

Expository preaching. Can anyone tell me what that is or what that means? [pause for answers] Back in the old days we may have turned to Webster, but these days, it's Wikipedia, right? Well, here you go:

Expository preaching is a form of preaching that details the meaning of a particular text or passage of Scripture. It explains what the Bible means by what it says. Exegesis is technical and grammatical exposition, *a careful drawing out of the exact meaning of a passage in its original context.*

That's the sort of preaching that I want us to value, church family: the kind that is careful to draw out what God intends from God's Word. Now why is that important? Why is it important for us to know & understand the meaning of God's Word? Or asked another way, why do your elders insist upon expository preaching within the family of South Church? [pause for answers] Because words absolutely define who we are. "Sticks & stones may break my bones, but" it's *words* that do the real damage. Amen? But just as words can damage, words can also heal, can't they? Words can give life! Words direct our lives. Words give meaning & purpose, they give birth to desires & ambitions! Yes, it is words that determine & define who we are, who our God is, what life is all about. And that is why words are SO important.

In our doctrinal statement, *the Doctrine of Scripture* is second only to *the Doctrine of God*. The Doctrine of the Scripture comes even before the Doctrine of Jesus Christ because it is the Word of God that tells us who "the Word of God made flesh" is. We gain all our understanding about everything from words. Our very lives are defined by words. Children are defined by the word of their Father. No wonder God has such a special place in His heart for orphans, huh? Because He means for them, for us, for all of His children to be defined—not by their own words about life or one another, but—by His Word. Fathers and mothers, there are no more important words you can share with your children than the Word of their heavenly Father, which, ironically, is all about His only begotten Son, the Word made flesh. And to His Word—the Son's Word—we turn all of our attention, once again this morning. Join me in vv32-33.

32-33 Every year about this time I start to get a little concerned about the cypress tree we planted just outside the garage. In nature, ball cypress trees are almost exclusively found near bodies of water. They're found along river banks in Texas. They grow huge, at least by hill country standards. Big, long branches full of beautiful wispy thin leaves. They make a wonderful sound as the river wind passes through them. But we didn't plant ours by a river; we planted it

by the garage. :-/ Probably not the smartest move I've ever made. And that's why, every year about this time, I get a little worried about it, about its bare naked branches, without a leaf in sight. My neighbors cypress trees are putting on leaves beautifully! But not mine. He planted his around his big pond. Me? I planted mine by the garage. So, about this time, every year I walk out to it and test out the small twigs at the end of its branches. The smallest ones often feel really brittle, which doesn't help ease my stress at all. But, just about the time I start thinking, "well, I guess I've killed it," low & behold, the branches turn tender and leaves come shooting out from what felt like dead twigs just a few days before.

The point of Jesus' short parable is this: when fig branches get tender, summer's a comin'! "Summer is *near*," He says. Tender branches arouse expectations that the next season of life is knocking at the door! After last week's temps in the 20s, I cannot tell you how grateful this south Texas boy was to see temps in the upper 70s yesterday. Praise the Lord! Indeed, summer is coming!

Jesus is connecting two things with this parable. He's pointing out the relationship between what? Between "all these things" and "He is near". "So also, when you see *all these things*, you know that *He is near*." "*When you see that, know this...*" Some of your versions may have "*it is near*" rather than "*He is near*," but don't worry, both are equally valid from the Greek and have virtually the same meaning "It", it refers to Christ's *Kingdom* coming, while "He" refers to Christ the King who is coming. So either way "it" or "He" is referring to one & the same: the Second Coming of Christ the King, and, with Him, His Kingdom!

The phrase "all these things" has been problematic down through the years as scholars have argued its meaning and what *all* it refers to. If by "all these things" Jesus means to include all that He just said in the paragraph above, in vv29-31—the angels being dispatched, His banner unfurling in the Heavens, the trumpet blasting to announce His immediate return—then these verses, vv32-33, don't make any sense because there is no distinction between "all these things" and His second coming.

I think the most natural way to understand what he means by "all these things" in v33 is to see it as a reference to the Kingdom birth pains that He described in vv4-28: a time of difficulty & persecution, which includes the acute time of "great tribulation" that occurred in 70ad when the temple & Jerusalem were destroyed. When you see all of those things taking place, know that His return—which He had just described in vv29-31—is near.

If we're right about that, then the next verse makes a lot more natural sense as well.

34 “Truly”, Jesus says, or you might have “I tell you the truth.” Either way, it is simply to emphasize what He is about to say. Again, remember, these are young Jewish disciples He was talking to, all of them with a very different idea about the Messiah’s reign & Kingdom: ideas of world dominance, of wiping out nations, or rebuilding the nation of Israel, etc. But that was NOT going to be their experience at all. That was not the way God would have His Church grow up for a while: the wheat would grow among the tares. Rather than dominance & an iron fist over the nations, the Gospel of Christ’s Kingdom would be met by great resistance, by threats, persecution, trials, tribulations, etc. Jesus must prepare those men for such an experience lest they think in their suffering after His ascension: “You know, maybe we missed it. Maybe Jesus wasn’t really the Christ we thought He was. Because this stuff sure seems hard. Rather than taking lives, this Kingdom is surrendering life, our lives as martyrs into the hands of those who hate the Lord & His Word. Maybe this isn’t it after all.” But that would be the churches true experience in the world, just as it is today, and will be until He comes again. And so He starts off by saying to those men by way of emphasis: “*Truly* I say to you...”

“this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” Uh oh! Now what does that mean. Has Jesus already returned and we missed it? No! He’s already told us that there will be NO mistaking His second coming: the whole earth will see it. Well then was Jesus wrong about the timing? Did He mistakenly think and so tell His men that He would return in their generation, even though He did not? No! That’s not an option either, nor was that what He was saying.

One option that scholars have put forward down through the years is that the phrase “this generation” refers to *a race of people*: in particular, the Jews. So, they say, what Jesus was saying was that *Jewish people* will not pass away until all these things take place. While the Greek word for “generation” can mean “race”, nowhere in Scripture is it defined that way when it is modified by the word *this*: *this generation*, as it is here in v34.

So then the simplest most natural reading is the right one. When Jesus said “this generation”, He really meant *that particular generation of people that He was talking to right then*. That generation would not pass away until “all these things” had taken place. Which makes perfect sense if our interpretation of vv32-33 is correct: that “all these things” does NOT include His second coming (referred to in vv29-31), but only the birth pains of His Kingdom described in vv4-28. Did that generation experience earthquakes, pain, suffering, sorrow, famine, the abomination of desolation standing in the temple, the destruction of Jerusalem? Yes, they did. They experienced all of *those things*. Jesus isn’t saying that such pain & sorrow must end

within that generation but only that “all these things” must happen during their lifetime, suffering of the sort that was inconceivable by those anticipating a very different kind of Kingdom.

35 Wowzers, what a claim! Don’t miss it. Unlike any other words ever spoken by man, Jesus declares that His Word will abide forever. Think about the authority that He is claiming there: the very same authority & truthfulness as God’s very own divine authority & truthfulness.

Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast. –Ps119.89-90

A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. –Is40.6-8

This is a clear claim to Jesus’ divinity as the Son of God, as God the Son. And to such we ought to give our whole lives to.

So what can we take away from these last couple of Sunday’s worth of Jesus’ words?

First of all, recall from last week’s passage v29:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

What sort of marvelous, peculiar glory is it that causes all lesser lights to darken in His radiant presence. His second coming will be so different from His first! In His first advent, He came with lowliness & meekness, typified by His birth in a manger, despised & rejected of men. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, condemned, mocked, spit upon, crowned with thorns, crucified. But at His Second Advent, He comes on the clouds of heaven with power, majesty & great glory! No one will miss this King’s royal, triumphant return: every jaw will drop, every knee bow, every tongue will confess; no jesting, no spitting on or mocking Him that Day, no unfaithfulness; only obedience, no other option; only adoration & worship.

Secondly, church, know that His angels will be dispatched to gather & protect you, His people. Throughout the Scriptures, clouds have been used to depict God’s presence, as in the Exodus. Those clouds guard & protect those on His side, but, for His enemies, only fear & woe of their imminent destruction. Our Rock of Ages, in whose cleft we are perfectly safe, comes crushing down with great wrath upon the rebellion of man. It will be an awful day for unbelievers, but one

His children need not fear in anyway, perfectly safe in Christ. In Him, we will *all* be gathered together: every saint from ancient of days to those reborn in the 11th hour of that last Day. What an awesome & happy gathering that will be! Myriads upon myriads of believers gathered from ALL nations, of all races, kind, tongue, tribe & color... in full worship of our beloved, faithful Husband, returning for His bride. What a magnificent procession of angelic hosts, His banner unfurled, trumpet blasting: a sight unmistakably beheld by all the earth! Compared to such glory, brother, how small is sin's temptation really? Surely we—together, church family—can be content to carry our crosses for just a little while longer in light of the enteral joy & glory our King will bring with Him when He comes?!

Lastly, do you believe these things? Do you trust the Word of the Lord? It makes all the difference in the world whether you do or not, doesn't it? If He is soon to return, if the unfaithful will be sentenced & condemned for their rebellion to eternal damnation, if the faithful will be taken up with Him in glory... that changes everything, doesn't it? It ought to! It changes the reason for which we were born & for which we die. Everything is by Christ, to Christ & for Christ. Our lives, our righteousness, our temptations to sin... all of it is redeemed, everything has purpose & meaning. Every day, every moment is an opportunity to live in accordance with His soon second coming, in such a way that causes our onlooking world to wonder at our preferences, our decisions, our patience, our righteousness, our kindness, our mercy, our grace, our goodness in the face of evil, our forgiveness of sin against us, our turning the other cheek, our pleadings with our Father to forgive those who seek our destruction... for they know not what they do. O what Christ likeness!

ALL of this depends on one thing: Whose word do we believe? Satan & his lies? Our own words? Sin's temptation? Man's fallen understanding about where love & happiness can be found? Whose word do we believe? Whose word defines & determines us? Is it our performance on the field, in the classroom, or in the workplace, the opinion of others: coworkers, classmates, or snapchat? Is it their words that define & determine us? Perhaps the kings of this earth, daytime television, politics, Fox News or CNN? Whose word defines you? "Oh be careful little ears what you hear!" Why? Because words define us, they tell us what reality is, they tell us what's important, they tell us who we are, why we exist, what we're to do, where to find joy & happiness. And therefore it matters so much whose words you believe. Heaven & earth will pass away, all the opinions of man that we spend so much time worrying about, that we're consumed with in the morning when we first turn on the radio for noise, to the movies we watch to put us to sleep: words define us.

The question is: Whose words? When the Son of Man arrives on clouds of glory & power, all of man's words will cease, all mouths will shut. Opinions will not matter on that Day. Only the Word of Christ will remain. Heaven & earth will all pass away, but His words will never pass away! O Christian, make absolutely sure that you heed His Words, that you give attention to His Word, that the truth of God's Word—found on the pages of Holy Scripture, make certain His Word—defines you & your understanding of everything. Take every thought captive to His Word. Bring everything to bear upon the Light of His Word. Ask yourself: Does this thought, this idea, this plan... does it align with the truth? What does God's Word have to say about my temptations, my desires, my loves, my likes, my thoughts, my time, my work, my children, my play, my family, my home, my stuff, my income, my spending, my friends, my service, my everything. "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

He is coming again. Few will believe, He has warned us again & again. Beloved, don't be surprised by the fiery trials you come under for believing Him & His Word. This world hated & crucified our Leader. Don't expect anything less for those who love, trust & follow Him. Peter told us that, especially in the last days, scoffers will arise. The closer we get to Christ's return, the faithful become fewer & fewer, all the more precious & hard to find. Will you be among them? Whatever men may say, think, or do to mock His name & fame, His Word shall stand. He is coming again. He will return. We live in an unbelieving age. But then again, how *few* believed in His first coming, right? Just the same, *few* believe in His second coming. Such doubt & disbelief is an infectious disease among the hearts & minds of men. So guard yours, therefore! Your eternal soul depends on it. The Word of the Lord is not legend or fable but deep, abiding, sustaining, powerful truth, essential to your identity & existence, now & forever. O God, grant us the grace to trust & obey the Word of the Lord.

PRAYER

SONG: *When We See Your Face*

COMMUNION

SONG: *Isn't He Good*

BENEDICTION: *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. –Ju24-25*