

Dallas Pastor Robert Jeffress Takes Veiled Swipe at Tim Tebow

After evangelical icon Tim Tebow canceled his scheduled appearance at First Baptist Church in Dallas because of controversial remarks made by senior pastor Robert Jeffress, the pastor appeared to fire back at the New York Jets quarterback in his sermon Sunday.

In the 10-minute speech, which the church made available on YouTube under the heading "Dr. Jeffress Responds to Tebow Controversy," Jeffress addresses the attention he had received without mentioning Tebow by name. But after thanking all of the people who had stood by him recently, he strongly rebuked those who didn't.

"I am grateful for men of God like these who are willing to stand up and act like men rather than wimping out when it gets a little controversial and an inconvenient thing to stand for the truth," said Jeffress, who received a standing ovation before he spoke. "God bless men like that."

The outspoken Jeffress has made controversial claims about Mormons, Muslims, Jews, Catholics and gays and lesbians in the past.

"There are some people who would say, 'God's given me a different ministry. God has called me to go preach about the love of God. I'm not called to preach about sin and controversial things. I've been called to preach about the love of God.' And they're sincere when they say that. But they are sincerely wrong. The fact is you cannot talk about the love of God. The love of God has no meaning whatsoever unless you understand the judgment of God that all of us deserve."

On Feb. 21, Tebow tweeted his reason for skipping the April 28 dedication of the church's new \$130 million building:

"While I was looking forward to sharing a message of hope and Christ's unconditional love with the faithful members of the historic First Baptist Church of Dallas in April, due to new information that has been brought to my attention, I have decided to cancel my upcoming appearance. I will continue to use the platform God has blessed me with to bring Faith, Hope and Love to all those needing a brighter day. Thank you for all of your love and support. God Bless!"

The church was much more benign in response to Tebow's cancellation last week.

"Mr. Tebow called Dr. Jeffress Wednesday evening saying that for personal and professional reasons he needed to avoid controversy at this time, but would like to come to First Baptist Dallas to speak at a future date," a statement read.

Tebow hasn't responded publicly to Jeffress' sermon.

Click below to watch the sermon.

Chris Strauss writes for USA Today.

Copyright 2013 Religion News Service. All rights reserved. No part of this transmission may be distributed or reproduced without written permission. A version of this story originally appeared in USA Today.