

Preachers and Preaching

By Mark W. White

Knowing that my own personal biases are on display when I approach such a subject as this, I fearfully tread where some preachers would not dare go. The subject of preachers and preaching is certainly a Bible topic. Take preachers out of the Bible and there isn't a lot left. After all, Jesus was a preacher. Noah was a preacher. So was Moses, Ezra, Paul, Peter, Barnabas and Apollos. All of God's apostles and prophets were preachers. Apparently, God figured humans need preaching, thus the necessity of a preacher.

When the apostle Paul wrote, "God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (I Cor. 1:21, NASB) he was exalting God, but chiding man for making preaching necessary in the first place. Men should have been obedient to God without exhortation and admonition to do so, but God found it necessary to preach to men. In context, the wisdom of the world had failed to know God, so preaching became essential to man's salvation. Simply put, we can say that preaching is an extension of God's grace to mankind.

This word, "preaching", is interesting. From the Greek word, *kerugma*, it indicates a proclamation of the gospel itself. Preaching is proclamation. That is different communication from a dialogue or a conversation. Jeremiah, one of God's prophet-preachers wrote, "For each time I speak I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, because for me the word of the Lord has resulted in reproach and derision all day long ..." (Jer. 20:8, NASB)

Regardless of whatever else Jeremiah was saying here, he indicated that preaching is not a casual little pep talk. He cried aloud. He proclaimed. He was compelled to speak because to not do so was like shutting up a coal of fire within his bones, which he could not successfully hold in (20:9). If a preacher today does not have this fire burning within him, he should not attempt to preach. His attempt is not real preaching. It is an unworthy substitute, devoid of the passion the word "preach" requires. Isaiah 58:1 concurs with this standard for real preaching. "Cry loudly, do not hold back; raise your voice like a trumpet, and declare to My people their transgression and to the house of Jacob their sins." (NASB) It's difficult to ignore the blast of a trumpet, for sure. Preaching, in God's mind, is a wake-up call to people who've been lulled to spiritual sleep by "arrogant words of vanity" (2 Pet. 2:18, NASB).

Our culture does not like preaching, but ours is not the first generation to say "don't preach to me." First-century gospel preachers had to raise their voices to a society who considered their preaching foolish and backwards (I Cor. 1:18-21). Thessalonian Christians were commended for receiving Paul's preaching as God's words (I Thess. 2:13). Some, however, considered preaching as "idle babbling" (Acts 17:18). You don't have to know what idle babble actually is to know the Epicureans and Stoics who accused Paul of such were not being complimentary when they wrongly said these things about Paul.

I am truly concerned that "preaching" is changing among the Lord's people today. We may have fewer men now who will "cry aloud and spare not." Some like the conversational, entertaining, softer, "style". There is such a thing as "smooth and flattering speech" (Rom. 16:18, NASB) designed to deceive. We must be cautious not to allow the soft style to also soften the message. Every preacher must communicate in the style of a "herald". The original word, *kerux*, is translated "preacher" in our English

Bibles, a word meaning to “herald a divine message.” Think of the town crier in colonial times when you think of a preacher. He is making an announcement, not of himself or his own plans and thoughts, but he loudly proclaims the news from the King or others who are in authority. Paul would write, “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5, NASB). Preaching is not about promoting the preacher, but it is about promoting the Lord and His will. We should keep this in mind so that our emphasis on preachers and preaching will be properly placed. A preacher who is more about calling attention to himself is not a herald of the Gospel. Some preachers do weird, egocentric things as they preach. They become a distraction with their posturing, prancing, leaping, screaming, and constant joking around. Some like to be cute and the attention it brings them, but preachers must learn that it’s not about them. Older brethren used to pray for the preacher and say, “may he hide himself behind the cross and preach Jesus and Him crucified.” That prayer is needed for preachers today. A preacher is not a “star” that Christians watch as he “performs”. What a tragedy we face if this is how a preacher and his preaching is viewed by the church! This is a real problem for many today.

Not every Christian man has the mindset or the skillset for preaching the Gospel. Different preachers have different styles because they have different personalities. Nevertheless, a man wanting to preach must either adapt God’s style, or find other ways to serve in the kingdom. There is simply too much at stake to not preach God’s word in God’s way.

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