

## I. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

*What Does the Bible Say?*

“Today’s Leaders for Today’s Church”

I Timothy 4:11–16

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

January 11, 2015 – Evening Sermon

This service is the ordination and installation of the officers selected and voted upon by the members of this congregation and will be installed as trust the Lord to give us the leaders He has so appointed for this congregation to serve Him effectively. I’d like to stick to our ministry theme this year from our theme verse John 17:17 which says “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy Word is truth.” The Sunday evening series that will run throughout the year is the timeless truth applied to timely topics and this is the first one in that study. One of those timely topics is today’s leadership needed for today’s church in today’s world. I want to develop a couple of thoughts around a passage of Scripture for that topic.

Timely truths for timeless topics is going to basically be on Sunday nights this year except for next Sunday in which we’ll address the issue of what God’s Word, the timeless truth, say about the timely topic of the sanctity of life. Then as we go back to Sunday evenings on this series we’ll look at what the Bible says on issues of the last things, like the rapture, the millennia, and the second coming of Christ, over the next four to five studies. When I cover the second coming of Christ I’ll tell you when Jesus is coming back. We will also look at issues concerning the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts.

In this study I want to share with you from John 10 about the matters concerning today’s leaders in today’s church in today’s world. I believe one of the things that is happening in today’s church is that for various reasons, dynamics and motivations today’s church has lost its ability to influence the culture. I do not believe the purpose of the church is to redeem or transform the culture. The purpose of the church is to bring the Gospel message of redemption to see sinners saved and transformed. When sinners get saved and transformed cultures begin to be changed. That’s what consequentially begins to happen but while I do not believe the church’s calling is to transform the culture but to fulfill the Great Commission by embracing the grand commandment, and as it equips Christians to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ that will change the culture because of the fact that people have changed. When people change their lives change. When their lives change their families change. When their families change their neighborhoods and cities change.

All those things begin to happen in the changing of a culture and the influencing of a culture and that doesn’t mean we don’t speak to the issues of a culture which we are called to do. We are not to be silent in matters of marriage and what a foundational institution it is in the culture. What is God’s gift of sexuality? Where is it to be embraced and enjoyed? What about the issues of public theology for the public good? What is the government there for? How should it be seen? So we are supposed to speak to issues and influence the culture that way. I believe the church has lost the ability to influence our culture. I believe one reason is that we have become Biblically illiterate. We do not know the Word of God.

That is one of the reasons we chose this ministry theme. It is to try to affirm again for us so that you can help and share it with others that the Word of God is the truth. You need to prioritize your reading, study, preaching and hearing of it in your life and embrace it, not as a good idea from God but as God's Word which stands sufficient and supreme in our life. We need to embrace that afresh and a new otherwise the church will continue its descent in Biblical illiteracy.

I want to show proof of this. Dr. Barker and I have served on the board of Westminster Seminary, a foremost seminary and I'm a little prejudice since it's my alma mater but it's one that has been known for turning out pastor/teachers, pastor/leaders and pastor/scholars. We are right now having to redo our curriculum because we can no longer assume certain levels of Biblical knowledge of men called to the ministry who come and enroll in the seminary. We used to be able to assume a certain level of Biblical facility and knowledge of a grasp of theology and we can't do that anymore. We are having to rewrite what people have to take in the summer before they can start now. We can't assume those things anymore and that's just one little evidence of the Biblical illiteracy.

The other is how Christians, with this secular, progressive movement of narcissism in our culture, have the inability to respond to it with thoughtful, clear, Biblical insight from a Christian world and life view. We have lost that. So we react out of anger or frustration or withdraw or retreat or do all of those things. Part of the reason we do this is because we don't really know the Word of God. Because of Biblical illiteracy there is also spiritual impotency where we have lost the ability to be salt and light. When the salt loses its saltiness it's no good but to be thrown out and trod under the foot of men. So those two factors are there in today's church in today's world which is today no longer a pseudo friend of the church.

There are many people of my colleagues that I talk with and they're kind of convinced that if we back off of some of the issues that are brought from the world to the church today in foundational issues like marriage, family, and sexuality and this tsunami wave that has seemingly risen up and worked through the culture, that they'll leave us alone and we can go ahead and do our own things. I have news for you, that's not going to happen. All you have to do is go to Atlanta, Georgia and there a simple fire chief who loves the Lord, is faithful to the Lord, from his church, wrote a book that got to some of his employees and one of the chapters of the book was dealing with the issue of sexuality. So he was fired because he actually held a position that sex belongs in marriage between a man and a woman. When the mayor says 'we're not going to tolerate that' what has the mayor just said? Christians need not apply unless they are willing to be silent or unless they'll be changed and shaped by the culture.

So how will we respond to that? Of course this ex-fire chief has gone to the top of my prayer list and I have been impressed with what I've heard about this man and how he is handling this with extreme grace and conviction but that is going to multiply. In the culture in many places it will not simply be that you can be silent but you must affirm that which is antithetical to Biblical Christianity. There will be the threat of job loss, isolation and ostracisms. So you have today's world that has lost any pseudo friendliness to the church and its message. There is today's church that has basically in a general sense lost the weightiness of worship and lost a commitment to Biblical expository preaching. On top of that you have the factor of today's leaders in that church.

In this study that is what I get the privilege to say a couple of things about because the world needs a living, vital, effective church that is salt and light and we won't have that church without those kinds of leaders. I get the extraordinary privilege to be involved with the installation and ordination of such leaders. What kinds of leaders are needed today for today's church? With no pride at all I think some of you are thinking that God has been gracious to us here at Briarwood and we're not where this church is with Biblical illiteracy and spiritual impotency. I think we always need to be aware of our inadequacies and confess them but I want you to see something else.

We are a Presbyterian church and for those reading this who aren't Presbyterian you don't have to be one to get to heaven. You are welcome here, see you in heaven and you can be one when you get to heaven (smile). One of our marks is that we believe the church's connection so the people being ordained and installed today have not only impacted this church but as they lead this church they lead our Presbytery. We are a church in a Presbytery and we have responsibilities. Our leaders not only serve here but there as well. We also have responsibilities in the denomination and I do thank the Lord that the history I inherited here from the pastor all the way through the elders were those who understood and embraced the Godly call to be church men, not only in the local church where we could just get along and do our thing but to extend ourselves and be vitally engaged in the leadership of the Presbytery, along with our sister churches. Then we need to extend ourselves with them into our denomination.

I think that is important because in God's kindness, our denomination which is not the largest denomination in the world, we have been able to punch outside of our weight class. I believe we have a gigantic responsibility. I think Briarwood has a responsibility and we won't get there in our Presbytery in our denomination without our leaders getting there and our leaders leading here. So today's leaders for today's church and today's church in today's world, not the world of your grandfather or grandmother, but this world and how do we move forward?

I believe leadership works and I believe leadership is work. I Timothy 3:1 says *[1] The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.* That's one of the reasons we ordain for life but let people serve in three year terms because you just need a break. So get your one or two year sabbatical and then saddle back up and let's go for it again. You don't have to be re-ordained but you do need to be reinstated but we give those breaks because we realize it's work for many of them have jobs and responsibilities elsewhere in life as well as giving of their time to properly lead this church through its leadership teams. Therefore it's appropriate they get a break because leadership is work.

Leadership works. It always does. Good leadership produces good results unless God sovereignly designs it some other way at that moment and it would only be an exception to prove the rule not disprove it. By the way, bad leadership works. Right before I came to Briarwood, when I was in Charlotte, the Abu Ghraib prison scandal broke out and I'm not sure why but I was interviewed for that in Charlotte. They asked me what I thought about that and I said "I don't know the details of it but if what they say is true of what the United States soldiers did to the guards, I can tell you where the problem is." The problem was command and control. I'm not absolving them for I'm just saying the problem is command and control.

Jesus said when the blind lead the blind they both fall in the pit. It works. Bad leadership, ill-equipped leadership, not ready leadership, all has a consequence as well. So leadership works. So what about good leadership? What kind of good leadership do we need for today? I want to give you a couple of thoughts from one passage of Scripture. You know this is important because Jesus spent most of His time in His three year public ministry focusing on leadership. He prioritized the seventy, the twelve, and the three to get them ready for them to lead the church in what it was to be and do, when He ascended to heaven victorious from the cross.

John 10:1–6 says [1] *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. [2] But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. [3] To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. [4] When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. [5] A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”* [6] *This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.* So Jesus is using a metaphor here saying He is the Shepherd and He leads them out and He gives this instruction. The disciples are having a hard time grasping it so He goes on.

John 10:7 says [7] *So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.* Here Jesus is mixing metaphors and it’s called an allegory and not a parable. He is not only the Shepherd but He is also the door. The Good Shepherd comes to the door and I am the door. Good shepherds come through the door. Jesus is the Door and the Shepherd you want to listen to are the ones who come to you like Me through Me for I am the Door. As He mixes these metaphors He then goes on.

John 10:8–18 says [8] *All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. [9] I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. [10] The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. [11] I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. [12] He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. [13] He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. [14] I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, [15] just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. [16] And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. [17] For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. [18] No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”*

Here Jesus says He is the Good Shepherd and He comes by way of the door. The sheep know the voice of the shepherd and the sheep will follow the shepherd. Strangers and hirelings don’t come to the door. They come over the wall to get the sheep. They don’t come through the door for the sheep. By the way, I not only come to the door, I am the Door. I’m not only the Shepherd but I am the Door and it is My voice that they follow and when they hear My voice they follow Me. With what He has said here I would like for you as leaders, stepping into the office of leadership, to do the work of

leadership. We are not office wearers but office bearers as we come to do the work of the leadership.

What kind of work do today's leaders need to do for today's church in today's world? This is not exhaustive but just a couple of thoughts from this text from Jesus which is one of His training sessions, record for us, with these whom He was to leave and we are to follow them. The Chief Shepherd now has developed a profile for the work of the under shepherds. What does it look like and what does it consist of? I want to give you the headings on this and there are five of them.

The first thing is that good shepherds know their sheep and their sheep know them. What is pictured here would have been very common on the hillsides of that day in Israel. You would have all these shepherds with their little flocks and night would come. At night most would want to go to sleep but the shepherd can't sleep for someone would come in and steal his sheep if he did sleep. So a number of shepherds would get together with their flocks and they would have someone get rocks and sticks to create a sheep fold. Then they would put their flock in the sheepfold and another shepherd would come along and put his sheep in that sheepfold. So you would end up with three or four flocks of sheep in this sheepfold with three or four shepherds there and now they could take turns guarding the sheepfold. So then the shepherds could get some rest. They would each take a watch while the others slept.

What will they do the next morning when all those flock now have combined? They didn't brand sheep in those days. They didn't have to because each shepherd would walk up to the door of the fold, wouldn't go over the side for they protected them from the thieves, open the door and start talking to the sheep. The sheep knew their shepherd's voice and the shepherd knew his sheep. Then he would walk away and they would follow him.

Periodically when I have the opportunity to speak to pastors and leaders like you, I like to say for whatever reason books are gone and you only get two books for the rest of your life as an elder or a pastor in the church of Jesus Christ. What are the two books? The first one is easy because it's the Bible and it's the truth. I think the second book should be the membership directory. I knew I had the privilege to come where there were mature leaders. I'll never forget the letter I received from Tom Harris who was an administrator of this church when I was called to come here and he said "Harry, I want to help you and I know you'll be here in a couple of months so let me send you the membership directory." I love that he had in the back who was married to who and he said "Harry you are inheriting a church full of ecclesiastical incest. You need to be careful because they are all marrying each other." So he clued me in on all of that. He knew what that important book is and you need to know your sheep.

Will you know all the sheep? No and that's why we believe in plurality here in leadership which include your congregational community, your ministry team and that circle that is around you. You begin to know them as well as acquainting yourself with everyone else. Leaders that make a difference in today's church know their sheep. Today's church is in today's world. Today's world is high tech and low touch. We actually think that being on a technological device listed on something called Facebook makes you a friend. How irrational is that? So in today's world it is high tech and low touch. We don't have to be low tech but we do need to be high touch and the church won't be high touch if the leaders aren't high touch. So they know their sheep.

Number two is they set the pace for the flock. The passage says that My sheep know my voice and they follow Me. The church of Jesus Christ is like a flock of sheep. We are His called shepherds. The church is not a bunch of cows and we're ranchers herding them. We are not herding the sheep but we're leading the sheep. Set the pace. Follow me. Peter said in I Peter 5 to be an example to the flock. It comes out in how you speak, live, set your priority of worship, priority of family, ministry and what you do with evangelism. Through all of those things we set the pace for the congregation.

Three is that you are to tend and defend the sheep. What was a shepherd equipped with? He was equipped with a staff that had a crook on one end and a point on the other end. So what is it that we're supposed to do for the sheep? We have been given a staff. Thy rod and thy staff beat me. No, no, thy rod and staff comfort me. Why? The shepherds have the staff. See the crook, if we get in trouble they'll reach out and grab us to pull us back. Sheep are stubborn and you may as a sheep fight the crook and still want to wander away but when we wander there is the crook for the shepherds to tend the flock.

What about like David? What about the bear or the lion that comes upon the flock? The end of the staff is a point. Not only do you tend the flock but you defend the flock from heretics, Absaloms, false teachers, and those who would lead the disciples astray. So you tend and defend the flock.

So today's leaders know the sheep, they have a knowledgeable, intimate relationship at varying levels because there is a plurality of leadership the entire flock can be covered. If nothing else we can work on intimacy through our congregational communities to know one another here. We set the pace by being an example for the flock. We set the pace by declaring the Word of God to them and living out the Word of God to them. Thirdly we tend and defend the sheep.

Fourthly, we feed the sheep. We grow grass by God's grace. We not only tend and defend so they lie down in quiet pastures by quiet waters but it is a lush place. Small groups are feeding them. There is one on one discipleship that is feeding them. Congregational communities are feeding them. There are men's ministries, women's ministries, special ministries around special issues that people are facing in their seasons and challenges of life that are attempting to feed the flock. We are attempting to give to the flock the mind of Lord by teaching them and when you teach them you are giving them the voice of the Lord. Any time the leaders of the church faithfully teach God's Word by the power of the Holy Spirit, it no longer becomes us but Jesus Himself will begin to speak to His people and they will know His voice and they will follow, not us, but Him. We are just tending them and defending them. We are feeding them and taking care of them. We are there so that they can grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Fifthly and finally, while we want to be effective and successful as a church, we're not going to let the world define success. We are going to let Jesus define success. When Jesus defines success one of His elements of success is faithful leaders who are faithful to the Word, their Savior, to His people, to the mission, and faithful to the message. They are faithful to grow in grace personally so that we can lead others to grow in grace graciously by the hand of God's sovereign mercy and ministry. So we then are to be faithful and that means the sheep aren't here for us. That's what hirelings think. Hirelings fleece and steal the sheep. Leaders that are good shepherds feed the sheep, care

for the sheep, watch over the sheep, protect the sheep, and not for themselves but for the sheep and for the Chief Shepherd.

Our reward is not the sheep for our reward comes from the Chief Shepherd. It is that we have ministered to some degree by His grace, not with perfection for none of us will ever get there and not even with profitability for when all is said and done we are not profitable servants, but at least with intention, courage, compassion, conviction and carefulness that we can care for the flock. As we care for this flock we are ready to help care for the extended flock in our Presbytery. We are ready to care for the flock in our denomination and we're grateful to be a part of a denomination that while it holds fast to what it believes, it continually tries to build bridges with other faithful believers in other denominations so that we can work together by God's grace, wherever we have confessional agreement in the Gospel of Christ. So by God's grace we would move forward to accomplish it.

Isn't it interesting how Jesus calls Himself a Good Shepherd? That's not the first time that this happens. Jesus is using this that they had already been prepared for. Who was one of the types of Christ in the Old Testament? His name was David who came from the tribe of Judah from which comes Christ. It was David, the great shepherd King who writes out a profile for our ministry and it's Psalm 23. In Psalm 23 he lays out for us the ministry of a shepherd but David didn't come up with it either. He had a great, great, great, great uncle whose name was Jacob, what a wanderer but when he got to the end of his life he said to his sons, "The Lord is my shepherd and when I would stray He would bring me home." The Lord is my Shepherd.

They not only had Jacob and David when Jesus gave them this example, when He used this to teach them about Himself and then the leaders He was going to produce but He had already prepared them with Isaiah 40. It says to get up on the mountain and preach Good News for the Lord is sending the Shepherd of His sheep and this Lord will bring them from many folds into One flock and we get the privilege to watch over this portion of His flock to spill over to the flocks that God is doing in other places that Christ would do a great work in today's church in today's world with today's leaders that look like this. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Father for the glorious words of our Savior who lays out for us these marvelous truths about the majesty and magnificence of leadership in general and His leadership in particular that goes to the cross and rises triumphantly from the grave and ascends to heaven from where He leads us through under shepherds. I thank You for the pastors, teaching and ruling elders and the deacons and for those who have served and are coming back into active service here and now. I thank You for those who are newly identified and being ordained as well as installed. I pray God that You now will attend these moments with the sacred vows of covenant leadership in the covenant community for the majesty of our covenant keeping God in the covenant of grace through Christ our Lord, in whose Name I pray, Amen.