

Preaching The Word Of God

Clinton Lacy, of West Richland, Washington, is credited with preaching the longest sermon on record on February, 1955. His sermon lasted 48 hours and 18 minutes. Small wonder that someone proposed a new beattitude: "Blessed is the preacher whose train of thought has a caboose."

I don't know if Lacy's sermon was about the subject of preaching or not, but most preachers I know can speak for a very long time about this labor of love. This past Lord's day I spoke about preaching the Word of God as an act of worship. I suggested that there are two reasons why all Christians should know something about preaching: (1) So that we know what to do with preaching when we hear it (1 Thess.2:13; Acts 2:40-4), and (2) So that we are able to discern the right kind of preaching from the wrong kind of preaching (Acts 17:11; Col.2:4).

Half of the time we spend in a typical worship assembly is occupied with preaching. For this reason, and because of the enormous ramifications of sound Bible preaching to our lives, our families, and the church itself, we need to ponder why Bible preaching has such a place of prominence in the corporate worship of the Lord's church. I believe there are two questions that need to be answered relative to this subject.

First, why is the Word of God itself so celebrated in the worship of the church? It is because the Bible, God's Word, is the foundation of the church's existence. God has always placed an emphasis on words. His own Son is identified as "*the Word*" (John 1:1-3; 14). When Jesus came to reveal God's will to sinners, He did so in words (Heb.1:1-2). Jesus declared that after His departure God's message would be proclaimed by Spirit-inspired apostles in words; through preaching (John 14-16; Matt.28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). The words by which the truth of God was to be revealed were to be disseminated to the world in both preaching and writing (John 17:20-21; 2 Tim.3:16-17). The dominant theme of these inspired words was, and continues to be, the offer of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The subject of salvation is so dominant in the Scriptures that salvation itself is attributed to the Word of God (Rom.1:16; James 1:21; 2 Tim.3:14-15; Eph.5:26-27). We have thus become the people of God through the call of grace manifested in the Word of God, whether written or heralded (Titus 2:11-15). We are brought to faith, and our faith is sustained, by the inspired Scriptures (Rom.10:17; Psa.1:3; 1 Thess.2:13; 1 Pet.2:1). Out of this response of faith to God's grace, we are made fit to worship Him "*in spirit and truth*" (John 4:24; 1 Pet.2:9-10). This explains why God's Word has such a central role in our worship. We are made worshipers by the Word! Worship is about responding to God in praise, adoration, and thanksgiving. These are simply the responsive activities of those who believe; whose faith has been produced and sustained by the Word of grace.

Second, why is *preaching* the Word of God such a dominant feature in the worship of the church? When Paul wrote to Timothy he made sure that the young preacher understood both the source and purpose of the Scriptures (2 Tim.3:14-17). Having made this point clear, Paul gave instructions to Timothy about the use he was to make of the Scriptures (2 Tim.4:1-5). Preaching was to be one of Timothy's definitive activities. The context of Paul's instructions indicate that preaching was not just for evangelistic purposes, but for the exhortation and admonition of Christians themselves. Thus God wants preachers to herald the Word to the church, and thus by implication to the church assemblies.

Through the history of God's people, preaching has always played a central role. I encourage the reader to investigate the scene in Nehemiah 8:6-8. This pattern of reading the Scriptures and explaining them was continued by Jesus and the apostles (Luke 4:16-29; Acts 13:14-31; 17:1-4; 20:7).

The central role of preaching in worship has to do with the essence of worship itself. Jonathan Edwards explained that "God receives glory when He is understood by His creatures, and when His creatures delight in that understanding." This is what preaching is about! This is what preaching hopes to accomplish! Worship takes in the whole worshiper; his or her whole heart and mind. The activity of preaching unites both the emotional and intellectual aspects of worship. Preaching directs the truth of God to the whole person. It is a passionate proclamation of God's revelation to spirit-man.

When preaching is what it should be (i.e., a heralding of God's Word), then it becomes one of the greatest (if not *the* greatest) stimulants to true worship. God has so ordained this form of presentation for His Word. His Word is to be proclaimed for the teaching of the mind and the reaching of the heart; to show the truth of Christ and to call for a response of humility and surrender; to exposit the Word of God and to praise the God of the Word!

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