching of God's Word is being replaced with everything from trendy worship styles to glitzy pageantry. A new wave of pastors is re-inventing church and repackaging the Gospel into a product to be sold to "consumers." And then, whatever seems to work is franchised out to other churches.

Someone has described this rush to re-invent the church, to the Gold Rush in California in the 1840's. Preachers are beating a path to the doors of exploding churches and hyped-up conferences where the latest "gold strike" has been reported. And it turns out that most of these new "strikes" are nothing but "fool's gold."

Where does the 21st century church go to find the model church in which the preaching and the teaching of God's Word is the priority thing? What does a church look like that is being driven by the Word of God?

We need look no further than the First Church of Jerusalem. New generations of church leaders would do well to take a new look at this congregation and rediscover the reason for its success.

Acts 2:42-47 is a condensed account of the Pentecostal power of this first Christian congregation: "*And he continued stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added*

to the church daily such as should be saved.”

These verses give us the major activities of this dynamic church – the apostle’s teaching, fellowship, worship, prayer, service, and evangelism. These are the six Holy Spirit blessed channels through which He decisively and dramatically changed the whole world. Each one of these disciplines is critical for the health of any vibrant church. The apostle’s teaching was purposefully listed first in this passage to show the primacy and supernatural power that the teaching of the apostles had in this first church.

There is a trumpet call from God to the modern church to make biblical preaching the central thing, just as the apostles did 2000 years ago.

What did the apostles teach? They taught doctrine. Their teaching and preaching ministry brought life to all other areas in the early church. It is no accident that God places teaching first, for it must always come first. Because many churches and pastors have relegated preaching to a secondary role, there is much pragmatism in the church, and a whole lot of un-biblical fluff.

Preaching was the primary activity of the apostles for four reasons: It was modeled after Jesus’ teaching, commanded in the Great Commission, practiced in the early church, and emphasized in the Pastoral Epistles.

The apostles and early church in Acts 2 were simply imitating what they had seen Jesus do. Additionally, the apostles taught the new believers the commands of Jesus in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 that had been given to them just a few days before.

No matter where the apostles went, they were preaching. Whether they were in public places (Acts 4:2, 33), or before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8-12, 5:28-32), or from house to house (Acts 5:42), they were boldly preaching in the name of the Risen Christ.

Biblical preaching must always occupy the leading place of influence in the life of a New Testament church. However, many pastors are turning away from, and even replacing preaching with concerts, drama, pageants, festivals, musicals and movies. These things are ok to a point, but they must never be allowed to overshadow the Spirit empowered proclamation of God’s Word.

“...because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.” (Acts 17:18) “And how shall they preach, except they be sent...” (Rom. 10:15) “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor. 1:18) “but we preach Christ crucified...” (1 Cor. 1:23) “Peach the Word...” (II Timothy 4:2)

Unfortunately, it appears that many churches are more concerned with keeping their crowd, than they are risking losing some people by preaching the biblical message of repentance. Pastors are more concerned with getting on television and closing a book deal on “How To Live Your Best Life Now!” rather than teaching about the real “catching up.” More and more people want their churches like they want their movies – new and exciting!

We pastors must stand accountable for much of the problems in the church today. If we are not preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit, the historical truths of Jesus life and work, prophetic truth, theological truth and ethical responsibilities, we are failing our people.

There is no one who enjoys Spirit-led worship music more that I do. Music has been a big part of my life, and I cherish Christ-honoring songs. However, I believe we have made something out of praise and worship that God never intended. I have talked with quite a number of people through the years that praise music had become their “fix.” They didn’t read their Bibles, they didn’t pray, and they couldn’t intelligently talk to you about any important doctrine, but they felt if they got high on praise and worship, God was smiling on them.

That’s how it was in the 1990’s in the Soul Survivor Church in Watford, England. The church was in a very dry time, and the praise and worship had become routine. Pastor Mike Pilavachi knew something was wrong with the church, but could get no sense of what it was. But one night God revealed to him the problem. As he put it, the Spirit of God revealed to him that the church was “worshipping worship.” Matt Redman was the worship team leader, and a great musician. The Pastor essentially “fired” the Praise Team, and began to preach on the great themes of the Bible, and the power of God came. The church began to sing some songs acapella, and a spirit of prayer ascended on the believers. Redman came to the pastor with a song he had written entitled. “Heart of Worship.” The pastor allowed Matt to sing the song in the church. The lyrics to the chorus are:

*I’m coming back to the heart of worship
And it’s all about you
It’s all about you, Jesus
I’m sorry Lord for the things
I’ve made it
When it’s all about you
It’s all about you, Jesus*

God’s people do not need motivational pep-talks that are aimed at soothing their felt needs, or, worse, putting salve on the guilty consciences of unregenerate church members. If people are to be brought to saving faith in Christ Jesus, and are to mature spiritually, they must be taught a comprehensive biblical message that has its roots in the Old Testament, and is focused on Christ, and full of doctrinal teaching and preaching.

