

**Sharing an Unchanging Christ in a Changing Culture**

**Be Ready to Share** Summer Sermon Series 2016

2 Timothy 4:1-5

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

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**TEXT:** 2 Timothy 4:1-5



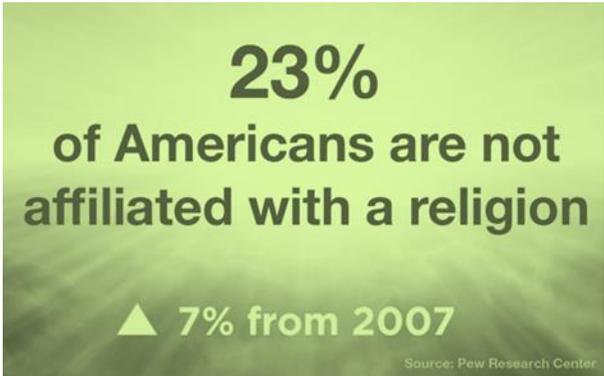
We begin a new summer series this morning at Kenwood, and our hope is to seek to empower us together as a community in our witness for Christ. The world around us is changing in all kinds of ways. Some changes are really obvious, like technology—my new phone is already outdated,—educational theory, and the deterioration of language and political discourse. Other changes are not as easy to see, like a shift in religious identity in our society. A significant study done by the Pew Research Center noticed a rising trend in the United States of the so-called “Nones.” This is a radical shift in our contemporary setting, and this reality defines a significant



part of our missionary context as a community, as believers in Christ. When we think of changes in our society, one of the great shifts that we see is that Christianity as broadly defined in the United States is declining. Between 2007 and 2014, the percentage of people who identify themselves as Christians went down eight

percentage points. This is an alarming number, and I would interpret this decline as people who

are not identifying themselves as Christians because the cultural benefits of claiming Christian faith are eroding. You might look at this and think that people who are confessing Christ are moving away from Christ. In reality, what this number represents is a decline in what we should call cultural Christianity, of people who say: "I'm a Christian because saying I am a Christian opens doors in society for me." When you look at churches that are preaching the gospel, have a strong evangelical commitment, churches that are deeply invested in ministry and missions, those churches are actually growing rapidly, so this number needs to be interpreted. It is a strong warning. Kenwood's future is dim if we don't embrace mission and evangelism as central. Research shows that 23% of Americans are not affiliated with any religion at all, and this is up 7%. Whether or not you are a numbers person, let me make this very real. This means that one out of every four people around you, living, working,



shopping, traveling, one out of every four has no connection to Jesus Christ at all. That is an amazing number, and that is our missionary setting. That is where we live. That is where Kenwood Baptist Church is. This is the so-called rise of the *Nones*, the people who when asked to identify their religious identity, one out of four respondents checked box that said *none*. This group should stir your heart. You will be tempted, and I am



tempted, to look down on people without faith in Christ, but if we are



living and called as a missionary community, then this is the group for which we are responsible. This is the group that surrounds us, and this is a group where truth is vague and ill-defined. This is a group with lots of questions. This is a group with misperceptions of Christianity. This is a group that cannot be reached with a mailer. This is a group that cannot be reached with just a TV show. This is a group that needs to be reached one-on-one, family-to-family, with intense relational effort, and if we are unwilling to make that, this is a group that will just continue to grow, and the distance between Kenwood and the surrounding culture will continue to widen. This spring, we heard Paul's letter to the Romans. This spring series pushed us to embrace God's mission. I miss Romans already, and yet the way forward from Romans this year has been to see what happens.

One of the things that happens from Romans is that Paul invests in the next generation of leadership. For him, one of those next-generation leaders was Timothy. Paul walked literally thousands of miles. He journeyed over many, many different cultural barriers. I love this painting of Paul and Timothy. It is an artist's depiction of Paul journeying. That is Timothy next to him. Timothy was much younger than Paul. Timothy and Paul met in the context of Paul's second missionary journey. He



was the son of a pagan father and a Jewish mother, and he came to Christ through his grandmother's sharing the Word of God with him. He joined the missionary team and became Paul's co-laborer. Timothy was mentored by Paul over many, many years. Of Paul's 13 letters in the New Testament, six of them are actually sent from Paul and Timothy. This young man was mentored and disciplined. He was given real responsibility, and his greatest responsibility toward the end of his life was that he was entrusted with the Church of Ephesus. Ephesus was the fourth largest city in the world at the time, so this is a huge responsibility. As Paul's life and ministry are winding down, he writes two final letters to Timothy, very intimate personal letters, and they are filled with the father's heart, pastoral wisdom. Wouldn't you love to talk with someone who had served Christ for 35 years and have them sit down with you and say: "Here's everything I've learned in the last 35 years"? You would be competing for second place with me on the sign-up sheet for that time. I'd love to hear it, wouldn't you? That is what 1 and 2 Timothy are filled with: mature, godly wisdom and instructions about how to conduct ministry. Paul stresses to Timothy that the criterion of leadership in the church is godliness. He teaches him that he must emphasize the preached Word. He teaches him that you have got to be patient and endure, and that you have to go in it for the long haul. He knows well that there will be challenges, there will be disruptions, there will be persecutions from without and division within. There will be battles to be fought, and he stresses throughout: Keep your eyes on Jesus Christ; preach the Word; be patient.

We come in this text this morning, 2 Timothy 4, to one of Paul's last words. It is this passage that begins our series. We will look this summer at different passages throughout the Bible that address various questions that are asked within our culture, but we begin this morning with the charge, with the imperative, with the command, that we must be about this. We must be ready to share.

Let's look at 2 Timothy 4:1-5 a little bit more closely. It starts in 2 Timothy 4:1 with an old formula. Paul says:

*"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."*

He says literally: *"I bear witness to you."* When you introduce a statement with an oath, like "So help me God," or "I swear to God that this is true," it increases the gravity, and it is a way of signaling the trustworthiness of what follows. The words that will follow this oath are introduced with such gravity that what he is about to tell Timothy was so important that he was taking an oath in the presence of God, who will one day judge all people. That is weighty, isn't it? All people living and those who have died will appear before God. Every person who has ever lived will stand before Jesus Christ. In Matthew 25, we see Christ enthroned. In the Book of Revelation, we see all humanity rising and standing before Him. Paul says that is going to happen, and in light of that, and in light of the appearing of Christ and His death on the cross, in light of the appearance of His kingdom, and the beginning of it, he has been given a charge, and it is five imperatives. The imperative is the strongest use of language. When you tell someone: "I would like for you to stop," that is a request. It's polite. But, if you saw a car coming towards a child, and you saw the child biking out into the road, and you knew that their life was going to be in danger, the imperative is available to you. That is not the time to express a wish: "Son or daughter, I would like for you to stop pedaling." You don't do that. You say: "STOP!" It's a warning; it's a command. Commands can either be positive ones—Do this, or they can be negative ones—Don't do this, or Stop doing this. These five commands are important for us to hear in 2 Timothy 4:2:

*"Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."*

The five commands are these, and all of them matter.

**#1 – Preach the Word.** I know some you are feeling really relaxed and you are thinking now about summer holidays, and you think: "Oh, that's David's responsibility. It has nothing to do with me. Maybe Scott will do it occasionally, but this has nothing to do with me." But preaching the Word is a broad term that means *heralding Christ*, and guess what? That is a responsibility all of us share. Kyle heralded Christ in the parking lot to Kurt. Lydia heralded Christ to Kurt in the context of the Alpha Course. I was used in part to herald Christ to Kyle at Max & Erma's Restaurant when I gave him a 500 page book on theology—which I don't recommend for the first step in evangelism, although for him and it was good. It worked. Preach the Word; herald Christ.

#2 – **Be ready.** This command is for all of us. It seems unfortunate to me that in the almost 30 years I've been a Christian, most times when I've heard people use that phrase, it has been in the context of saying: "Be ready to leave this world." Or, many Christians use this phrase to say: "Be ready for the assault of the world. We are setting up barricades, protecting the fortresses. Get ready!" But the dominant *get ready* here is: "Get yourself ready so you can go out into the world. Be ready!" The ESV translates what Paul says as: "Be ready *in season and out of season.*" The Greek text has just two adverbs: *eukairos* and *akairos*, meaning *be ready when it's really a good time to share*, and *be ready when it's not a good time, when it's an inopportune time*. Be ready when the cultural winds are going with you and you can unfurl the sails of opportunity and you have got people streaming in saying: "Tell me more about Jesus," like Cornelius and his family in Acts 10: "God has given me a vision: Come, speak to us. Present the gospel. We are all present. We are all ready." When that happens, unfurl your sails. When someone insults you and attacks you, or you are really tired at the end of the trip and you think the last thing in the world you want is some one on this airplane to engage you about Christianity; when everything looks like it's not a good time, Paul says: "Keep your sails open then, too, because you never know."

Steve Sjogren was a long-term pastor of the Vineyard in Cincinnati. Very few people know that they met in the basement of Kenwood Baptist Church for a season until they outgrew the Fellowship Hall and needed their own building. Steve told me once of a story of coming back from a long trip and ending up sitting on the plane next to one of the great villains of Cincinnati, a man who is self-identified as hostile to Christianity, who is pushing the boundaries constantly on social propriety and what should be published and made available in our city. Some of you who have been in Cincinnati for long time probably know who I am talking about. Steve had reached the end of this overnight flight. He said he looked terrible; he was unshaven; he had body odor; he was really tired; and he sat down right next to this guy. This man turned to Stephen and said: "What you do?" Of course, Steve had already recognized him, knew who he was, and Steve said: "I pastor a church," and suddenly everything changed. He said to Steve: "What kind of church is that? What kind of Christians go there?" Steve said that in his total exhaustion, the Lord gave him a word, and he said: "We are the kind of Christians that don't hate you." That is a group of Christians that put the cleaning tabs in the urinals for this man's business with Scriptures on them. That is an inopportune moment that all of the sudden became a wide-open opportunity. This is a call for all of us to be ready: be ready when it looks good; be ready when it looks terrible, and you never know what God will make of that.

#3 – **Reprove.** The word *reprove* means literally to bring to light, to show when things are vague and unclear, to reestablish it. Our society is increasingly confused and unclear about basic fundamental things, like our gender, or about 101 operational kinds of things. I was told

about a woman in a MOPS group in New England. MOPS is an evangelistic ministry open to anyone who wants to participate. During a discussion group at MOPS, this woman said: "I'm not going to force gender on my children. I'm going to raise them with no identity, and then when they get old enough, they can just select." That is a confusing childhood. We have to reprove, reestablish, bring the truth to light.

#4 – **Rebuke**. It takes courage and conviction to correct sin. To rebuke means you have to say when something is wrong. You have to have the courage to say: "That's wrong. That should not be done. God is not pleased with that." We need this. Timothy needs the courage to do it.

#5 – **Exhort**. He also needs the encouragement to exhort. Exhorting is the word that used to encourage.

You have to do all of these things. You don't do them all at the same time. You don't do them in the wrong setting. You need wisdom. He says we do them with complete patience and teaching. You should not rebuke someone who needs encouragement, and you should not encourage someone who needs rebuking. You should preach the Word, herald Christ. Paul says we should be ready and be patient. People report today that they've had 20 encounters with Christians before believing, so be patient.

Why are there five commands? Why is this all so important? We see why in 2 Timothy 4:3-4:

*"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."*

People will surround themselves with others who will just tell them what they want to hear, and they will surround themselves with teachers who are fit according to their own passions and desires. If this was true 20 centuries ago, it is still true today. Paul says that people will turn away from listening to the truth, and they will wander off into myths or fantasy. Many families that we serve and minister to and are trying to reach, many of them are unraveling because their lives are built around fantasy. Many husbands neglect their homes, their marriages, for fantasy. Many people stop paying attention to God's Word because they are distracted with a virtual-reality that does not carry any accountability or conviction. If this was true 20 centuries ago, how much more is it true now!

These commands he has given are weighty, mature, godly pieces of instruction that are good for all of us, for me and for you, and Timothy 4:5 ends with a charge, with four more imperatives for Timothy, for David Palmer, and for all of us here:

*"As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist,*

*fulfill your ministry.”*

Number one: **Be sober-minded** about it. Be realistic. This is not easy, so just be aware of that.

Number two: **Endure suffering**. He uses here a verb to say *just put up with the hard things*. For the video that Kyle and I made to introduce this series this summer, I had five people refuse to answer a couple of basic questions about their religious identity. Five people said they were too busy, or they might get in trouble for talking about this, or they couldn't talk about it.

Number three: Paul also says to **do the work of an evangelist**. Do it. Get engaged in it.

Number four: **Fulfill your ministry**. Wherever your role is, participate. Be realistic; sober-minded; endure hard things; do the work of an evangelist; fulfill your ministry. This is where we are headed this summer.

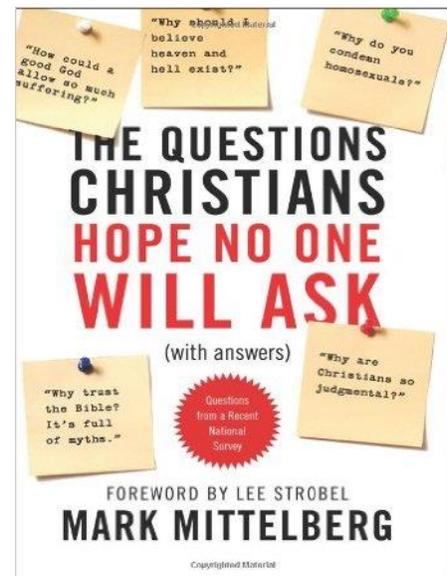
Let me give us together four applications as we get started with this new series.

Application number one: We have a new book based on interviews of over 1000 people who don't know Christ. They were willing to answer questions such as: What holds you back? What misperceptions do you have? Help us know where you are, what you think, what you really believe. These questions were synthesized. It is not a difficult book to read, but it will equip you. It is called: *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask*, with the subtitle: *(with answers)*. Get the book and read it.

Application number two: One of the speakers at the apologetics conference we held the spring, Dr. Brian Miller, gave an acronym for us that was very helpful. It made an



impact on me, and it has helped me to start



living this way. The acronym is SALT. Jesus said: "You are the salt of the earth. If the salt has lost its taste, how will its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under

people's feet." If the salt is not being salt, it has no value. Salt has to be poured out. No one's food is preserved with the salt still in the shaker. Nothing is made more savory with the salt still in the shaker. No one at the end of the day will say: You impacted me so much for Christ by that

six-pound bag of salt that you have in your pantry.” The salt has to be poured out and given, and Brian gives us this really helpful acronym for salt. It is: **S = start**. Start the conversation. **A = ask**. Ask questions. Ask people where they are, what they believe, what their impression is of a local church, how they grew up. Ask if they have had a negative experience with Christianity, or if they could ask God one question, what would it be? There are just dozens of really legitimate starting questions which you can ask. **L = listen**. Listen to the response. It is in our listening that we discover who needs to be encouraged, who needs to be rebuked, who needs to be reproved. It's in our listening that we discover where and what we have gathered can be applied. **T = tell**. Tell the story of what God has done in Christ. Bear witness to it. If you want to, include what he has done in your own life, but tell what God has done for the world in Christ.

Application number three: Assume spiritual responsibility for your neighborhood. For many of us, this will begin with a prayer walk, just walking your neighborhood and praying, saying: “God, I'm available to You, and as I walk my neighborhood, I want to feel a degree of spiritual responsibility for the people that live around me.” Christ has sent us. If you want to go beyond a prayer walk, you can open your home or your porch. You can share the sidewalk. You can pour salt out for those around you.

Application number four: We are trying something a little bit different this summer. Our church family is spread out all around metro Cincinnati, and our staff team has done a great job with getting maps and going through our database and plotting out a nice matrix of where everyone at Kenwood lives. When we look at Kenwood, we are spread out all around the city. We typically tend to get together with our friends and establish relationships at Kenwood. We have a number of small groups that are already existing, as well as adult Sunday School classes where relationships are known and established, and this summer, as ministry takes a break in certain areas, we want to encourage and challenge you to meet together in a summer community group that is organized by geography. A number of people have agreed to host a group. These are going to be informal groups, connected with the summer series. We want to encourage you to strengthen existing friendships and to make some new ones, but we also want you to feel free to invite the people that live around you.

As we finish just getting out of the harbor of this new series, I really want to challenge us as a church. It is important for now and for the future for Kenwood to listen to what is going on around us. It is very important that we take seriously the questions that are being asked. It is totally inappropriate for Christians to say in response to questions: “Those are bad questions. I don't want anything to do with you.” We know what the questions are, so it is our responsibility to learn and be prepared, to be ready to give a response that is thoughtful, and point people to Christ. It is so important for Kenwood's present and future that we start pouring ourselves out in salty ways. I am starting to get into this, and I have a couple of spots that I am going to

regularly, and I am sharing with you a little bit about it. I have a big opening with a whole group of Chinese workers at a restaurant, and we took a huge step this week. I have another group of internationals that I am talking to in the context of a local coffee shop. Those are some of places I go. Non-Christians and *Nones* don't usually just walk through Kenwood during the week, so I have to be intentional. It is good for all of us to be out. We have got to take seriously that have a responsibility for those around us. I encourage you to participate in one of the summer community groups. This is intimidating. It is hard. I know a pastor of a large church of 10,000. I thought he must be doing all these really great things, and I asked him: "What's the hardest thing for you?" I'll never forget what he said. He said: "The hardest thing in my experience of ministry is that Christians cool off in their zeal for sharing Christ faster than anything."

We need to stoke the coals. If we have heard Romans faithfully, this makes sense. We have a word to herald, and that word is the Good News of what God has done in Jesus Christ. What God has done in Jesus Christ gives the answer to the question Kyle was asked: "How can Jesus be the only way?" This is the answer to that question: "Jesus Christ is the only one who, as the sinless, spotless, Lamb of God, Son of God, gave His life as a ransom for sinners like you and me." He is the only one who has done that. He is the only one who solved the problem of our sin that we have before God. That is why it is not arrogance to say we trust in Him and Him alone.

I want to invite you to quiet your heart to hear that Jesus, in the presence of His disciples, took bread, broke it, and said: "This is My body which was broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." Jesus said to His disciples: "This cup is the cup of the New Covenant in My blood poured out for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." This is not the table Kenwood Baptist Church. It is the table of the Lord Jesus Christ who gave His life as a ransom for the sin of the world. If you have received Him, you are welcome to partake together with us. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we honor and extol You, glorious, glorious Son of God. We ask Your blessing and ask that You pour out Your Spirit upon us this summer. Lord, renew the missionary heart of this church and other churches in our city. Father, I pray boldly that the percentage of *Nones* would go the other direction in the next three years and that that would be a result of renewal and revival among gospel-centered churches in our community, including this one. Lord, we want to commit ourselves exclusively to You afresh now, for You have done what only You can do for all of us. We give You thanks and praise.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.