

In Such a Time as This, Should Pastors Avoid or Address Serious Issues?

3 Iconic Pastors

“If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point that the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages is where the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at this point.” –Martin Luther

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” –Martin Luther King Jr.

“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act, is to act.” –Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Recently a thought-provoking article appeared on the internet titled, “The Christian Church in America Has Lost Its Focus and Purpose.” While remaining Gospel-centered, have we drifted off-course?

An Absentee Church?

A pastor confessed to me a struggle that resonates with scores of pastors: “How do we hang on to Millennials? They’re leaving in droves.”

The reality is many don’t see any real-world-relevance in the church. Issues of today aren’t being addressed (while they sure are by an activist secular media). Because they observe

an absentee church, they're increasingly absentee attenders.

New Testament writers didn't just preach in an expository way but targeted issues Christians faced. The Scriptures were applied in a contemporary, meaningful way.

The Ford/Kavanaugh hearings mesmerized millions. How many pastors seized the moment to instruct congregations on a biblically-informed understanding of conflict resolution, law and justice? Or did multitudes simply go on with their pre-planned 26-week sermon series on a book of the Bible or continue with uplifting, crowd-pleasing "How to be Happy, Healthy and Wealthy" motivational messages?

During the past decade, I embarked on two projects: a book, *Here's the Deal – Examining the Controversial Issues Being Talked About Today* and a video, *Is Gay OK? 10 Things Everyone Needs to Know*. Growing increasingly aware of the aggressiveness of those promoting issues destroying the moral fabric of our nation, I had a sense of urgency to help God's people with these God-given assignments.

Midway through my journey, the senior leader in our church told me if I continued work on the video, it would be a "deal breaker" regarding my position in the church. He told me a leader's wife had previously sung a song called, "It Ain't Natural" and received death threats, so this was not a direction they wanted to go. It was their prerogative, so subsequently I was released in a quiet departure with no announcement.

A couple months ago I was having a lively conversation with a longtime pastor friend in the DC area who surprised me with this statement, "My brother, we would never have you speak in our church because you're too political."

Am I out of step with what God wants for shepherds of His flock in our increasingly hostile, evil society? Or is He trying to awaken pastors to the idea that we no longer have

the option of remaining silent while the house is on fire? Because I am privileged to have relationships across this country with leaders who embrace the latter, I share the following, remembering the words of Billy Graham, "Courage is contagious!"

Needed: A Sense of Urgency

Most people don't pay close attention to the movement of sexual predators in their state. But if they get word that one is moving in a few doors away, immediately they take notice and raise concerns. A sense of urgency has been aroused.

In our church I recently spoke on "The Biblical Worldview of Immigration." Because multitudes don't realize the seriousness and repercussions of this critical issue, there's much complacency and embracing of counterfeit "social justice." Consider the current crisis, with thousands of migrants presently on the march to America, with leftists underwriting and exploiting it.

Kris Kobach, Republican candidate for the Governor of Kansas, stirs concern among people and jolts them out of apathy by relating: Five Middle Eastern foreigners became illegal immigrants and should've been apprehended; four were stopped by police but due to laxity in our current system, law enforcement didn't have the information to deport them; three of these individuals were pilots, and if they had been arrested and deported, 3000 people who perished on 9/11 wouldn't have died!

Discerning the Times

One day Jesus upbraided the crowd for knowing how to "discern the face of the sky and of the earth. But why do you not know how to discern this time?" (Luke 12:56).

As pastors, are we enjoying giving uplifting, crowd-pleasing sermons yet tiptoeing around dealing with the avalanche of

deception bombarding us and our children? Is our most recent sermon series good Bible exposition, replete with inspirational quotes, yet without specific cultural application to the hot-button issues of our day?

As a pastor for 46 years, I know how one can sprinkle sermons with comic relief, non-offensive references to a cranky boss, irritable baby or broken A/C representing the “severe trials” we face while skillfully avoiding brutal realities confronting us in our post-Christian nation. We may not preach a prosperity gospel, but have we embraced a “popularity gospel” by chasing after new members with a non-offensive approach?

The midterm election is days away. The House and Senate can be upended with conservative achievements reversed, affecting all our lives. How many pastors preach on the imperative of voting and inform their people with objective guides?

God’s people are facing unprecedented challenges and pressures. Many are battling addictions, fearful, burdened, confused and trying to isolate themselves from insidious cultural influences. They need more than a guest-friendly, breezy service with some peppy songs and a crowd-pleasing sermon, only to be thrust back out into a dangerous and deceptive world.

Pastor Jesus, the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11), never held back from addressing specific sins and injustice. Affirming John the Baptist as “no one greater” (Luke 7:28b), John nailed specific selfishness, greed, neglecting the poor, violence and Herod’s sexual immorality (John 3:11-20). Pastor Paul exposed incest (1Cor. 5:1-2) along with numerous areas of sin throughout his letters while affirming, “For I did not keep from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

My most recent sermon was “Sex and the City [of God]” where in a PG-13, age-appropriate manner, we examined the plague of immorality and catastrophic consequences revealed by the CDC

(115 million Americans now living with STDs!). Fornication, divorce, living together, abortion, pornography, homosexuality, gay marriage, transgenderism, adultery and fatherlessness were all addressed so we're equipped with a liberating, biblically-informed worldview.

Informed Influencers

Jesus called us to be "salt" and "light" (Matt. 5:13-16). We are to influence, penetrate culture, expose darkness and as an antiseptic, hold back evil. Historically great leaders like Luther, Wesley, Spurgeon, Booth, Bonhoeffer, Finney, Martin Luther King Jr. and Chuck Colson all served us by their example.

William Wilberforce led pastors and an entire nation to see the abolishment of slavery. This reverberated to America, where we did likewise.

On the other hand, pastors in Nazi Germany stayed silent, leading their congregations in "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" while trains filled with Jews being transported to extermination camps passed by on Sunday mornings.

Here's the deal: Revelation 21:8 says cowards are the first to be cast into the lake of fire! To serve you, may I offer the free video resource at to equip yourself and lead your flock if you're a pastor. Reflect upon the words of the pastors whose quotes began this commentary as we pray and equip people with a biblical worldview on the critical issues of our generation.