

A HOLY PREACHING: Living Truth People Long to Hear PROCLAMATION

Compiled by

NEIL B. WISEMAN

and

CHARLES E. ZINK



Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City
Kansas City, Missouri

Copyright 2004
by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City

ISBN 083-412-1417

Printed in the United States of America

Cover Design: Ted Ferguson

Bible Credits

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the King James Version (KJV).

The Bible: A New Translation (MOFFATT). Copyright 1922, 1924, 1925, 1935 by Harper and Row, Publishers, Incorporated. Copyright 1950, 1952, 1953, 1954 by James A. R. Moffatt. Used by permission.

The New American Standard Bible (NASB), © copyright The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission.

The New English Bible (NEB). Copyright © by the Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1961, 1970. Reprinted by permission.

The Holy Bible, New International Version® (NIV®). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Reprinted with permission of the Macmillan Publishing Company from *The New Testament in Modern English* (PHILLIPS), Revised Student Edition, by J. B. Phillips, translator. Copyright 1958, 1960, 1972 by J. B. Phillips.

The Revised Standard Version (RSV) of the Bible, copyright 1946, 1952, 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission.

The Bible: An American Translation (SMITH/GOODSPEED). Old Testament translation edited by J. M. Powis Smith. New Testament translated by Edgar J. Goodspeed. Copyright 1935 by University of Chicago. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

The Message (TM). Copyright © 1993. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A holy proclamation : preaching : living truth people long to hear / compiled Neil B. Wiseman & Charles E. Zink.

p. cm.

“A Palcon resource book for Nazarene ministers, 2004”.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8341-2141-7 (pbk.)

1. Preaching. 2. Pastoral theology. I. Wiseman, Neil B. II. Zink, Charles E. III. Title.

BT4211.3.W57 2004

251—dc22

2004003071

CONTENTS

Foreword	5
Preface	7
1 <i>Preaching: Its Significance and Impact</i> J. B. Chapman	9
2 <i>What Is Biblical Preaching?</i> W. T. Purkiser	21
3 <i>Finding What God Really Means in a Passage</i> Mildred Bangs Wynkoop	33
4 <i>Preaching Great Bible Characters</i> Ross W. Hayslip	47
5 <i>Preaching Great Bible Paragraphs</i> W. E. McCumber	59
6 <i>Preaching Great Bible Events</i> Millard C. Reed	69
7 <i>Preaching Scriptural Holiness</i> G. B. Williamson	79
8 <i>Preaching That Connects</i> J. K. Warrick	87
9 <i>A Lifelong Quest to Improve Our Preaching</i> Tim D. Stearman	97
10 <i>Anointing: Empowered Speaking for God</i> Neil B. Wiseman	109

FOREWORD

THE CHALLENGE OF OUR MISSION

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Please allow me to express my gratitude for your faithfulness to this important calling of shepherding believers in the Church of the Nazarene. Your ministry is vital to the redemptive work of the Kingdom, both in your local community and in our particular branch of Christ's Body. Without you and your partners in ministry, both clergy and laity, all efforts to maintain our heritage, to uphold our core values, and to carry out our mission would be in vain. I am optimistic about the future of the Church of the Nazarene, primarily because of the quality of my colleagues in ministry. God has blessed and gifted His Church by calling you to lead her.

As you peruse these three volumes prepared for PALCON 2004, I hope you will conclude as I have, that the subjects they address are vital to our ministry in the Church of the Nazarene. The degree of your faithfulness and mine to our preaching task, to our role as shepherds, and to our doctrine of holiness, will have a direct effect on the extent to which current and future generations will identify and distinguish themselves as a Missional, Christian, Holiness people.

Let us covenant together that the labors of these authors, whose ministries were and are so Spirit-filled, will not fall to the ground. Let us pray for guidance and inspiration from the Holy Spirit as we read their words, absorb their passion, and proceed as the inheritors of their spiritual legacy. May you find yourself refreshed, stimulated, and moved to action by what you read in these pages.

In His Peace,
Charles E. Zink
Director, Clergy Development

PREFACE

PREACHING MATTERS—IT REALLY DOES

PREACHING MATTERS. Consider what it is and how it works. Viewed from a strictly human perspective, preaching seems absurd. How could it be that God chooses to deliver His message to the world through human beings, many of whom stammer, stutter, and are shy about speaking in public?

Think what preaching does. It converts and convicts. It encourages and challenges. It warns and affirms. In the lofty and amazing plan of God, preaching uses a mere mortal to deliver His message to His people. And preaching is to be done Sunday by Sunday across a preacher's lifetime—flaws and all.

Because the call to preach is for life, and because preaching is so important to the church and the world, preaching must be taken seriously and done well. That means since preaching puts the preacher on public display, he or she must live a blameless, holy life—that's what gives preaching authenticity and credibility.

Because preaching demands so much from those who preach—soul, voice, preparation, prayer, organization, and priority—we have to keep improving across a lifetime. That task of keeping sharp in our preaching is hard work and requires help from many sources. That's what this book is about: preachers helping preachers improve their craft. I have personally heard every writer in this book preach and preach well.

The concept for this anthology on preaching came from a conversation about the resources produced for the first PALCON in 1976-77. In fact, some of the chapters for this book are from *Biblical Preaching for Contemporary Man*, a multi-author book published for PALCON I. Some of this material is relatively new, and other chapters are part of Nazarene history. (They have been edited only slightly, and therefore retain the writers' original work, in some cases complete with dated references and nongender-inclusive language.) As founding director of the first PALCON, it gives me indescribable satisfaction to be involved in PALCON 2004.

My joy is full and my heart filled with gratitude for the accumulated impact the various PALCONs have had on our church. And I am glad to be a small part of PALCON 2004.

—Neil B. Wiseman

1

PREACHING: ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT

J. B. Chapman

AT THE OUTSET I must acknowledge the honor that has been bestowed on me in that I have been selected to offer here at the Nazarene seminary this series "The Preaching Ministry," which is the first in the Basil Miller series on "Preaching Today." I appreciate being named by Dr. Basil Miller, the sponsor of this course and especially so, since Dr. Miller was a student of mine for three years in the days of the old Peniel College in Texas. To be confirmed by the executives of the seminary, and to be allowed wide margin in the selection of the time when I should be here is a multiplied favor.

There are advantages in being the first to appear for these lectures, for in such a case one comes to a full field from which to gather stalks of grain, and he can proceed without regard to predecessors, to whom, when there are such, one owes an obligation. But there are disadvantages, also, for without precedents to serve as guides, one must find his way amid many inviting paths, being always in danger of choosing a road that ends only in the woods.

I am, however, especially conscious of obligation to those who shall come after me to this platform for this series. The most that I can hope is that my effort shall constitute a passing prelude to the good work they are sure to do, and it shall be my joy to leave the task to those better minds and better hands, and to pray for their prosperity and blessing.

To this fine company of preachers in the making, this hundred seminary students who hail from places near and far, I appeal for sympathy and help. I shall bring in my offering of gleanings from the fields of Boaz, hastily gathered, and still in the straw. Please help me thrash out as much grain as possible, and let us use the handfuls we find as seed to be sown in the fields of our own lives that, springing up and watered by our tears, shall become a fruitful harvest in the days that are ahead.

Last August I entered upon my 47th year in the Christian ministry; but I

rejoice to find myself much more a learner than a scholar, more a probationer than a professional, and more a novice than an expert; for I subscribe fully to the thesis of Bruce Barton to the effect that when a man is through changing, he is through. Being quite conscious of my maladroitness, I come here as a student rather than as a teacher, and I shall sit at the round table rather than in the professor's chair.

A prospective missionary, describing the ground of his conviction that he was called to be a missionary, told how in both visions and in dreams he saw himself standing before the people of the land toward which he had now set his face, preaching the gospel to them. He was aware that there is much to do besides preaching, but it was this vision of preaching that made all the rest take

on meaning. I think it was that way with us all, and that it will continue to be that way through life. The minister's life involves many things: pastoral work, administrative work, and work of undefined character. But that which lifts all these activities from the plane of drudgery is the prospect and possibility of standing up to deliver the message of Christ in the unction of the Spirit. One can do the other things, even the most undesirable and monotonous of them, if by so doing he can purchase a chance to preach.

**THE PREACHER IS
GOD'S VICE-REGENT,
DEPUTED BY DIVINE
AUTHORITY TO
EXERCISE A HOLY
COMMISSION.**

I do not in this instance speak of pleasure in any ordinary sense, and yet I think God does so assure the hearts of His anointed ones that they can come to the time for preaching clothed in a garment of joy and praise. They can come to Sunday morning, saying in their hearts, "This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24, NIV). Those who tell of their dread of preaching (Spurgeon said his knees always knocked when he stood up to preach) are but coming to the subject from another approach. There is a sense of responsibility that is challenging, and without this no one can know the joy of preaching. But this dread is like the hunger that is forgotten when the soul is filled.

In a denominational journal there recently appeared an article under the title "When Is the Preacher Worth His Salt?" The answer to the titular question is quite carefully concealed beneath many deserved complaints against those who cumber the holy office; but the answer is there in strong words: "The preacher is God's vice-regent, deputed by divine authority to exercise a holy commission. He is Christ's ambassador, entrusted with all the negotiations involved in winning lost men and a belligerent world." The writer quotes a prominent columnist as saying of the ministry: "Men to match this hour are tragically lacking. Especially regrettable is the lack of great preachers. They are the ones to whom we naturally look for spiritual leadership, but too many of them are uninspired men merely holding jobs. The prophet note is not heard in their pulpits nor leadership felt in their congregations."

Rev. Armacost, the author of “When Is the Preacher Worth His Salt?” in a notable paragraph says, “A minister is a prophet of God. He is under orders. If no agonizing, terrifying convictions impelled him to enter this holy office, he had better never touch it.”

And farther along he says:

The preacher has allowed the old techniques and dynamics of the camp meeting, the revival, the sawdust trail, the prayer meeting, and pretty largely, the Sunday evening services to go into the discard, and has relaxed with a sigh of relief. But he has not, through travail of soul, brought forth with daring adventure any modern equivalent in improved techniques. Instead he has buried those result-producing methods in graves of oblivion, and goes tiptoeing among the tombstones as though he feared some of them might come to life again to plague him.

To be at his best, a workman should be ashamed neither of himself nor of his calling. But if shame must attach, it is better that he should be a mediocre workman in a worthy field than that he should be accomplished in a calling of no consequence. This is no place for a eulogy on the ministry as a calling. We are at this moment more concerned with facts as they are, with reference to this work, than we are with ideals of what should be. By this I mean that we are not going to work under ideal conditions, but under real conditions—conditions largely ready-made for us by others.

When Paul talked of “the foolishness of preaching,” he may have been reflecting estimates picked up from his contemporaries. On Mars’ hill, you know, the wise men called Paul “a babbler,” and this and similar words may have been used of preachers more than the written records show. By using the phrase “foolishness of preaching” in the connection that he did, Paul tacitly admitted his own inability to defend the adequacy of such means to the end toward which it was directed. There is no task so monumental as that involved in saving men from sin, making good men out of bad, and that this should be accomplished by simply preaching to them rather than by applying force of a more tangible sort, is positing an effect without prescribing a sufficient cause, according to the judgment of the great majority of the world of mankind. This discrepancy must have been apparent to the Greeks, as it has been to thinking people ever since, even including those whose lives are devoted to the sacred task of preaching.

So bent are men of all callings to find excuses for their shortcomings that they ride exhausted hobbies even after they are dead. For example, it is common in our times to hear people, and especially preachers, condemn our day as being irreverent and unsympathetic toward preachers. But if one reads of Paul’s humiliating experiences at the hands of popular mobs, by order of civil authorities, and by urge of rival religious leaders, he will marvel that Paul’s ministerial dignity could be maintained. Or if one takes the stoniness and mocking that

John Wesley and his coadjutors endured, he may wonder that the preacher of the present day is given such a pedestal on which to stand. Men have not usually thought of their day as favorable. It is always some day of the past, or, in rare instances of proper facing, some day in the future that is happy. Today is too real to be ideal, and bargain seekers find the price of alibis favor the selection of “the times” as a good buy. But for practical purposes we may dispose of this whole matter by saying simply that our day is what it is, and that it is a challenge for us to meet it. If we ever make good at all, we shall have to do it during our own day and generation—other days must be left with the fathers or committed to the sons.

There is no calling in which the current element is stronger than in the calling of the minister. His message is unchanging, but his methods must be ever changing. When men have tampered with the message in the endeavor to adapt it to their times, they have erred destructively, whether they have gone to the right, toward compromise, or to the left, toward fanaticism and cultism. But when men have held fast to methods because of their inability to discern between message and methods, they have erred in effectiveness and have failed in their task.

We of today must give to men the same message given by our Master, but we must adapt our methods to many situations that did not exist in Palestine when He “spake as never man spake” in the preaching of His own glorious

**OUR DAY DEMANDS
SUBSTANTIAL
PREACHING. WHEN
WE SAY IT DEMANDS
IT, WE MEAN BOTH
THAT IT NEEDS IT
AND THAT IT CALLS
FOR IT.**

gospel. The same may be said of all the generations since, leading up to our own. We cannot follow the sermon forms that were so effective in the preaching of John Wesley. We cannot preach so long at one time as did Charles G. Finney. Camp meetings are neither so unusual nor so effective as they were in the days of Instep and MacDonald. There were factors in the ministry of Drs. Bresee and Walker that do not find answers in the situations of today. Even methods we ourselves followed yesterday must be modified to fit today and tomorrow. All these things are valid and challenging. The ministry is no place for mossbacks who insist on using a rock in one end of the corn sack to balance against the corn in the other end, just because their fathers did it that way; it is no place for Rip Van Winkles who sleep for 20 years while the

world goes on to a new day. The ministry as a calling is everything but monotonous, for it is ever challenging and ever new.

The basic error is that of supposing that because the demands now are different as regarding the methods of preaching they are therefore either less or, as some would pessimistically hold, nonexistent. We lay it down as the center of

our present thesis that our day demands substantial preaching. When we say it demands it, we mean both that it needs it and that it calls for it.

THE CHURCH ITSELF DEMANDS SUBSTANTIAL PREACHING

Rev. Donald S. Metz, in an article recently submitted to the *Preacher's Magazine*, says: "A free or informal church makes demands upon its ministers far greater than does the formal or liturgical church. The more formal a church becomes, the more the minister becomes a priest—the spokesman of the church. The less formal a church is, the more the minister becomes a prophet—the spokesman of God."

If, then, the tendency is for churches to become more liturgical, no matter whether we are speaking of denominations or of local churches within denominations, the tendency is to make less of preaching and more of other forms of ministerial service. This tendency may be the result of the preacher's inability or unwillingness to preach. But in a service that is climaxed by the sermon, a weak sermon means a weak service. As Dr. Metz says, "The liturgical service is ritual-centered, while the informal service is pulpit-centered." Hence, as might be expected, liturgical churches do not produce outstanding preachers, and strong preachers do not develop liturgical churches. Since most people, including preachers, are inclined to "take the way of least resistance," a saying that traced, to its basis, means that most people are temperamentally lazy and try to get along without hard work, and since it is easier to plan a good liturgical service than to prepare to preach well, the preachers make the formal service their refuge, and the people accept a good service in the place of a good sermon that they would not get anyway.

It is not within the scope of the present assignment to discuss the general scope of the minister's task, nor yet to enter into the subject of the worship service—having set our own limits within the bounds of the preaching section. Our reference to the worship service is not a criticism, but rather a warning. The alternates are not, as I believe, between a good worship service with poor preaching and a poor worship service with good preaching. The real choice should be something better than either of these; namely, a good worship service with good preaching.

Neither is it within the scope of our present purpose to speak of the multitudinous activities connected with the preacher's calling, even though by these the preacher buys his opportunity to preach. It has never been possible to separate the pastor and the preacher. No matter how large the church, the man that preaches is the pastor in the thinking of the people, and if the man that calls does not preach when the people return the call, they feel that it is an off day in the church. And here, again, we would not mention to berate, but to warn. The tendency to compensate is so ingrained in us that candid people have learned to think of a good pastor as a poor preacher, and of a good preacher as a careless or

untactful pastor. But it need not and should not be so. It should be the determination of every minister to be as balanced and complete as time and ability permit.

It has been difficult for people to quote that scriptural passage on the relationship of priest and people. Some quote it "Like priest, like people" and some say, "Like people, like priest." But the fact is that both orders have been observed. Churches tend to produce preachers to their liking, and preachers tend to force churches into their own mold. In some instances the churches are within their rights, and in others the preachers must set, not follow the fashions.

But you of this seminary are in training for service in churches that require prophets, speaking for God, more than priests, speaking for the church. The churches you will serve want preaching preachers, and the fact that you are here indicates that you want to be preaching preachers. But even in our group, there are plenty of instances in which preaching is relegated to a secondary, even to a minor place, by reason of so many and such extended activities. We are not, as a rule, long on ritual, but we are long on announcements, special singing, collections, and the introductions of friends and strangers. So that the "after which the preacher will preach" often comes just 10 minutes before time for the benediction.

But I believe these monstrosities that pass for religious meetings are either made or permitted by the preacher in charge, and are not on the demand or by the wish of the spiritual section of the church. If these things do represent the desires of the church, the church is mistaken, and the preacher should tactfully correct it. If the church wants substantial preaching, it must make place for it. In the sphere of the natural, it is sometimes necessary to create a demand for that which is needed and available. When bananas appeared on the market a few years ago, the public had no appetite for them. Yet bananas are a good and useful food, and are abundantly available, so interested persons set in systematically to create a desire and appetite for bananas, and with what success we are all witnesses. If this can be done on the markets of this world, it can be done also regarding good preaching, and it must be done if the Protestant church is to prosper and continue to grow. For whenever substantial preaching gives way to liturgy, the influence of the Protestant church takes second place to the Roman Catholic, for as a liturgical institution, no body of people can successfully compete with the Roman Catholic Church. Men can follow the liturgy blindly, but Protestant Christianity must have an informed constituency, and, with all the various methods in vogue for promoting Christian education, the historic method of teaching by preaching still retains its precedence. Truth is not gospel truth until it is presented by Spirit-anointed preachers. Classrooms and lecture halls may teach Bible history and geography and make people wise concerning philosophical and logical truths. But that gospel which is the power of God unto salvation cannot be read out of a book, lifted from a picture on a page or

screen, heard on phonograph or radio, but must be preached by living men to living men.

I talked with Bishop Pickett in India regarding mission methods. The bishop said:

There is no way of founding the church anywhere except the way of Jesus and the apostles—just by preaching the gospel. It never has worked when people have built church buildings as a means of founding the church, or have established hospitals or schools for the same purpose. The order is, and always has been, to preach the gospel until the people are saved, then build buildings *in which* they can worship, and establish hospitals for the curing of their bodies, and schools for the education of the minds.

I would add to the bishop's observation this one word more: God's method of preserving the purity and power of His Church is distinctly connected with the preaching of the gospel; and every other way, when it becomes a substitute for substantial preaching, results in spiritual deterioration and essential defeat. If the Church is to continue to be the Church, the chief place must be given to preaching the gospel in the hearing of the people who constitute the Church. So that, in truth, the Church cannot be either brought into being or preserved in purity and power, except by means of substantial preaching.

Dr. P. F. Bresee epitomized good preaching in a few words when he said that good preaching is so simple that children can understand it, and so spiritual that old people will appreciate it, and in between children and old people everybody will find a share.

THE COMMUNITY, AS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE CHURCH, DEMANDS SUBSTANTIAL PREACHING

It has been said that our day is a difficult one for preachers because of the competition. The community is full of people who are willing to address their fellows publicly on all sorts of subjects and on a wide variety of occasions, so that the preacher no longer has a monopoly on the occasions that call for public speaking. Likewise, it is said that the preacher was once also the teacher and the doctor in the community, and these activities have been taken over by others, so that the preacher is at a disadvantage having his field restricted.

Even though we may not follow the motto "Competition is the life of trade" through all its meanderings in the philosophy of economics, we do know that specialization is a good thing for efficiency, and that cooperation is more effective in groups than in the community in general. If one were going to make au-

**THE CHURCH
CANNOT BE EITHER
BROUGHT INTO
BEING OR PRESERVED
IN PURITY AND
POWER, EXCEPT BY
MEANS OF
SUBSTANTIAL
PREACHING.**

tomobile tires, he would do better in Akron, Ohio, than in some community where such work is not done. If he were going to start a department store or a garage, it would be better for him to go into the section of the city where such institutions are generally found. Even if one is going to start a church, it is often better for him to locate on "Church Street," than to go into a section where there are no churches. Since others have taken over school teaching and medicine and other branches of service involving learning in general, the minister is better able to specialize on his own God-given task and should be able to do that work better than his predecessors could do it cluttered up, as they necessarily were, with "many things." And as to competition from many speakers, let the preacher rejoice that he has so many helpers, and let him prepare to meet the competition by converting it into cooperation. Let others speak on politics, civic reform, and community uplift; and let the preacher give himself to the best message of all—the message that underlies every worthwhile message—the saving message of Christ. And let the preacher preach a better gospel than the others can preach, let him believe a better creed than others believe, let him speak more vitally than the others can speak, and he can be assured of a hearing. The preacher cannot, to be sure, expect to gain a hearing by the grace of his ordination or by the influence of his degrees—the world is not impressed by these things. He must win his hearing on the merits of what he says and the way he says it. But the true prophet of God who is ready and willing to put his best and his all into the task will ask for no better odds than that.

The rights of the community, as well as the rights of the church, deserve consideration. We all have heard how Mary, Queen of Scots, said she feared the prayers of John Knox more than the armies of England. But it was the fearless preaching of Knox that made his prayers a power with the worldly queen. The Scriptures express pity for a people when their king is a child, and in the language of our present thought, that means that the community is in peril when its preachers are weak. John Wesley and the early Methodists are credited with saving England from revolution like that which drenched France with blood. And it was by their awakening of the public conscience, along with the transformation of a comparatively few from sin to holiness, that enabled the British to turn the round corner instead of the square one, as the French did, if they did really turn the corner at all.

Thoughtful men, even though they be wicked and worldly, appreciate virile preaching. Only unregenerated church members and soft hypocrites call for an emasculated gospel and a meaningless message. Even though men may not themselves believe what the preacher says, they feel better if they can realize that the preacher believes it, and believes it with all his heart. Preachers who have been popular with the world have been preachers of the substantial sort. And speaking of the demand as a need, the community certainly demands substantial preaching nowadays. Graft in politics, dishonesty in business, and lasciviousness

in social relations all find their going difficult in a land where fearless prophets lift up their voices like trumpets to show the house of David and the people of Israel their sins. That some will not hear, that many will reject and persecute, and that many will not acknowledge the source of their benefits should not deter the prophet of God, for he does not ask praise, even though he strives to be praiseworthy.

THE PREACHER'S OWN SOUL DEMANDS SUBSTANTIAL PREACHING

In fulfilling his duty to God and to his neighbor, one cannot fail to take care of his own soul. And, reversed, if one is true to himself, he cannot be false to any man. Is the preacher a watchman upon the wall? Then, if he is to live with his own conscience, he must lift up his voice like a trumpet when he sees danger approach. Is the preacher a shepherd? Then he must seek the lost with a concern that is all-consuming. Is he a prophet of the gospel age? Then he must shout aloud his tidings of great joy. Is he conscious of his charge to keep? Then he must not shun to make known to men all the counsel of God in the most effective manner it is given him to know it.

**I HAVE IN MIND A
COMBINATION OF
SUBSTANCE AND
FORCE THAT DEFIES
DEFINITION.**

I have called it "substantial preaching" in this section, for I have in mind a combination of substance and force that defies definition. The kind of preaching I have in mind is the kind you wish you could do when you cannot do it. Its receipt calls for content and for consecrated personality. This type of preaching makes heavy demands upon those who would answer to it. It demands religious experience that is as clear and definite as a sunbeam. It demands conviction such as sustained the martyrs while the bundled sticks were being kindled at their feet. It demands patience in preparation like that which Moses had during his days in the Arabian Desert; for it requires the mastering of the doctrines upon which the teaching side of our holy religion is based, and the exercise of the logic and philosophy necessary to enable one to make deep thoughts intelligible. It demands right attitudes toward God, the Church, and the world of mankind. It demands an emptying of selfishness and an in-filling of love that makes one glad to become a follower of the foot washing Savior, who sought to minister, not to be ministered unto, and who laid down His life for those He came to serve.

Charles Silvester Horne, in *The Romance of Preaching*, says:

The appearance of a true preacher is the greatest gift that any nation can have. By his presence, and his spirit, he multiplies the fighting forces for righteousness indefinitely. John Knox's voice was as the sound of a trumpet. When Luther rode to Worms, every timid believer in the Refor-

mation plucked up heart to speak and act more boldly. When Cromwell arrived on Marston Moor, the historian tells us that a great shout went up in the Puritan camp which was the presage of victory.¹

Later, speaking of the preacher's personal reactions, Horne says, "There is no tragedy in all the world like the disillusioned minister. He has to keep on preaching. His congregation is often weary; but no one is so heavy of heart as he is."²

In summing up, Mr. Horne presents Moses as "the first of the prophets"; the preachers of the apostolic age as the leaders of a triumphant movement that remade the world; Athanasius and Chrysostom he calls "the Royalty of the Pulpit"; Savonarola, Calvin, and Knox are "the Rulers of Peoples"; John Robinson and the pilgrim fathers are "the Founders of Freedom"; while Wesley and Whitefield represent "the Passion of Evangelism." And in a final word, this preacher whose life span was only 49 years, 25 of which he spent in the active Christian ministry, and when within three days of his own death (although he knew it not) said:

I have recalled to you, in the course of these lectures, some of the memorable words and deeds of those whose names are inscribed in letters of gold on the roll of the Church's leaders and prophets. It would have been a great thing no doubt to have run with Timothy on some errand for St. Paul. It would have been a great thing to have dared everything for Christ when Nero was on the throne. It would have been a great thing to have confronted emperors with Athanasius; to have died for freedom with

Savonarola; to have crossed the Atlantic with Brewster and Bradford; to have waked the world to new spiritual life with Whitefield and Wesley. But let no man say that our age is inferior in opportunity to any that has gone before. The one demand is the consecrated spirit, and the forward mind.³

It will belong to your ministry to conserve for men and women of today the eternal truths in which our fathers lived, but to present those truths as they have passed through the living mind and been shined upon by the broadening light; that is the precious gift of God to our generation.

We may not know the order in which all the things of nature appeared. But we know that here was first a preacher, then a church; and we know that is the order of rank, as well as the order of time. The church of today is what the preachers of yesterday made it, plus the little that the preachers of today have done. The church of tomorrow is prefigured in the preachers of today, and in those who will be the preachers in the near tomorrow. I say this not to our praise but to emphasize our responsibility. It cannot well be otherwise.

Let us know that while men may choose their civil leaders, and economic overlords may assume their office, ours is a calling in which the eternal God is

**THE CHURCH OF
TODAY IS WHAT THE
PREACHERS OF
YESTERDAY MADE IT.**

the sole electorate. This is not an honor that any man can properly take for and of himself. Neither is it an honor that one can properly refuse, if the God of all indicates that he has been chosen. But “a call to service is a call to prepare for service,” as well as a call to serve. And none who know the full implications of this calling can ever feel that he has arrived in such a sense that he need no longer apply himself to the best there is, both in preparation and in endeavor to achieve. For only by all available means can anyone become “a good minister of Jesus Christ nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine,” to the praise of the glory of Him who hath loved us and washed us in His blood, and made us partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. To Him be glory both now and forevermore, world without end. Amen.

1. Charles Silvester Horne, *The Romance of Preaching*, with introduction by Charles R. Brown, and biographical sketch by Howard A. Bridgman (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1914), 43.

2. *Ibid.*, 45.

3. *Ibid.*, 297-98.

Originally published as “Substantial Preaching Demanded,” chapter 1 of *The Preaching Ministry* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, revised ed., 1976), 9-27.

There is no place in the
Church of the Nazarene for
ordinary preaching.
Preaching with us
must be a constant
revelation of divine personality
manifest through the
anointing Blood of Christ by
the Holy Spirit.
It is not learning,
nor eloquence, nor education;
it is not lofty thought with
climaxes of intellectual power,
but God speaking through
His servant beseeching men
to be reconciled to God.

—Phineas F. Bresee

From *The Quotable Bresee*, Harold Ivan Smith, comp. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1983), 178.

2

WHAT IS BIBLICAL PREACHING?

W. T. Purkiser

WITH ALL THE CHANGES time has brought to the work of the ministry, preaching is still its major function. Today's pastor may be a counselor, an educator, an administrator, and a promoter. But if he is to fulfill his God-called purpose, he is first of all a preacher. Preaching is not the pastor's only work, but it is his most important work.

Many reasons may be given for the importance of preaching. Not the least is the one stated by the apostle Paul: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). True preaching is more than the recitation of truth. Preaching is the extension into our time of that saving and sanctifying work of Christ that is the essence of the gospel. When the Word is preached in faith as Emil Brunner long since said, the most important happening on the face of the earth takes place.

To preach is more than to say words. Preaching is an act of God through a human being in which the redemptive work of Christ becomes present reality. It is the faithful proclamation of the message of the Bible in such a way that ancient truth becomes modern trauma and triumph.

Preaching not only says something but also does something. To preach is to become part of the mission of Christ who came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). It is to bring the Cross and the Resurrection out of the past into the present moment of decision.

True preaching brings the historic Incarnation into the modern occasion. In effect, it reenacts the redemptive event it describes. The risen Redeemer becomes the contemporary Christ, the living Lord who confronts people today with His decisive call, "Follow me." Ancient fact becomes living reality in the Spirit-anointed preaching of the Word. Through preaching, Christ judges, saves, teaches, and directs us in this our day as surely as He judged, saved, taught, and directed those He met in Galilee and Judea 1,900 years ago.

In true preaching, the words of a man become the Word of God. God speaks and acts directly in human life. J. B. Phillips translates 2 Cor. 5:20, "We

are now Christ's ambassadors, as though God were appealing direct to you through us." What begins as a person-to-person encounter between the person in the pulpit and the people in the pew becomes a Person-to-person encounter in which the preacher in the pulpit drops out of sight and God through His Spirit individually addresses those who hear.

What then Rome claims for the Mass, Protestants possess in the "sacrament" of the Spirit-directed preaching—the reenactment of the redeeming sacrifice of Christ.

A student asked his homiletics professor, "Prof, will my sermon do?"

The real question is the response of the professor: "Do what?"

Whatever else this means—and what it means has been set forth in eloquent detail by Peter Forsyth, Herbert Farmer, James S. Stewart, Donald G. Miller, John Knox, and others¹—it means that preaching is not what it ought to be unless it is in a real sense biblical preaching. *Gospel* is a word that means "God's spell"—literally, "God's story"—and God's story is told nowhere else with such strength and purity as in the Book His Spirit inspired.

WHAT BIBLICAL PREACHING IS

Unfortunately, much modern preaching falls far short of what it should be. It is little more than religious editorializing on the life and thought of modern man. Such moralizing has brought preaching into the kind of disrepute suggested in the retort "Don't you preach at me. I've had enough of your preaching." Preaching is reduced to the level of scolding.

It takes little insight to see what has happened. Such preaching has lost its biblical rootage. God judges but He does not scold. Instead of "Thus saith the Lord," the theme of preaching of this sort is "Thus saith the latest book I've read," or worse, "Thus saith the latest notion I've had." Only a biblical vision of what preaching should be, and only preaching that is truly biblical, can win the hearing the Church must have if it is to survive and succeed in today's world.

Preaching may be biblical in two ways: when its content is biblical, when it proclaims what the Bible teaches; and when it is biblical in form, when it takes its direction from and expounds the thought of a biblical passage.

This means that not all biblical preaching is textual or expository. Indeed, some alleged textual and expository preaching is decidedly unbiblical. But all biblical preaching roots in the meaning and message of the Bible itself.

Topical preaching may be biblical—if the topic is explored in the light of the balanced teaching of the Scriptures. Topical preaching puts greater responsibility on the preacher to insure that its content and development is truly in harmony with the whole message of the Bible. Preaching is biblical when what is preached is what the Scriptures teach. Each point must be examined to be sure it expresses biblical truth, and each point should be supported by direct scriptural reference.

But biblical preaching takes on an added dimension of power and depth when even its form is shaped by the biblical passage explored. The Bible becomes not only a guide to *what* is preached but *how* it is preached. Here, textual and expository preaching takes advantage of the way the truth is presented in the Scriptures. Its biblical roots are both real and obvious.

With no circularity intended, the preaching described in the Bible is biblical preaching. The prophets of the Old Testament consistently prefaced their oracles with “Thus saith the Lord.” The New Testament characteristically identifies preaching the gospel with “preaching the word.” Jesus “preached the word unto them” (Mark 2:2). People never thought of Him as a priest but always as “one of the prophets” (Matt. 16:14), proclaiming the Word of God. Over and over throughout the Book of Acts, the work of the apostles is described as “preaching the word” (Acts 8:4, 25; 11:19; 13:4; 14:25; 15:35-36; 16:6; 17:13). Paul urges Timothy—and all who follow—to “preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2).

There is, to be sure, a wooden, mechanical, legalistic use of the Bible that is dutiful but not dynamic. But preaching that takes a biblical passage or theme, explores its implications, and applies its message, cannot fail to accomplish the purposes for which God sends forth His Word.

Biblical preaching may move in either of two directions. It may select and announce a specific passage and authentically apply its truth to the lives of the hearers. Or it may start with a recognized problem and turn to the Bible for its answer. Today’s preaching, as Karl Barth once suggested, must look at life with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

As there is a plan unfolding throughout the Bible, so biblical preaching ideally is planned preaching. The plans are as varied as the men who make them. The important thing is that there be a plan. Plans, of course, are subject to change by the Holy Spirit who (it is hoped) first suggested them. But the preacher who plans his pulpit work six months or a year ahead and who keeps that plan always in mind has half his preparation already done. Sermons planned in advance can grow, and to *grow* sermons is always better than building them.

Preaching plans may involve series—preaching through the Bible book by book, chapter by chapter, paragraph by paragraph, a series of great themes, passages, or personalities. They may involve “courses” of sermons—related to the preaching aims of the minister himself, although not announced as a series.

Part of planning for the future should be a review of the past. What subjects, what emphases, have been covered in the past year? If the hearers had only this

**AS THERE IS A PLAN
UNFOLDING
THROUGHOUT THE
BIBLE, SO BIBLICAL
PREACHING IDEALLY
IS PLANNED
PREACHING.**

one pulpit ministry from which to form their understanding of Christianity, what sort of faith would they have? What important Bible themes have been covered? More apropos, what important Bible themes have been passed over? But whatever the plan, and however it be formulated, what is important is that there be one.

THE ADVANTAGES OF BIBLICAL PREACHING

Much of the value of biblical preaching is implied in what has already been said. Its specific advantages may now at least briefly be listed. There are advantages for the listener. And there are advantages for the preacher.

WHY SHOULD WE THINK PEOPLE PREFER OUR SPECULATIONS TO THE DECLARATION OF GOD'S WORD?

1. *Biblical preaching assists in building an enduring and spiritually mature church.* Several studies of outstanding churches have been made in recent years. It is interesting to note the number of them in which the preaching is described in such statements as “The preaching was a simple exposition of a biblical passage”; or “There was a good deal of scriptural reference in the sermon, and much direct application

to the problems which beset the ordinary person.”

Why should we think people prefer our speculations to the declaration of God's Word? Why should we think we can attract a hearing by substituting popularized psychology, philosophy, or politics for the Scriptures?

People come to church not to hear some novel idea, not to get more information about world events, not even to be informed about the achievements of their own particular religious group. They come to hear some sure word of God—something that will illumine life to its core, and send them out with lifted vision, broadened horizons, a more sure hope, and the purified determination to do the will of God as He makes it known to them. To give them anything other than such a word is to offer stones for bread or a serpent for fish.

Biblical preaching educates the congregation in the essentials of sound doctrine. For many moderns, the Bible is little more than “a housing project for bookworms.” Rarely will the level of biblical knowledge in the pew surpass that in the pulpit. The spiritual illiteracy of the present day will be cured, if at all, by a thoroughly biblical pastoral ministry.

2. *Biblical preaching stimulates variety in the pastor's ministry.* Faithfully and systematically to preach the Bible is to find an infinite variety of themes and their development. It is impossible to become a faddist or ride a hobby when one conscientiously preaches the whole counsel of God.

Ended forever is the pastor's frantic search for sermon topics. Before him is a Source Book for preaching that is unlimited in its breadth and scope. His “seedbed” of texts and topics will be as prolific as nature's production of seeds—far beyond the minimum necessary to sustain the life of the species.

The faithful study and preaching of any portion of God's Word will yield a wide variety of basic themes and applications to every conceivable need of human life. Practical duties will be impressed on Christian hearers, not because they are selected on the whim of the preacher but because they emerge in his faithful exposition of the Scriptures. The warnings as well as the promises of the Bible will be expounded, not dragged in by the heels, so to speak, but as they are encountered in the Word itself.

3. *Biblical preaching keeps the pulpit down to earth and practical.* There is no ivory tower in the Scriptures. The purpose of the Bible is "doctrine, . . . reproof, . . . correction, . . . [and] instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Sometimes preaching *about* the Bible is confused with biblical preaching. Preaching about the Bible may indeed be abstract, technical, and without much spiritual value. But, as John Knox insists, when preaching is authentic, it is relevant. If it lacks relevance, it is not truly biblical. We do not, as some have said, "Make the Bible live." What we do is make its life apparent—turn it loose in the world to do the work of God.

4. *Biblical preaching encourages the minister's unceasing personal study of the Bible.* He must become, in John Wesley's phrase, "a man of one Book." This will not mean for him—any more than it meant for Wesley—that he reads nothing but the Bible. It will mean that everything he reads, and the vital focus of his interest, will always be brought to the measuring rod of the Scriptures.

Preaching can be biblical only to the degree that the preacher himself first wrestles with the passage he preaches. In its meticulous study he finds not only food for his people but also the enrichment of his own understanding of the Word.

Along with careful and intensive study of parts of the Bible, the preacher must combine a consistent program for the study of the whole—the sweeping, overall grasp of biblical theology that saves one from a limited and parochial view. Neglect of Bible study inevitably dries up the springs of inspiration and power. "Lifelong learning" must be the slogan in the preacher's personal Bible study.

5. *Biblical preaching imparts authority to the pulpit.* It restores the prophetic note to preaching. The ultimate authority of the preacher is not his education, his scholarship, his experience, his natural wisdom; it is "Thus saith the Lord." The amazement of the people who listened to the Sermon on the Mount was not at the novelty of Christ's teachings. It was that "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:29). This authority our Lord shares with those who preach His Word.

**WHEN PREACHING IS
AUTHENTIC, IT IS
RELEVANT.**

True, the preacher must not confuse his private interpretation of the Word with the authority of God. “Pulpit infallibility” is no more a reality than “papal infallibility.” The preacher must never let the fact that he stands “three feet above contradiction” invest him with a dogmatic and unbending mentality. The authority of the Word is not that of individual or sectarian interpretation; it is the authority of Christ shining through the truth, however imperfectly presented.

THE PREPARATION FOR BIBLICAL PREACHING

It is possible to give lip service to biblical preaching without ever getting down to the hard labor involved. A biblical preacher needs tools, just as a carpenter needs tools; but having the tools makes a man neither a preacher nor a carpenter unless he learns to use them.

Whatever the exceptions, biblical preaching starts from a passage of scripture—a verse or, better, a paragraph. In any case, the scripture selected should include enough of the context to give all the facets of the thought. The selected passage will have a meaning almost immediately apparent, but it must still be thoroughly studied. The hidden treasure of its deepest truth will be yielded up only as the preacher lives with it, wrestles with its words and phrases, reads it through again and again, and studies it carefully.

Access to the original Hebrew and Greek texts is valuable but not necessary. A preacher with little or no knowledge of either biblical language can learn to use interlinear translations as by Marshall; analytical concordances by Young and Strong; word studies by Barclay, Richardson, Robertson, and, more recently, Earle; Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*; as well as a wealth of contemporary translations.

Only after he has made a firsthand study of the passage should the preacher turn to the commentaries: the *Beacon Bible Commentary*; *Beacon Bible Expositions*; Barclay’s *Daily Bible Study*; *The New Bible Commentary*; Adam Clarke and Matthew Henry; *The Interpreter’s Bible*; and the large number of commentaries on individual books—the *International Critical Commentaries*; *The New International Commentary*; Moffatt’s, Epworth, Tyndale, Torch, and Harper’s, to name some of the leaders.

Basic to biblical preaching is what is technically called exegesis, or more broadly, hermeneutics—the art of discovering and defining the meaning of the biblical text. The biblical preacher must know and apply the basic principles of interpretation.

Interpretation deals with the meanings of sentences. One writer has given as the golden rule of biblical preaching:

Make some scripture statement the basis of your message:

Know what it means:

Preach what it says: . . .

The meaning of a passage is never ours to decide, but only ours to discover.²

Some principles may be suggested for the discovery of meanings:

1. Start with the assumption that the Bible is God's Word and that it speaks to the human predicament today. It is not one book among others; it is *the* Book.

This means that considerations of a critical nature, valid as they may be, belong to the study and not the pulpit. The preacher may wrestle with questions; he must preach answers. This gives point to W. R. Maltby's comment that although the well is deep and the preacher needs a long rope to draw the water, he should not make the people "chew on the rope."

For all its humanness, the Bible is divine. It "inerrantly [reveals] the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation." We do not judge it; it judges us. It is not that we "go through the Bible"; the Bible must go through us. It is the "given" with which we start. We are not called to change it or even to defend it but to proclaim it.

This means appreciation for the spiritual factor in Bible study. The Word is spiritually discerned. The Holy Spirit as Teacher is the prime essential. The preacher enters his study with Clara Scott's prayer:

*Open my eyes, that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine.³*

2. Give specific attention to the literary form. This is a frame of reference logically prior to the words themselves. The Bible embraces many literary forms: poetry, proverbial wisdom, history, chronicle, sermon, oracle, parable, allegory, and epistle.

Each literary form obviously involves principles of interpretation proper to itself. "The Lord is my rock" does not mean that God is granite or limestone. "He shall cover thee with his feather, and under his wings shalt thou trust" is not evidence that God is a Being with wings and feathers.

Less obvious are expressions sometimes known as Hebraisms. An example would be comparisons stated in absolute terms. "Hate" may mean a lesser degree of love, as when Jesus said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (John 6:27) does not forbid earning one's daily bread but stresses the greater value of spiritual food.

Other examples would include the "prophetic present" in which Isa. 9:6 says, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," when the event itself was 700 years in the future; and Paul says, "Whom he did predestinate, them he also

called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30), when the glorification is yet to come. In a similar way, biblical writers often speak of what is certain as if it were close at hand although it may be yet distant in point of time.

**INDIVIDUAL WORDS
ARE THE ULTIMATE
UNITS OF MEANING.**

One marvels at the confusion caused by the typical Hebraic expression for a short time, “three days and three nights.” This is used once for Christ’s stay in the tomb, and there are those who declare that it must mean a literal 72 hours—although all four Gospels declare the Crucifixion to have been on “the preparation,” the regular Greek term for Friday; and the New Testament says 16 times that Christ was raised from the dead “the third day.”

3. Study the key words of the passage under consideration. Don’t be too sure you know what they mean. Individual words are the ultimate units of meaning.

The meanings of words are determined in two ways: by their dictionary definition or, in the case of a different language, by the use of a lexicon; and, more importantly, by their usage. In word studies, as A. B. Davidson said, the concordance is more important than the lexicon. How words are used by any given writer is the chief guide to what they mean for him.

For example, the characteristic New Testament word for “sin” is *hamartia*, defined in the lexicon simply as “missing the mark.” But the lexicon gives no clue as to whether the mark is missed through weakness, poor but well-intentioned aim, or because the archer shoots at the wrong target. It is only when we look at the way Jesus, Paul, and John use the term that we see the meaning of “sin” as “a willful violation of a known law of God.” “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. . . . If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (Jesus in John 8:34, 36); “Now being made free from sin . . . ye have your fruit unto holiness” (Rom. 6:22); and “He that committeth sin is of the devil . . . Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin” (1 John 3:8-9).

4. Take the content of the passage as a whole and relate the key words to their context. Try to read the passage as if you were reading it for the first time. Consider its relation to what has preceded and to what follows.

The principal rule of exegesis is “context.” A text without a context may be worse than a “pretext.” It may be actually misleading. How often 1 John 1:8, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” has been waved as a club against the doctrine of holiness, quite oblivious to the context in which both verses 7 and 9 affirm cleansing “from all sin” and “all unrighteousness.” The deception is not of those who humbly confess the cleansing blood of Christ, but of those who allege that they have no sin from which they need to be cleansed.

Context is of two kinds: literary and historical. The literary context is the paragraph, the chapter, the book, the Testament, and ultimately the whole of the Scriptures. It includes the literary *genre* of which we have already spoken.

The historical context requires us to ask what these words would have meant to the persons to whom they were originally written, as far as it is possible for us to find that out. The literal meaning of sentences is their normal, customary sense in their historical context. While “all scripture is given” for us, “all scripture” was initially given *to* a specific person or persons. It is always helpful to ask, “Why was this particular event or idea chosen for inclusion in this context?”

This means that cultural conditioning must be considered. “Rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15) includes discrimination at this point. Paul’s comments concerning marriage and about slavery in 1 Cor. 7, and his requirement that Christian women wear veils and keep silence in church in 1 Cor. 11 and 14 are examples of such cultural conditioning.

5. Interpret each passage in the light of progressive revelation. Especially must we be careful about reading back into the Old Testament the religious experiences and ethics of the New Testament, expecting of Old Testament personalities what is proper only in the New Testament age.

Where a statement appears in the Bible determines its theological weight, and, to some extent at least, its very meaning. “Sanctify” does not mean the same in Josh. 3:5 (“Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the LORD will do wonders among you”) as it does in John 17:17 (the high-priestly prayer of Jesus, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth”); and it is only confusion to read it as if it does. By no stretch of the imagination may the speculation of Eccles. 3:19, “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast,” be taken to cancel the clear meaning of Paul’s words in 2 Cor. 5:1-8 and Phil. 1:21-24 that death ushers the believer immediately into the presence of Christ.

This is not to deny the unity of the Scriptures. But the core of the unity of the Scriptures is Christ. The “center of gravity” in the Bible is the New Testament, and the heart of the New Testament is Christ.

When this principle is rightly observed, what is historically called “the analogy of faith” comes into play. The whole of the Scriptures interprets the parts of the Scriptures. No part of the Scriptures may be interpreted in such a manner as to distort the whole. Here is the difference between mainstream Christianity and the multitude of sects that have grown up on its margins. The sects are based, almost without exception, on their one-sided, special pleading

**THE CORE OF THE
UNITY OF THE
SCRIPTURES IS
CHRIST.**

emphasis on one aspect of the Scriptures to the neglect of the whole. What we must always seek is the “general norm of the Word of God.”

This involves a measure of circularity, to be sure. The whole is known only through the study of the parts; and the parts, in turn, are only fully understood in light of the whole. Herein is the value of biblical theology for the student of the Scriptures. It offers the overview and the balance necessary to move easily from part to whole and from whole to part.

After the labor of exegesis comes the toil of homiletics. This is the task of organizing, outlining, illustrating, and carefully planning introduction, application, and conclusion. Whether the final work be done by writing in full, preparing a brief, or drawing up a short outline, it must be done. It isn't enough to gather the food; it must be prepared and “put on the table” in appetizing form.

Nobody who has ever done it denies that biblical preaching is hard work. But it is worth it, both for the immediate returns and for the long future.

CONCLUSION

Herein is the challenge of biblical preaching in our day. Nothing can surpass its importance. Much is new in the work of the modern minister. Paul never ran a copy machine or did research on a computer. But preaching is as old as the Bible itself. In the pulpit, the pastor is in a true apostolic succession. He is doing the work of his Lord and the prophets and apostles of the Old and New Testaments.

Preaching is the “hardest, highest, and holiest” service possible to God and man; and there is no preaching more effective than biblical preaching.

*To give of self, and not to count the cost,
To learn, to teach, to labor, and to pray,
To serve like Christ, the least, the last, the lost—
These were the beacon fires that lit the way.⁴*

1. Peter T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1907); Herbert H. Farmer, *The Servant of the Word* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942); James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946); *A Faith to Proclaim* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953); Donald G. Miller, *Fire in Thy Mouth* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954); *The Way to Biblical Preaching* (New York: Abingdon Press: 1957); John Knox, *The Integrity of Preaching* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957).

2. R. E. O. White, *A Guide to Preaching* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 32.

3. “Open My Eyes, That I May See,” words and music by Clara H. Scott, 1895. From *Sing to the Lord* (Kansas City: Lillenas Publishing Company, 1993), 461.

4. Georgia Harkness in *Masterpieces of Religious Verse*, ed. James Dalton Morrison (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1948), No. 1489.



The people
to whom we minister
and speak
will not recall
99 percent of what
we say to them.
But they will
never forget the kind
of persons
we are.

—Dallas Willard

From *The Pastor's Guide to Effective Ministry* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2002), 12.

3

FINDING WHAT GOD REALLY MEANS IN A PASSAGE

Mildred Bangs Wynkoop

EXTRA BLUE RIBBONS should be awarded in heaven to those who have stuck faithfully with the uninteresting preacher through thick and thin. Of course, the boring preacher would have to finance and present the ribbons himself. God would not bother. He made His truth so interesting that whoever dulls it ought to have to be required to go into heaven's side door with his awards, if he gets in at all. The preacher's task is to preach the truth—and do it interestingly.

Morton Enslin tells how he played the alphabet game through many a boring sermon.¹ He listened for words that began with each succeeding letter in the alphabet (no fair going to *g* until *f* came up). One virtue might be the rapt expression one would seem to wear as he listened intently for the next word with the proper letter. At any rate, a listener would be more sure of earning his blue ribbon by playing the alphabet game than by falling asleep in church.

An interesting sermon, as well as the true truth, is the least a preacher can contribute to the preaching event. Truth is fabulously interesting. God saw to that. So if the preacher becomes “deadly dull,” he or she has to really work hard to ruin that which has been handed to him so vibrant with life. And some preachers do work hard.

The Bible is our major Resource, but the fact alone does not solve the problem. An awesome responsibility rests on those who attempt to dig sermons from it.

A wholesomely shocking little book that keeps a prominent section of my desk warm is called *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church*, by James Smart. In speaking of today's problems, he said, “Sermons are rarely heard which open the scriptures to the community in such a way that the people themselves begin to be able to find their way between life situations and the [biblical] resources to illuminate life.” And then Smart puts in the painful probe, “It is only our ineptitude that makes words dull which in their original utterance shook the community that heard them to the depths and endangered the lives of the speakers.”²

We are reminded of a little 5-foot-7-inch, white-wigged, 122-pound British preacher speaking from the Word of God to great crowds of people in the open fields. The spiritual force of his message was so powerful that strong men would literally faint during the sermon. John Wesley was a biblical preacher—and he was not dull to those who heard him in that day. Wesley preached holiness but not in a narrow, parochial sense. Holiness was to him a total Bible truth; a Church truth that belonged in every corner of human life. It spoke to personal and social issues, labor problems, public education, cultural ideals, health and welfare matters. He preached the first of several sermons in his usual day at five o'clock in the morning, always to people who came knowing that he was going to preach. In a morally decadent day, England listened, trembled, and changed. And he preached from the same Bible we do.

To those who stand in the Wesleyan theological tradition, the proclamation of holiness becomes a virtual mandate. But when the more definite term *scriptural holiness* is added, the whole question of responsible biblical preaching is encountered. All Christian traditions teach holiness. But quite frankly, the Wesleyan comes to his view from a different approach to his Bible and theology than others. Can we say what the Wesleyan approach is? The differences that divide the great theological traditions in Christendom lie here. Our task is not to argue the truth or error of the great traditions but to explore the primary assumption and methods underlying the activity of biblical interpretation and to so understand our own stance in theological matters.

Quite simply, Wesleyans assume that the Bible was given to communicate God's message to mankind. This communication was given in history, interpreted by "holy men," and preserved in written form to be understood by us. The retrieval of God's meaning in terms of our understanding is what interpretation is. But what is involved in the interpretation enterprise is not always obvious to those who engage in it. Two very different approaches are possible—proof-texting or induction.

PROOF-TEXTING

Proof-texting is one sure way to get out of the Bible what one wants to find there. Basing the proof for the truth of a doctrine on selected sections of the Bible without regard for the context or the specific purpose of the author is proof-texting. In this approach the theological stance of the preacher determines what he will be able to find in the Bible. He is limited to those words or phrases that correspond to those he and his theological tradition use. Much of the Bible remains in a shadowy limbo because it does not speak to his point. Contexts, since they usually weaken the message he wants to declare, are neglected or even ignored.

Perhaps the most theologically dangerous spin-off of proof-texting is the tendency to actually misinterpret, even distort, a text of scripture, usually with-

out malice aforethought, in order to assure certain theological results or denominational distinctives. (Don't look now, but the Calvinists tiptoeing behind you may not be the worst offenders. Wesleyans have been known to commit this indiscretion too!)

As an example of the latter holiness proof-texting blunder, the following bit of conversation may be illuminative. "How often ought one to 'preach holiness'?" is a frequent question. There are two sorts of opposing responses, both of which arise out of a misunderstanding of what scriptural holiness preaching is. One says, "Don't overdo it. Preach once a month, or once a quarter, or once a year." The other says, "Preach it every time you go into the pulpit." And those who listen to him are apt to say, "We are tired of holiness. We wish you preachers would give us some food."

In both cases the problem lies in the fact that holiness is proof-texted and therefore interpreted too narrowly. It may mean a dry doctrinal sermon in which the bare theological bones are counted, or it may mean a constant exhortation to a certain experience with no life involvement indicated beyond it. Neither alternative is biblical preaching.

INDUCTION

The opposite approach from proof-texting, namely, induction, asks the question, "What does the text actually say?" before it is dogmatic about what it means. Induction ranges out widely from the text into an exploration of the context, past the paragraph into the whole book in which the paragraph and sentence lie. Induction does not presume to know all the answers before asking the dogmatic questions and waiting for the answers from the context. Just as a doctor carefully explores all possible aspects of a patient's physical and psychological makeup to determine his diagnosis, so must a preacher discover all available information bearing on his text before prescribing remedies to fit the needs of the people.

The most basic diagnostic questions prove to be remarkably interesting. Who wrote the book? Who was he? What was on his mind when he wrote? To whom did he write? What was the point of what he wrote? How does the section in which the text lies relate to that point? What was the meaning of the text we are using to those to whom it was written? What is there about that meaning that speaks to the situation our audience is in? This type of honest interpretation will open the way for the people to learn to go to the Bible to find answers to their own questions about their own life problems when they are alone.

From such painstaking study arises a closer approximation to biblical preaching than proof-texting can ever approach. Messages come up out of the

**WHAT WAS THE
MEANING OF THE
TEXT WE ARE USING
TO THOSE TO WHOM
IT WAS WRITTEN?**

context with frequently surprising results. Floods of insight and revelation break over the dikes of fear and defensiveness to create new spiritual life and exciting creativity.

HERMENEUTICS—RESPONSIBLE INTERPRETATION

“Christian preaching,” says James Earl Massey, “demands responsible hermeneutics. Simply stated, *hermeneutics* has to do with the task and art of interpretation.”³

Hermeneutics—a big word—means that interpretation is taken seriously and responsibly. Biblical meanings are discovered and expressed in contemporary idiom and made applicable to everyday situations. This task is a part of the package in which God’s call is received.

A call to the Christian ministry is a call to responsibility in handling the Word of God. That Word must be interpreted, that is, properly understood and adapted to the understanding of those for whom it is intended. There can be no exceptions to this responsibility. The art of interpretation can and must be learned at whatever cost in time and concentration and strength and discipline it requires. No longer is the cop-out philosophy acceptable that gave comfort to the lazy preacher, “Open your mouth and the Lord will fill it.”

HERMENEUTICS REFERS TO THE ACTIVITY OF COMMUNICATING A MESSAGE FROM SOMEONE.

“Hermeneutics” is a word coming from Greek mythology. Hermes was the god of language, who, it was said, invented language as a means of communication between the gods and men. From this mythological origin, hermeneutics come to us with a useful background of meaning. Hermeneutics refers to the activity of communicating a message from someone (in our case, God’s Word, in the form of the Bible) to someone (in our case, 20th-century mankind). This communication requires that the interpreter be thoroughly acquainted with the Person and the meaning of that Someone as well as the “someones” who are to receive that message.

In a most absolute sense, the interpreter dare not substitute his own message for that of God, nor has he discharged his stewardship until that message is put into the form that the hearer can understand in his own situation. “God’s Word in Man’s Language” is the way Eugene Nida expressed it in a book by that title. Until missionaries achieve facility in a new language, they realize the imperative need to have an interpreter who can translate, not merely their words but their ideas, their idiom, and the significance of what they are saying into the thought patterns of the people. The interpreter may need three or four times as long as the foreign speaker to get this across because some Western concepts are nearly untranslatable into a language that has no corresponding

concepts. He learns that mere equivalence of word does not communicate anything. Communication takes more than a lexicon, it takes a life.

A discussion of responsible biblical interpretation falls naturally into three divisions: (1) *the preacher himself*, (2) *the Bible* from which the preacher derives his message, and (3) *the people* to whom he preaches. The first examines the problem of *eisegesis*, or that which the preacher brings with him to the preaching event; the second attempts to commend *exegesis*, or that which the preacher draws from his source; and the third leads into the *existential* dimension of the preaching event, which is the ultimate purpose of the whole effort. This purpose is that real, living, involved people must be brought into a personal encounter with Him who is Truth. Until the Word is put into human idiom, the preaching procedure is futile.

The Preacher and Theological Biases

Hermeneutics starts the moment the preacher closes his study door, because he himself is the first problem that is confronted in sermon building. The problem is called *eisegesis*, which means that the interpreter brings with him “notions, questions, interests and a definite mind-set,”⁴ which predisposes him to certain ways of thinking. This affects his interpretation. Everyone has a bias that must be taken into account as does a compass that must be adjusted to certain geological and geographical locations to give an accurate reading.

Preaching is not done in an intellectually and spiritually antiseptic neutrality. All the preacher’s heritage comes into that event with him. He has been affected by the prejudices, ideals, social attitudes, and theological emphases that have molded his mind. These colors are deep dyed. They did not wash off in the baptismal font. The preacher does not leave them outside his study door when he goes in to prepare his message.

These personal ways of thinking seem so natural that he without question assumes everyone accepts his point of view. A classic example is the apostle Peter who so gloriously proclaimed the universal scope of the gospel on that first Christian Pentecost Day and the fact that Jesus of Nazareth would save whoever would believe on Him (Acts 2). But when it came to accepting Gentiles on an equal basis with Jews, he had trouble.

It is possible for everyone to go to the study touched by a bit of chauvinism. (Not all chauvinism is a white male disease!) To change our figure—we do wear colored glasses when we come to the Bible. These natural lenses can neutralize or even block some of the rays of light shining out from God’s Word so that the truth that is seen is a partial truth and not quite accurately God’s Word.

a. *Self-criticism, Painful but Wholesome*

There are those who say that it is impossible to escape some measure of bias. But objectivity is essential to truth, and it begins not in arguing yes and no

over the interpretation of a passage of scripture. It begins, if it does begin, in the more responsible, rational activity that distinguishes men from animals. The human kind can take stock of his thinking and begin to ask questions about his heretofore undisturbed, unquestioned ideas—the ideas by which he judges the right and wrong, good and bad, true and false of all matters that come to his attention. Self-criticism is a noble art; it is the ability to look inward, critically, at oneself. It is the beginning of wisdom, the foundation of all learning.

Can we change our inner computer? Can one who has been taught that the earth is flat change his judgment-forming apparatus to accept a globe-shaped earth? Can one who believed that evil spirits cause disease become a respected and efficient scientist or physician who takes bacteria seriously? Can one who has held grossly faulty ideas of God learn about Jesus who corrects errors men have about God? Such corrections are possible, and the Bible proceeds on that assumption.

b. Some Values of Eisegesis

Eisegesis is the personal bias we bring with us to the Bible. It must be recognized for the danger that it is to biblical preaching. But Jay Williams in *Theology Today* suggests another dimension:

As an interpreter of Scripture, each man brings with him a whole pile of intellectual and emotional baggage which cannot easily be dispensed with. In fact, to jettison it would be like trying to perform a self-styled prefrontal lobotomy. In order to think at all, we must think with a cultural and linguistic context . . . which shapes what we see and what we are likely *not* to see.⁵

We must stop and ask: Is an empty, unbiased mind so desirable even if such were possible? All thinking requires a context of culture and language that not only hides some things from us but discovers things to us few others would see. Besides the obvious projections of our heritage that bring some scriptural insights into focus, there is also a very personal and subjective preparation that sensitizes us to truth others miss. Deep sorrow, bitter disappointment and disillusionment, profound questioning and searching for meanings, loneliness, stabbing beauty, wonder and curiosity, inexpressible desire—any or all these may serve to sensitize us to truths in the Word. They were always there but are freshly exposed and reserved for those whose souls have been bared by great emotion and experience to receive them. Less sensitive souls fail totally to “see” these truths. Extreme emotional and empathetic life experiences gave David a grasp of truth and faith that provides profound help to us in our extreme life experiences.

Bringing these highly personal sensitivities, peculiar dispositions, opennesses, and yearnings to God’s Word, along with the ear that hears “the beat of another drummer,” makes eisegesis not always a detriment to truth.

But eisegesis can be destructive of truth. The preacher must come to his task aware of his prejudicial “reading-into-ness” and humbly and prayerfully open himself to honest self-criticism. If he can recognize his blind, sometimes

bigoted eisegesis, yet add his unique personal contributions to the “enlightenment” moment, a “happening” can happen, gloriously, to him and, in turn, to those who hear his preaching.

A preacher does not, or should not, merely process truth, whipping it into palatable form to pour into other minds. He must first of all be possessed by it. He must become a living carrier of the truth. Deeply infected himself, he infects others in every contact. The religion of Jesus is more “a blessed contagion than a science. It is a divine infection that spreads from heart to heart . . . When you have it you can’t keep it.”⁶

After we have been warned against eisegesis—seeing only what we want to see—and have recognized that a certain kind of eisegesis is necessary, we are ready to face into the truth that the Bible yields its dynamic to those who bare their souls to it. Baring souls requires a faith that we can trust our souls to God through the Bible. We can wrestle with it as Jacob wrestled with the Angel. Finally confessing his own nature, he received a new name to live up to. So can come to every truth-seeker a new dimension of understanding.

Leander Kirk says it well: “If there is not struggle with the text, no exposure to it, the text will degenerate into a useful tool with which the preacher hopes to sanctify ideas he already has . . . Unless the word is *heard* it cannot be resaid . . . Where there is authentic hearing, the preacher risks being vulnerable.”⁷

So, in the final analysis, this Word of God is not presenting us with powerful passages to lift out and take up to hurl at others, thus slaying them with the truth. First of all, that Word must slay us, compelling us to incarnate it. Only then can we use it to lead others to the Lord. Only then will they take orders from that Word for every detail of their own lives.

Gold-mining the Bible—Exegesis

The use the preacher makes of the Bible reveals his idea of what the Bible is for. If he perceives the Bible to be but a well of preaching texts for which he dips each time he preaches, his sermonizing will be disoriented and shallow. Hermeneutics is based on the conviction that the Bible is given, with all its diversity, as communication from God to man. It is not a book of mystery and magic (even spiritual magic) but of revelation—an opening. It speaks to a man’s mind as well as to his heart. The Bible must be understood before it can be obeyed.

**THE BIBLE MUST BE
UNDERSTOOD BEFORE
IT CAN BE OBEYED.**

The Wesleyan theological emphasis is built on this approach to the Scriptures. Not that Wesleyanism has a corner on this approach—far from it. But the typical Wesleyan doctrines arise from the assumption, derived from the appeals in the Bible, that God is revealing himself and that man is capable by God’s grace of responding to that revelation. The view held about God and man and

grace is the watershed between quite divergent understandings of theology. To the Wesleyan, the sweep of historical revelation is spoken to any and all men, not to any limited segment of mankind. On the basis of his observations, the Wesleyan feels that any limitations of that ability are imported from purely human assumptions about God and man. It does not come from what is disclosed by God and about himself and humanity in the Bible.

The God whose nature is love has put himself into human history in order that mankind can understand what He is saying. Every new flash of insight is preceded by historical steps to bring the mind to the place where faith is possible. The master example is the coming of Jesus, which was heralded in innumerable ways. Its significance could not be shrouded in a cloud of mystery but was opened to the full experience of men: "That . . . which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes . . . and our hands have handled . . . declare we unto you" (1 John 1:1, 3).

The biblical exegete, then, will need to trace these steps in order to explain Jesus Christ. The Book of Hebrews does this. The author comes up to Jesus through the Old Testament Tabernacle symbolism and the experiences in the Sinai wilderness. A Jew could thus understand Jesus as the Fulfillment of all the ritual. Stephen, in Acts 7, brought his snarling audience through the same history but selected another line of reasoning.

Every biblical truth has a history. Every Christian doctrine has deep roots. Every text has a context that draws the preacher into very specific human problems. The context is inspired, too, and cannot be divorced from the text if the sermon remains the *Word of God* and not the empty *words of man*. Sermons cannot often bring all the historical roots into the pulpit, but these roots must keep the preacher tied to the Word.

The Bible was not given to us to read in bits and pieces, such as a snippet or two pulled out of a "Promise Box" at the breakfast table. Many people have come up through a concept of the Bible that militates against a submission to the discipline of study. Some have thought that the Bible was a source of magic verses to be pulled out of the box to paste over our problems to make the pain go away. It has tended to make our religion a life of "snack-shop" consumption. Snacks are not only expensive but lacking in proteins and vitamins. The shallow biblical usages of today's pop religion cannot answer the real questions that our world raises. Getting hooked on religious slogans, and chopped-off Bible verses cannot, in the long haul, lead to spiritual health and sustained strength.

The Bible is not really the Word from God until it is used as it was intended to be read. "The Scripture," James Smart says, "was a Public Book for the church." Paul's letters, for instance, had to do with "what it means to be a church." They were written to the Christian community, calling it to its redemptive mission. "The Bible is marching orders for an army, not bedtime reading to help one sleep more soundly."⁸ Which is quicker (we sometimes ask our-

selves): a couple of “begats” or a couple of aspirins to “make me drowsy so I can get to sleep”?

Really hearing the Word allays unwholesome fears in order to drive us to courageous action. Every renewal of the church, Leander Kirk reminds us, results from a new hearing of the Bible, listening for and listening to that “strange, disturbing, yet gracious word.” This will turn the church outward to the world and away from its preoccupation with itself and its own image. A most unlikely but memorable title of an article in *Christian Century* says brusquely what we are trying to say: “How I Have Been Snagged by the Seat of My Pants While Reading the Bible.” Author Walter Wink writes about the startling new vistas of relevant biblical truth that had transformed his thinking.⁹

Exegesis is listening intently to what the Bible has to say to the preacher before he says it to the people. But “listening to” is sweaty work. John Wesley speaks to this point in a hard-hitting address to the preachers working under him:

How much shall I suffer in my usefulness, if I have wasted opportunities . . . and droned away precious hours . . . if I have loitered away the time in which I might have become acquainted with the treasures of sacred knowledge. . . . Have I used all possible diligence to receive the most accurate knowledge of the English scripture? . . . Have I . . . attained a thorough knowledge of the sacred text . . . of its literal and spiritual meaning? Otherwise, how can I attempt to instruct others therein? Without this, I am a blind guide indeed. I am absolutely incapable of teaching my flock what I have never learned myself; no more fit to lead souls to God, than I am to govern the world.¹⁰

“Listening to” involves developing an appreciation for the Bible as literature. The wealth of literary forms must be interpreted according to its own genre. *History* must be read for what it is, not as theology. A theology of the Holy Spirit cannot be derived from Acts, which was intended only to tell us what happened and to indicate why it happened. Poetry like “The hills skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs” is not scientific fact, though it portrays otherwise inexpressible truths. *Parables* point to one thing and should not be made to run around “on all fours” to flesh out a sermon from them. *Phenomenal* truth and *proverbial* truth must be carefully distinguished for what they are.

C. Peter Wagner summarizes the ideas in these words: “Not all parts of Scripture were meant to serve the same function. . . . We should never go first to non-theological portions of Scripture to form any Christian doctrine or practice, then try to make the theological portions fit in. That is allowing the tail to wag the dog.”¹¹

Long and diligent and honest and deep study of a biblical book, or series of books, will eventually be rewarded by a grasp of the underlying relationship of the parts. When these previously unrelated parts mesh, the intellectual joy and spiritual rejuvenation and preaching power is almost overwhelming.

The People—the Existential Dimension

A young businesswoman was caught up in a very high spiritual “happening” in a recent Sunday morning service. Later she said, “But I cannot bring this into my Monday work experience. These are two worlds that won’t come together.” Why not? For the preacher, the goal of the interpretation of the Bible is to bring the two worlds together for the people to whom he ministers. Jesus’ word to Peter is very apropos: “Feed my sheep.” This is what hermeneutics is all about. The subject matter of the text in its concreteness must be stated in such a way that people can grasp it and learn to find in the Bible a word spoken to their specific lives.

This involves the preacher in knowing his people inside out. As a rule, unless the preacher makes himself available, the people tend to hide from him their real, secular problems. They may listen to the pulpit language with toleration but without grasp. Theological language becomes a set of labels with very little understanding of the content of the package they are on. Bible stories often remain simply fantasy—pious but not real. The whole of the scientific world is checked at the church door and left outside.

The moral dilemma of the modern world presses in on every side. Concerns such as the children’s social problems, family planning, and abortion are simply on a different wavelength from that which the preacher speaks about. Personal problems of depression, fear, excessive desire, spiritual malaise, emotional insecurity do not seem to find answers in church. Too often the perplexed preacher, possibly troubled by the same problems, proposes too simple an answer to a complex situation: “You need another work of grace” or “Jesus is the Answer” or “Trust God more.” These admonitions sound religious, but they are hollow.

Often in preachers’ retreats or workshops, the speakers grapple with these issues honestly and creatively. Most of the workshop participants are helped and agree. But, most will say, “All this is true, but I could not say these things from the pulpit. The people are not ready. They could not stand it.” Morton Enslin, already quoted, says with great relevance, “The people were ready, and they still are. Frank, honest, and understandable insights into the preacher’s thinking—certainties and uncertainties—are always welcome.”¹² The people are needing to hear what the preacher is experiencing and what he is finding in the Bible that speaks to him.

Remembering that interpretation is for communication, the question needs to be constantly raised, “Are we getting the message through?” C. S. Lewis once said that in his opinions every ministerial student, before being granted a degree, should have to take an especially important and difficult theological chapter and translate it into language the ordinary layman could understand. Lewis was not primarily a theologian, but he had so mastered the field that he could speak to a growing radio audience on doctrinal matters and be listened to avidly. We today

read what he said with increasing interest. What he said was simple but with enormous depth because it touched life.

The New Testament, sometimes hard for us to understand now, was not difficult when it was written. Koine Greek was the common language of the people. It was not the King James classic language of that day but much more like *The Living Bible* type of talk. And the earthly, human Hebrew language of the Old Testament was the dictionary that gave meaning to the New Testament ideas. The sublime themes of the Bible, so often locked in technical language today, were originally conveyed in the language of the common man.

Much of Black preaching today has anticipated and outstripped the contemporary hermeneutical concepts. Henry H. Mitchell, in *Black Preaching*, quotes Gerhard Ebeling: “The Word of God must be left free to assert itself in an unflinching critical manner against distortions and fixations. But . . . theology and preaching should be free to make a translation into whatever language is required at the moment and to refuse to be satisfied with correct, archaising repetition of ‘pre-doctrine.’”¹³

Mitchell says the Black preacher has known this all along, and he shows us concretely how this is so. This could well become a pattern for all Christian preaching. We are reminded of two principles of the new hermeneutic that can contribute to our effectiveness.

a. *The gospel must be declared in the language and culture of the people—the vernacular.* People listen with unabashed eagerness to a gospel proclamation in the language and idiom they live with every day.

b. *The gospel must speak to the contemporary man and his needs.* The Sunday sermon must have something to say to Monday’s labor problems. The sermon will not change the Monday world, but it can bring light to bear on it that will help the people to live with Monday redemptively. Sunday can be carried into Monday to make a difference.

Maybe the white, Western style of preaching has surrendered too much to a depersonalized gospel drained of the deeply human, realistic, earthly idiom the gospel came to us in. Maybe there has yawned between the pulpit and the pew a gulf that becomes wider as time goes on and theological terms become more stereotyped and rigid.

The alternative to the preaching that has lost its grip is not to resort to gimmicky, shallow, storytelling binges designed to compete with popular TV entertainment. The alternative is to become a Bible preacher—a very special sort of Bible preacher. Merely telling a Bible story with dramatic flourishes is not in itself Bible preaching.

The biblical preacher who interprets dynamically, lives in the world of the Scriptures: “His most intimate companions are prophets, psalmists, apostles, evangelists with Jesus Christ at their center.”¹⁴ He must learn their language, listen to them, enter their world, hear what they have to say to him, and be shattered and then healed by them.

But more than that, he must be immersed in the world around him where his people work and live. Smart reminds us that these two worlds must begin to merge so that one speaks to the other. We must learn to look in the Bible and see past the cultural differences and recognize *today's* world there, not merely a strange, ancient, unreal world. Underneath the cultural overlay is the familiar world all of us live in.

A sermon that has become incarnated in a preacher who has paid the price of knowing his Bible—and knowing his people—can stand up to the challenge the people demand of it. The preacher can do something of what Jesus did, which was to open himself to the full view of people where they could see the sermon lived out. This is hermeneutics.

We cannot escape the force of the conclusion Henry Mitchell makes when he says, “Hermeneutics’ is a code word for putting the gospel on a tell-it-like-it-is, nitty-gritty basis.”¹⁵

1. Morton Enslin, “Religion Without Theology,” *Religion in Life* (Spring 1976), 69.

2. James Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 22.

3. James Earl Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit* (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, 1974), 53-54.

4. *Ibid.*, 55.

5. Jay Williams, “Exegesis/Eisegesis: Is There a Difference?” *Theology Today* (Oct. 1973), 218-27.

6. W. E. Sanger, *Why Jesus Never Wrote a Book* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 15.

7. Leander Kirk, “Listening to and Listening For,” *Interpretation* (April 1973), 184-202.

8. Smart, *Strange Silence*, 103.

9. Walter Wink, “How I Have Been Snagged by the Seat of My Pants While Reading the Bible,” *Christian Century* (Sept. 24, 1975), 816-19.

10. John Wesley, “Address to the Clergy” (Feb. 1756).

11. C. Peter Wagner, “Bibliolatry,” *Eternity* (Nov. 1958), 16.

12. Enslin, “Religion Without Theology,” 70.

13. Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (New York: Lippincott Press, 1970), 35.

14. Smart, *Strange Silence*, 163.

15. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 30.

Originally published as “Responsible Biblical Interpretation,” chapter 2 of *Biblical Preaching for Contemporary Man*, comp. Neil B. Wiseman (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1976), 25-43.



I believe that there are
many accommodating preachers,
and too many practitioners
in the church who are
not believers.

Jesus Christ did not say,
“Go into all the world and
tell the world that it is quite right.”

The Gospel is something
completely different.

In fact,
it is directly opposed
to the world.

—C. S. Lewis

From *The Quotable Lewis*, eds. Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1989), 493.

PREACHING GREAT BIBLE CHARACTERS

Ross W. Hayslip

BIOGRAPHY, wherever we find it, makes thrilling reading. And the Bible uses these natural interests as a channel for getting truth to us. There's nothing more interesting than people and their stories.

Thomas Carlyle correctly suggests, "The highest being reveals himself in man." That is why the Bible is filled with biographical material. Its pages are crowded with true-to-life people—men, women, children, kings, queens, commoners, soldiers, fishermen, tax collectors, priests, and shepherds. Some of them are known by their names, others by what they did. Stalwarts like Abraham, Moses, Joseph, and Paul have great details given about them. In other accounts, there are only brief flashes, like the references to Pilate's wife, who sought to warn her husband; Simon of Cyrene, who became immortal as a crossbearer; Cleopas, who appeared on the Emmaus road; and Eutychus, who fell asleep during Paul's preaching. Since people, rather than abstract propositions, are the aim of vital Christianity, we should not be surprised that the Bible devotes large spaces to biographies.

The Incarnation—the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us—provides the noblest example of God's way of clothing majestic truth with human personality to make it understandable to common folk in every generation. Like secular history, the Bible teaches deep lessons through the lives of people. God illuminates His message by allowing us to see it in human form. So as we allow the personalities of the Bible to march before our congregations, they see truth. To see truth and to act upon it—that is the goal of all preaching.

HUMAN INTEREST—A MAGNET TO TRUTH

As you journey through the Bible, you are constantly bumping into people. Starting in Genesis you begin with "Adam the Original Man," "Eve the Grand Mother," "Cain the Killer," "Abel, the Righteous," "Nimrod, the Hunter," "Enoch, Who Defeated Death," "Noah, the Boat-builder," "Abraham, the Pioneer," "Isaac, the Well-Digger," "Esau, the Hunter," "Jacob, the Wrestler," "Judah, the Ancestor

of Christ,” and “Joseph, the Dreamer.” What an interesting cast of characters make up the first book of the Bible! The designations here given to them could be changed if a different aspect of their character is to be emphasized. You might look at “Adam, in God’s Image,” “Eve, Who Listened to the Tempter,” “Cain, Who Questioned God,” “Abel, Whose Sacrifice Was Approved,” “Enoch, Who Walked with God,” “Noah, Who Preached of Righteousness,” “Abraham, Who Believed God,” “Isaac, the Sacrifice,” “Esau and Jacob, the Unidentical Twins,” and “Joseph, the Governor of Egypt.”

Along with Eve there are some other women worthy of note in Genesis. We find “Sarah, Who Laughed at God,” “Rebekah, Who Went to the Well,” “Rachel, the Mother of Joseph,” “Hagar, the Handmaid,” “Remember Lot’s Wife,” and “The Wife of Potiphar.” If we read the background material in Genesis, we come up with some real facts of interest for preaching about these noted women.

With a good concordance you can classify your Bible characters. “Famous Failures” might be “Lot, the Mayor of Sodom,” “Samson, the Weak Strong Man,” “Saul, the Big Little King,” “Solomon, the Foolish Wise Man,” “Jonah, the Willful Prophet,” and “Demas, the Deserter.”

Another way of grouping characters could be “Workers for God.” We could list “Caleb, Who Called for Mountains,” “Elijah, Who Prayed,” “Daniel, Who Stopped Lions’ Mouths,” “Joshua, the Leader of Men,” and “Barnabas, the Great Giver.” The “Marys of the Bible” could be listed for a sermon grouping as “Mary, the Mother of Jesus,” “Mary, the Sister of Martha,” “Mary Magdalene,” and “Mary, the Mother of Mark.” These are only a few of many possibilities; the biographical treasures of the Bible are limitless.

BIBLE CHARACTERS CAPTURE ATTENTION

**“THE BEST PART OF
PREACHING IS THE
GRACE OF GOD AT
WORK IN REAL
PEOPLE.”**

Everyone loves a good story. The late General Superintendent Dr. Hardy C. Powers frequently admonished pastors to wrap the truth in a story so people could never forget it. And he did it so well and so frequently that his human-interest stories will always be remembered by those who heard him preach. The Bible does that too.

The Bible character sermon has wide appeal because it speaks quickly and directly to the life experiences of the average man. Samuel Johnson expressed a commonly held opinion, “The biographical part of literature is what I like the best.” And a spiritual paraphrase of Johnson describes the preference of many sermon listeners from the pew, “The best part of preaching is the grace of God at work in real people.”

BIBLE CHARACTERS PROVIDE EXAMPLES

Children imitate without apology; adults try to be more coy about it, but they imitate too. Nearly everyone wants to be like his ideal person. So worthy models deeply influence the development of Christian character. When the 21st-century preacher announces his topic, “Religion for the Contemporary Businessman,” he has the attention of all his hearers who are in business. Where in all the Bible could he find more preaching material than from Joseph’s business career? The Joseph sermon leads the preacher to virtues like honesty, integrity, and optimism. Where else could a preacher find so much interesting material that simply cries out to be preached?

Frank Caldwell summarizes, “It is primarily at the point of indirect imitation of ideal persons that the angle of biographical preaching attains its greatest significance.”¹ Such real-life examples provide interesting, useful scriptural prods to effective present-day living.

FAULTS TO AVOID

Biographical preaching consisting of a running commentary is as dull as dust. But a piece of life about a Bible personality with a clear, sharp focus often provides the exact truth channel needed by the preacher. Blackwood illustrates a way biographical sermons can be used to preach doctrine:

For example, think about the Providence of God in the life of a busy man. Instead of arguing about the matter, or trying to prove it by logic, one may begin with Joseph. One points out that during his early trials and disappointments, as well as during his adventures in high government office, God was looking out for His servant and friend. This is exactly what Providence means, in so far as it concerns one man. According to the root idea of the word, Providence means that God is the Good Provider. He looks ahead and prepares the way for the man who trusts in Him. This is what the scholars sometimes call the doctrine of Particular Providence.²

Thus for a sermon on a major character, the preacher does well to focus clearly on one truth as found in the experience of the Bible personality.

To make the biographical sermon effective, the preacher must recognize that the Bible is not simply an anthology of biographies. The details must be filled in from historical and geographical data from the context and reference works like the atlas or Bible history books. A vivid imagination always provides a plus for biographical preaching, but imagination must be applied only after a thorough study of the time, the culture, and the geography of the Bible character under consideration. Useful biographical preaching gives needed attention to the life situation of the person being discussed.

Biographical preaching impact is frequently blunted when the preacher overloads his narrative preaching with long explanations and forced conclu-

sions. Baumann summarizes the idea, “Narrative sermons have implicit suggestive applications throughout the sermon and it is unnecessary to insult the listener by tacking them on.”³ When one preaches on biblical personalities, he does well to allow his characters to speak for themselves. This is done by description, interaction, and conversations from the actual biblical record.

Good structuring of biographical preaching generally requires the preacher to deal with a time sequence from the life of his character; for example, youth, middle life, and old age, or a specific event or series of events like preconversion and postconversion. Delightful and moving holiness preaching can grow out of a sermon on a particular New Testament personality before and after Pentecost. Another structuring that always secures attention is a contrasting of two Bible characters, like Jacob and Esau, Paul and Barnabas, or Peter and John. Still another way of building the Bible character sermon is to trace the actual spiritual development of a person. Then the hearer can reasonably conclude there is hope for me—I can make it.

Biographical preaching must center on the possibilities of grace at work in human life. There are failures and sins in the lives of biblical characters that provide a legitimate basis for warning, but a totally negative message without the proclamation of God’s willingness to make every person new is not the effective kind of biographical preaching. Rather our most powerful pulpit proclamation announces that our God is redemptively at work in the common clay of human nature. Louis Pasteur caught the value of biographical studies when he wrote, “From the lives of men whose passage is marked by a trace of durable light, let us piously gather up every word, every incident likely to make known the incentives of their great souls, for the education of posterity.”⁴ And that is a worthy goal for every sermon on a biblical character.

Biographical preaching must avoid too frequent emphasis on one character. J. Sidlow Baxter speaks of exhaustless biographical resources: “Again and again we turn back to the figures which move before us in its pages, and find new relevances, significances, and new applications to our own times and to our own lives.”⁵

GETTING THE IDEA FOR THE SERMON

Halford Luccock once correctly said that a sermon, like a river, begins in the sky. The preacher is a proclaimer for God. What the minister declares must have behind it the authority of “Thus saith the Lord.” I have found that often God speaks to me through the apparent spiritual needs of my people.

I have found that the sacred seasons of the Christian calendar are times that I need to preach on the great truths that surround Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost; and for this, Bible personalities often help me. For example, there are wonderful character studies in the Gospels surrounding the events of Christ’s birth. Before you use them, you must ask yourself what precise message you

wish to bear. What truth is to be proclaimed? The object of the sermon is of more importance than its subject. At Christmastime the purpose is to center the minds of your people on Christ's first coming, and yet you want to help them deepen their own devotional lives.

A few years ago I worked out the following Advent series. With Luke 2:1 as a text, I preached on "God Uses Caesar." The skeleton outline was: (1) God Uses People to Work Out His Purposes; (2) God Uses Time to Work Out His Purposes; and (3) God Uses Events to Work Out His Purposes. Luke 2:2 formed my text for "The Governor Who Missed It." The main points were: (1) The Governor Was Successful in the Secular; (2) God Was Seeking in the Spiritual; and (3) The Governor Was Lost in Self-Interest. The sermon that I think I enjoyed the most of this series was "Anna the Liberated Woman," with Luke 2:36-39 as background. Here is how I put it together:

A. *The Constancy of Her Character*

1. Anna was a prophetess. Four women are mentioned in the Old Testament as being prophetesses: Miriam (Exod. 15:20); Deborah (Judg. 4:4); Huldah (2 Kings 22:14); the unnamed wife of Isaiah (Isa. 8:3).
2. She was the daughter of Phanuel—his name meant "The Face of God." No doubt his spiritual influence was important in her life. Often as is the father, so is the daughter.
3. She was of the tribe of Asher—a Bible dictionary tells us of the failures of the tribe of Asher. Anna did not allow the failures of her ancestry to limit her.

B. *The Depth of Her Devotion*

1. She was of advanced age. Life can grow grander as it grows longer. You don't have to grow old inside. There are numerous examples of this from literature, both old and contemporary.
2. She had lived many years as a widow. She had tasted life's disappointments. God's concern for widows (a Bible textbook or concordance can help us here).
3. She attended the Temple. Church attendance was vital in her life. There is joy in going to the house of the Lord. In a study of "Great Churches of America" I found one common factor. There is something in their fellowship that makes people want to come to worship together.

C. *The Continuity of Her Communication*

1. She fasted and prayed night and day. Prayer is the lifting up of the heart, mind, and will toward God. Fasting intensifies the prayer.
2. Thanksgiving formed her spirit of prayer. There are at least three things for which we can always be thankful: The fact that we are God's children; His great plan of redemption for all men; and His

boundless love for the world. Rom. 8:28 will help us in our thanksgiving.

3. A life of testimony (v. 38). “She spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.” Dr. J. B. Chapman said, “We all need the grace of God to live the common life in an uncommon manner.” This is the greatest testimony we can give—“Living for Jesus a life that is true.”

Easter and Pentecost also abound with human personalities that can be woven into series of sermons that will not only spotlight the meaning of the season but will also present practical truth to help in day-by-day living.

BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS

Sermons never come easy. The modern preacher has a background of training in basic disciplines of literary composition. He has innumerable sermon helps. He has at his disposal countless volumes with all the fruits of scholarship, research, and fact-finding. Yet in spite of all these benefits he must, in the words of Halford Luccock, “toil as a miner under a landslide.” Authentic preaching comes only from intensive effort at preparation.

When I have found the direction in which I wish to go and have found a Bible character to lead me in that direction; then I must put the ideas together in a form that will get me there by the most direct path. When I was a young minister, I preached from 45 minutes to one hour. Now in my mature years 30 minutes is my absolute maximum. It takes a lot more time and work to prepare the 30-minute message than the hour monologue.

We must put into our sermons the blood of our own Christian personality, the sweat of our all-out effort, and the tears of our compassion for people.

About 20 years ago I sought to build a sermon that would challenge and inspire my people. The idea occurred to me that I could construct it around the theme “Three Men Named Ananias.” I started by reading the accounts of these men as I found them in the Word of God. All of these men are mentioned in the Book of Acts. Here is how it all came together.

Three Men Named Ananias

Text: Acts 23:2; 5:1; 9:10

Introduction: We are looking at three different men who had the same name.

Note the differences in their characters. A man’s name need not make or break him. He can grace or disgrace his name based on his relationship to his God and fellowmen.

A. *The Religionist* (Acts 23:1-5)

1. He was a member of one of the leading organizations of his day (Judaism).

2. He seems to have kept the ordinances of his faith (various laws and practices of Judaism common in that day).
 3. He was very sincere in his beliefs and in his reaction to the apostle Paul. (Sincerity does not keep us from being wrong.)
- B. *The Hypocrite* (Acts 5:1-11)
1. He was selfish in keeping that which he knew he ought to have given.
 2. He was doubtless fearful in that he failed to trust God in doing what he knew he should.
 3. He was a pretender to an action that he had failed to perform.
- C. *The Soul Winner* (Acts 9:1-19)
1. He was a disciple (v. 10). The meaning of true discipleship.
 2. He was a man of vision (v. 10). Without a vision the people perish.
 3. He was a man of obedience (v. 17). Doing the will of God leaves us no time for disputing about His plans. Obedience is indeed the Christian's crown.

I read and reread the scriptural accounts of these men until I felt acquainted with all three of them. Even now I occasionally rework the original outline, change some of my illustrations, and preach it again before a new group. Perhaps sometime in the future I shall take my three friends named Ananias and treat each one separately in a sermon, thus making a series of three.

UNITY CAN COME FROM DIVERSITY

Doctrine can be preached from biography. The first sermon that I ever heard Dr. Paul S. Rees deliver was at a great holiness convention. He spoke on the subject of "The Fullness of Barnabas," and his text was Acts 11:24, "For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord." Carefully and skillfully, Dr. Rees preached a dynamic sermon on the manner in which a human being may live the Spirit-filled life. The character of Barnabas is indeed a great springboard for preaching the experience of entire sanctification. Let's try to put it together and bring the theme of the unity of holiness out of the diversified aspects of a man's character.

A Good Man

Text: Acts 11:24

Introduction: Holiness is religious principle put into the motion of everyday life. It is the perfect love of God embodied in the character of human beings. We see the life of holiness here exemplified not in an apostle but in a lay worker.

A. *Barnabas, the Excellent Man*

1. Goodspeed's translation here calls Barnabas an "excellent man." He was large-hearted rather than large-headed. "Goodness" was God's appraisal here, not man's.

2. Filled with the Holy Spirit. Refer again to Acts 2:4 as to what happened at Pentecost. Holiness is the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
 3. Full of faith. This was one of the results of being filled with the Spirit. (Read Heb. 11 for illustrations.)
- B. *Barnabas, the Effective Evangelist*
1. “Considerable numbers of people were brought in for the Lord” (Moffatt). A considerable number—the experience of holiness will bring church growth.
 2. They were added to or brought in for the Lord. Not to personalities or organizations, but to God.
 3. Barnabas was an example of untiring efforts in his labor for the Lord.
- C. *Barnabas, the Faithful Encourager*
1. He saw the grace of God. One of the blessings and benefits of the holy life is to see God’s grace in operation in our world.
 2. He was glad. He knew that men would be happier as they grew in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.
 3. His exhortation. He encouraged the new Christians to stay true. “With purpose of heart” is a phrase that tells us how holiness will fix our hearts on God.

FILLING IN DETAILS

We take all of the relevant facts that God’s Word gives us, knowing that the biblical writers are presenting close-ups rather than panoramas. We can use restrained imagination to fill in some of the blank spots in order to present a picture that will adequately show the area of truth that we wish to share. We do no violence to the truth as we seek to see these characters as they really were. In fact, it has been well said that a preacher without imagination is like an observatory without a telescope.

**A PREACHER
WITHOUT
IMAGINATION IS LIKE
AN OBSERVATORY
WITHOUT A
TELESCOPE.**

An old preacher friend, now long departed, had a holiness sermon focused on the character of the apostle Peter. His simple outline was: (1) Peter by the Fire (temptation in the court of the high priest); (2) Peter in the Fire (sanctification on the Day of Pentecost); (3) Peter on Fire (evangelization in Jerusalem). He used these points with great force to show how the power of the Holy Spirit affected the life of Simon Peter.

DON’T BEND THE CHARACTER TO FIT THE PLOT

There is a temptation in biographical preaching to magnify the negative

aspects of the character by making his faults loom disproportionately large. I have heard Nicodemus pilloried in many pulpits as a coward because he came to Jesus by night. Ananias the liar is a far more familiar figure than Ananias who prayed with Paul in Damascus. We are far more acquainted with Judas the traitor than the Judas to whose house on Straight Street Paul was led blinded. If you are going to preach a series on “The Bad People in the Bible,” you will probably select such characters as Cain, Esau, Balaam, Saul, Jezebel, Pilate, and Judas. If you do so, be sure to show how they are reflections of our modern society and as such deserve our sympathy for their failures, since we know full well that we, too, are not beyond the possibility of duplicating their acts.

I have heard some rather startling conclusions drawn about eternal punishment from the story of the rich man in hell as recorded in Luke 16. Be sure that you do your homework when you prepare your message on this character.

If you are going to preach about James, be sure that you keep separate James, the son of Zebedee; James, the son of Alphaeus; and James, the brother of the Lord. The James on the Mount of Transfiguration and the James who wrote the Epistle are evidently not one and the same, so they should not be identified as one person.

VARIETY CAN BE THE SPICE OF THE SERMON

Sometimes the message can come through by the treatment of three distinct personalities.

Investing in Eternity

Text: Matt. 26:13

Scripture Lesson: Matt. 26:6-13

Introduction: Here is a study of three persons who had intimate contact with Jesus. Their response to the encounter was varied. Let us examine with care each person’s response to the presence of the Lord.

A. *Simon, Who Did His Duty*

1. Simon the leper is said to be a relative of Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead. He was cured of leprosy or else he could not have mingled publicly with people. He could have been the leper healed in Matt. 8:2-4.
2. He had opened his home in hospitality to Jesus. The presence of Jesus makes a great difference in our homes. He comes only by our invitation and stays only at our desire.
3. When He is in our presence, we must decide what our relationship to Him shall be. Will He be our Savior? Will we acknowledge Him as our Lord and Master? Shall we, like Simon, simply treat Him as a guest?

B. *The Disciples, Who Misread Motives*

1. They expressed indignation. Jesus was many times an embarrassment to His disciples (e.g., the woman at the well at Sychar). The woman was a poet at heart while the disciples were prosaic. They made the mistake of criticizing another person's act of sincere devotion to God.
2. It was a waste to them. They said that it could have been sold. We can never sell the sacred. The amount that was involved was equal to a year's wages for a workman. We can never count any effort for God's service as waste.
3. "The poor ye have always." What Jesus was saying was, "If you love Me sincerely, you will give proper care to the poor." We can love and serve Jesus and also minister to the poor. The deeper we love Him, the more we will care for them.

C. *The Woman, Who Invested in Eternity*

1. She brought encouragement to Jesus in an hour of need. He was entering into the shadows of the Cross. She sought to encourage the Savior.
2. She demonstrated devotion at its finest. We show our devotion quite clearly by our acts of worship. Kierkegaard said, "God has only one passion—to love and be loved. God is that which demands absolute love."
3. She made an eternal impact. Now nearly 2,000 years after this event we are drawing blessing and benefit from this simple deed of love performed by an insignificant woman. Our impact on life will be rated by what we gave to it rather than what we kept from it.

Conclusion: The story of this act is a story of three people whose lives were touched by the presence of Jesus. We remember two of these unfavorably, but the one whose service was motivated by love will forever be an example to us.

FIND YOURSELF IN THE BIBLE

**THE BETTER YOU
KNOW A CHARACTER,
THE CLOSER YOU
IDENTIFY WITH HIM.**

It is interesting to note that James comments on Elijah by saying that he was "a man subject to like passions as we are" (5:17). One great translator has put it: "Elijah was only a man like ourselves." When you see yourself in the Bible and realize that people haven't changed since the days when they appeared in Bible history, then it becomes easy to identify with people with whom you can share fears, hopes, and ambitions. The better you know a character, the closer you identify with him, the easier it will be for you to weave him into the

message that you seek to proclaim. You are, in a sense, re-creating these personalities so that they are seen as real human beings. You seek to understand and interpret their spiritual experiences, their faith, and their relationship with God. As their re-creator, you owe them the acquaintanceship that can only come from a careful study of their lives.

BIOGRAPHICAL PREACHING HAS ITS OWN REWARD

Perhaps the greatest value of biographical preaching is that it gives you an opportunity to vividly show how the transforming grace of God performs miracles in human personality. This kind of preaching points out the possibilities of sainthood in every Magdalene; a rock of fidelity and firmness potentially in every impulsive and vacillating Peter; a guileless Israelite in the man who asks, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" an apostle of love in the young man who seeks authority and encouragement to invoke the consuming fire of heaven upon the heads of his opposers.

I once heard Dr. Thor Hall of Duke Divinity School define preaching as tearing loose the biblical message from its historical setting and using it to confront contemporary situations. We really understand the story of the Good Samaritan when the Jericho road becomes Main Street in our hometown, and the priest and Levite are seen as our neighbors who live on either side of us. The prodigal son is seen in the thousands of runaway kids that throng to our cities. The rich fool has far more meaning for us when we locate him among some of our friends who have become enamored with the world of the material at the expense of their soul's welfare. The biblical characters live all around us. Let them speak for you in full dimension and color.

-
1. Frank Caldwell, *Preaching Angels* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954), 54-55.
 2. Andrew W. Blackwood, *Preaching from the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1941), 63.
 3. J. Daniel Baumann, *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 251.
 4. Quoted in Paul S. Rees, *Men of Action in Acts* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revel Co., 1966), VI.
 5. J. Sidlow Baxter, *Mark These Men* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 5.

Originally published as chapter 5 of *Biblical Preaching for Contemporary Man*, comp. Neil B. Wiseman (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1976), 74-90.

People imagine
the longer a sermon is,
the more good
it will do.
This is a grand mistake.
The help done
on earth,
God doth it . . . ,
and He
doth not need that
we should use many words.
—John Wesley

Quoted in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 31.

5

PREACHING GREAT BIBLE PARAGRAPHS

W. E. McCumber

AN ENGLISH PASTOR who was prejudiced against women preachers once said, “A woman preaching is like a dog walking on its hind legs; it’s seldom done; and when it is done, it’s poorly done.” I do not share his prejudice. Let God call whomever He wishes to preach the Word. But the quoted complaint could be justly applied to much preaching from paragraphs of Scripture—seldom done and poorly done. If this is true, why preach from paragraphs instead of phrases or verses? A few reasons are readily apparent.

Paragraph preaching is more *natural*. The Bible was written in paragraphs, not in isolated words or sentences. The basic “meaning chunk” (to borrow a phrase from Bernard Ramm) of Scripture is the paragraph. Preaching from them, when done well, is bound to be more biblical and more biblically communicative. It allows the Bible to address its own message to the congregation more easily than other kinds of preaching. The pastor who is compelled to understand and explain a paragraph of Scripture is less likely to use his text as a springboard for plunging into subjective ideas and interests. It is harder to free oneself from a paragraph than a sentence. The minister is called to be the servant of the Word, not to make it the servant of his own desires and opinions. Preaching is bound to the Bible, and a paragraph has more strength to bind than have isolated verses.

Paragraph preaching is more *helpful*. It compels the preacher, and trains the people, to use the Bible as it was written. Handling the Bible atomistically by seizing upon individual verses without regard to their context has exerted a baneful influence upon the church. Such proof-texting has buttressed every heresy. And it has allowed a misguided people to stamp as a “Bible preacher” someone who impresses the ignorant or uncaring by his ability to quote scores of random verses in support of notions that may be grossly unbiblical and subversive of genuine Christianity. The church deserves more honest and helpful preaching. Paragraph preaching is a powerful stimulus to a true handling of the Word.

Paragraph preaching is more *versatile*. It lends itself to a wide range of materials and helps the preacher to avoid monotony of theme. My mother once complained that a pastor changed his text every Sunday but never his sermon. If he had patiently and honestly examined the meaning of each text in its context and had preached from paragraphs instead of sentences, he would not have been trapped in a barren pulpit ministry. Pursuing one's way through a Gospel or an Epistle will force upon the attention of the preacher every great concept employed by evangelist or apostle to set forth the riches of Jesus Christ. Preaching from paragraphs doesn't make monotony impossible, but it does make it less likely.

Given such advantages, those who seek to do paragraph preaching must be concerned with three things: selecting the paragraph, expounding the paragraph, and doing this with variety.

SELECTING THE PARAGRAPH

The Bible furnishes an abundance of preaching material. We are embarrassed by our wealth, not our poverty, after a few years of study and preaching. The problem becomes one of selection. With so many texts crying out to be preached, what shall we choose? Several factors are involved.

**“WRESTLE WITH
GREAT THEMES EVEN
IF THEY THROW
YOU.”**

a. The ability of the preacher. The pastor should know what he is talking about when he speaks from the pulpit. Some parts of the Scriptures are easier than others to exegete and expound. Until he has become adept at using the tools of exegesis and can unravel the knotty problems of the more difficult passages, a preacher is well-advised to stick to simpler portions of the Scriptures. He should learn to walk before he tries to climb. But he should keep at the study of Scriptures until he gains confidence enough to leave the lowlands and risk the mountains. He must not wait too long to pit his strength against some of the tougher parts of the Bible. As one has urged, “Wrestle with great themes even if they throw you.” His rule should be to choose a paragraph he can handle.

b. The needs of the congregation. The paragraph from which one preaches should have something significant to say to the hearers. Preaching is vastly more than supplying factual data or rehearsing ancient history. There are some paragraphs of the Scriptures that really do not speak to the felt needs of a modern congregation. As a sample: “The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, 74. The singers: the sons of Asaph, 128. The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, and the sons of Shobai, in all 139” (Ezra 2:40-42, NASB). Surely a preacher may avoid preaching from that paragraph all his life

without feeling that he has cheated the people. Some portions of the Scriptures that may be of interest to the archivist or historian do not meaningfully address “the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker.”

c. The sequence in a series of messages. If one is preaching through a book of the Bible, the process of selection is almost automatic. One simply goes on to the next paragraph or paragraphs that supply the next unit of thought. Even so, the preacher may not choose to expound every paragraph of the book. When I was a pastor, I preached through the Gospel of Luke, but I omitted most of the teaching passages in the early chapters, because I planned to cover that material in a future series from Matthew. Planning a whole series in advance greatly facilitates selection.

d. The suggestions of the people. Pastors sometimes poll the congregation for sermon suggestions. They can then compile lists of those topics or chapters or doctrines or ethical issues the people would like to have treated from the pulpit. The minister is called to proclaim what people *need* to hear, not what they *want* to hear, of course. Most of the time people will respond from the level of needs—from what is “bugging” them. The pastor reserves the right to amend the list. Conceivably, a segregated congregation in an area of racial turmoil will not want to hear a sermon based on the parable of the Good Samaritan, but they need to.

e. The calendar of the church. The great days that commemorate God’s mighty saving acts call for certain special materials. Other specific types of passages may be used to lead up to and to lead away from the sermons for these days. A series of paragraphs drawn from the prophets, relating to the coming Messiah, may well precede the Christian sermon, while another series chosen from the ministry of Jesus supplies a rich foreground for the sermons on Good Friday and Easter.

f. The guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is a constant factor among the variables of selection. Every true minister desires this above all. He needs to remember that His guidance is not given magically. It need not await the hour for preaching. He is wiser to assume that He who spans all time and knows all hearts will guide the process of selection well in advance. Ted Martin’s dictum about an order of service fits here too: “The Holy Spirit would rather interrupt a program than invade a vacuum.” The Holy Spirit knows best the Bible’s meaning, the people’s lives, and the preacher’s abilities. He can be trusted to supervise the paragraph selection of the prayerful and trusting pastor.

EXPOSITION OF THE PARAGRAPH

Here the task may be discussed under the headings of understanding the material, structuring the sermon, and translating the message.

a. Understanding the material. This is the task of exegesis. Since interpretation of the Bible is discussed elsewhere in this book, it need not be enlarged

upon here. If only for emphasis, however, let me say here that adequate tools for exegesis are available to any pastor—books that will help him to interpret the Book. These can be purchased for less money than ministers often spend on equipment for hunting, fishing, and golfing. There is no justification for empty bookshelves and consequent shallow preaching.

Understanding demands that the preacher study the text in context, which includes (1) the paragraphs surrounding the one from which he intends to preach, (2) the entire book from which it has been selected, and (3) the whole tenor of the Bible with regard to the themes it contains. Word studies and theological motifs are important here, and so is the cultivation of historical imagination that projects one into the passage and its milieu.

As he studies the paragraph, he should keep raising three questions: (1) What does it say? He must deal intelligently with any textual problems the paragraph contains. (2) What does it mean? The meaning is to be exported from it, not imported into it. What is the writer, himself, intending to teach by what he has penned? (3) What does it demand? Unless the text makes some kind of demand, unless it summons to some kind of response, it is wasting time to preach it. The minister traffics in truth for life's sake. "These are written that . . . you may have life" (John 20:31).¹ How does the truth of the paragraph apply to the lives of preacher and people?

b. Structuring the sermon. It is important that the ideas be preached logically, coherently, and progressively, for the human mind is created to respond best to such presentation.

A *point of focus* needs to be found in the paragraph. For example, in a message from Luke 7:1-10 the point of focus was the words "Jesus . . . marvelled at him." Why would Jesus marvel at this man? (1) *His love was unusual.* He was a Gentile who loved the Jews (v. 5). He was a master who loved his slave (vv. 1-2). This was rare in Jesus' day. (2) *His humility was unusual.* He thought less of himself than others thought of him. They said, "He is worthy," but he said, "I am not worthy" (vv. 4, 6).

This was not false modesty, for he knew himself to be a person of authority (v. 8). (3) *His faith was unusual.* Just as his soldiers carried out his commands, because he represented the Roman emperor, he believed that Jesus could command illness because He represented the kingdom of God. Jesus had not found such faith "even in Israel" (v. 10, NRSV). The entire sermon was designed to raise the challenge: Does Jesus find such faith, humility, and love in us?

This leads to another thought. *The purpose of the sermon* determines its structure. Usually the purpose will be that of the paragraph; the writer's purpose determines the preacher's. Sometimes one may need to develop a secondary theme, without, of course, contradicting the primary theme of the passage.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SERMON DETERMINES ITS STRUCTURE.

For example, a message for pastors was structured from the material in Acts 18:5-17. The purpose of the sermon was to encourage pastors to determine both the tenure and content of their ministries by no other consideration than the will of God. Paul was a model of this attitude. The focus was on verse 11: "And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." The structure:

(1) *The Jews couldn't run him off.* "They opposed and reviled him" (v. 6). They launched "a united attack" upon him (v. 12). Despite the opposition he stayed at his post, for God ordered him to remain (vv. 9-10).

(2) *The church couldn't tie him down.* "He stayed a year and six months" and then moved on under marching orders from the Spirit. When turmoil subsided and problems lessened, he might have comfortably "homesteaded" the church there. But neither his friends nor his successes (vv. 7-8, 10) could dissuade him from the will of God for his ministry.

(3) *The devil couldn't shut him up.* While he stayed, he "was occupied with preaching" (v. 5) and with "teaching the word of God" (v. 11). When dragged before Gallio, though circumstances prevented him from speaking, he was ready and willing "to open his mouth" (v. 14). What a model of the dedicated and unintimidated minister! Neither troubles nor pleasures could silence his message or dictate his tenure. He went where he went, stayed where he stayed, and preached what he preached out of conviction that it was all the will of God for his ministry.

Luke's primary purpose in writing these paragraphs was to record a segment of Early Church history. A secondary purpose was to display the inoffensive nature of Christianity to Roman officialdom. Perhaps a tertiary purpose was to argue the validity of Paul's apostleship. Without contradicting any of these, the passage can be structured and preached for the purpose of challenging pastors to singleminded devotion to God's will for the time, place, and content of their ministries. The subtheme does not force the passage to say or mean anything foreign to itself.

In structuring the sermon, we must *limit our ideas* to achieve effectiveness. Many paragraphs are so rich in possibilities for preaching that one could use them all only by preaching a series of sermons from the same paragraph. To prevent rambling and to achieve cohesiveness, the pastor must be disciplined to reject all the ideas arising out of the passage that do not contribute to the purpose of the sermon.

John 2:1-11, which records Jesus' first miracle, is such a paragraph. The presence of Jesus at the wedding evokes a sermon idea on Jesus and our social life (vv. 1-2). The relationship of Mary to Jesus is intriguing; she fails as an intercessor (v. 3) but succeeds as an adviser (v. 5). The "six stone jars" standing empty speak of the failure of ritualism to give life (v. 6). The obedience of the servants in filling the jars "to the brim" reminds us that full obedience brings

full blessing (v. 7). The good wine served last speaks of the increasing joy of the Christian life (vv. 9-10). Ideas are jumping in every direction as one reads this passage. A point of focus and a purpose for the message keeps us from a sermon that goes everywhere and ends nowhere.

I found that focus once in the phrase “beginning of miracles” in verse 11 (KJV). The sermon was addressed to a church living in the past, mooning over the “good old days,” and doing little about the present challenge. The purpose of the sermon was to help them see the past as promise and to believe that God was as able and willing to work today and tomorrow as He had been yesterday. The introduction acknowledged that the conversion of water into wine was a tremendous incident, manifesting the glory of Jesus as the Son of God, and deepening the faith of the disciples. But it was just the beginning. Brief allusion was then made to the other six “signs” that John records: the healing of the officer’s son, the healing of the paralytic, the feeding of the multitude, the walking on the sea, the healing of the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus. Even these were not all. Many of Jesus’ miracles were left unrecorded (20:20; 21:35). From this “beginning” a single proposition was deduced: *God’s first miracle is never His last*. There will always be more to come. (1) Application was first made to the individual believer. Beyond the miracle of conversion God could provide miracles of cleansing, healing, feeding, and witnessing. (2) Application was then made to the corporate church. God’s love and power were only beginning in the foundation of the church. There could be and would be future miracles of revival, soul winning, and church growth. It was an effective blow at ancestor worship, but the strength of the blow lay in the concentration of ideas.

c. Translating the message. Exegetical accuracy and structural efficiency will not assure success in preaching if the preacher fails to speak the language of the people. His biblical and theological studies have involved language that is technical and not popular. He can easily forget that what is familiar to him is an unknown tongue to the congregation. Let me suggest three simple aids to communication.

(1) *Keep your sermon language simple.* Use theological terms only when you must, and then carefully define and explain them in words and by illustrations the hearers can grasp. Preaching over people’s heads, as one Scotsman observed, does not argue superior ammunition but inferior preaching.

(2) *Bring the people into the study when preparing the sermon.* In imagination gather a cross section of the congregation; and as you write, keep asking them, Is this clear? The issue is not whether or not it is clear to you, but whether it is clear to them.

(3) *Write for the ear, not for the eye.* Writing orally is crucial to the pastor’s task. If people are reading, and meanings are missed or ideas are fuzzy, they have leisure to reread until things break clear. But when you preach, it is going by them one time only. They cannot stop to reconsider anything without missing what follows.

Spoken prose must be plainer than written or communication bogs down. You will be preaching to the ear, so write for the ear when preparing to preach.

VARIATION OF STRATEGY

In paragraph preaching, as in all preaching, variety is desirable. The attention span and interest quotient of the average churchgoer is quite limited. Unvarying presentation of truth tends to further shrink the limits.

The available material is certainly varied. The Bible contains an intriguing variety of literary types, dealing with many kinds of truth and reflecting in its pages the unique personalities of those who speak and write. You must learn to handle this material so that its pluralism of type, style, and teaching comes through to your people. The surest way to do this, in preaching from paragraphs, is to plan and preach constantly changing series of messages.

a. A book series. The novice should keep the series short, working through one of the briefer Epistles, such as Galatians. Two sermons may explore *the personal issue* in chapters 1 and 2. Two more sermons may expound *the doctrinal issue* in chapters 3 and 4. A final two can enforce *the practical issue* in chapters 5 and 6. When the pastor is ready for a longer series, he can preach consecutively through the Gospel of Mark or the Epistle to the Romans. Until the congregation is accustomed to, and appreciative of, series preaching, he should keep each series to a dozen or fewer sermons.

b. A doctrinal series. Obviously, a few sermons cannot provide a complete theology. But a good measure of basic truth can be expounded, and the appetite of the church will be whetted for more of the same at a later time.

In addition to a series that gives a sermon each to several doctrines, a series might explore the interrelatedness of a major doctrine to others. One such series that I found useful was centered around the doctrine of holiness in human experience, with the sermon materials drawn from 1 Thessalonians:

- (1) Election—The Origin of Holiness (1:2-8)
- (2) Conversion—The Entrance into Holiness (1:9-10)
- (3) Christian Perfection—The Essence of Holiness (3:9-13)
- (4) Entire Sanctification—The Completion of Holiness (5:23-28)
- (5) The Second Advent—The Consummation of Holiness (4:13-18)

These sermons prompted a surprising number of requests for additional sermons elaborating other doctrines.

c. An ethical series. A topic in this area is sure to arouse interest and provide response. People need to know what the Bible teaches concerning the moral issues at the forefront of controversy today. Because the Bible is a book about God and people and relationships, it touches upon all that is relevant to daily life in a real world. In such a series special caution must be taken to let the paragraph speak its own message and not to force it to speak the personal opinions of the preacher.

d. A chapter series. Sermons based on the great chapters of the Bible can be fruitful. Many psalms lend themselves to this kind of treatment, as do certain chapters in the Gospels and Epistles. One thinks immediately of Psalm 1, Psalm 130, Mark 5, Matthew 28, Luke 15, John 17, Romans 12, Hebrews 11, Revelation 20, and others. The value of such a series extends beyond the message of each chapter in itself. It awakens interest in the whole book from which the chapter is taken, and it encourages the people to do more individual reading and study of the Scriptures.

e. A topical series. Utilizing certain literary types, such a series can provide refreshing variety. Apparent examples are the parables and the miracles of Jesus. The seven “signs” in the Gospel of John supply choice material for sermons witnessing to the Lordship and Saviorhood of Jesus, leading up to the supreme reality to which the “signs” point—the Crucifixion and Resurrection. This would make a good pre-Easter series. The negative and destructive conclusions of certain form critics notwithstanding, the various forms of which the biblical materials are comprised furnish some captivating possibilities for series preaching.

f. A narrative series. The Old Testament stories and Acts offer choice options for such a series. Some of your people have known these stories since childhood, but to preach them in the light of their setting within the redemptive purpose of God will open new vistas of truth for the hoariest veteran of Sunday School instruction. A former parishioner once said, “Of all the messages you preached, I found those Sunday night sermons based on Old Testament stories the most memorable and helpful. Do you still preach sermons like those?” I do.

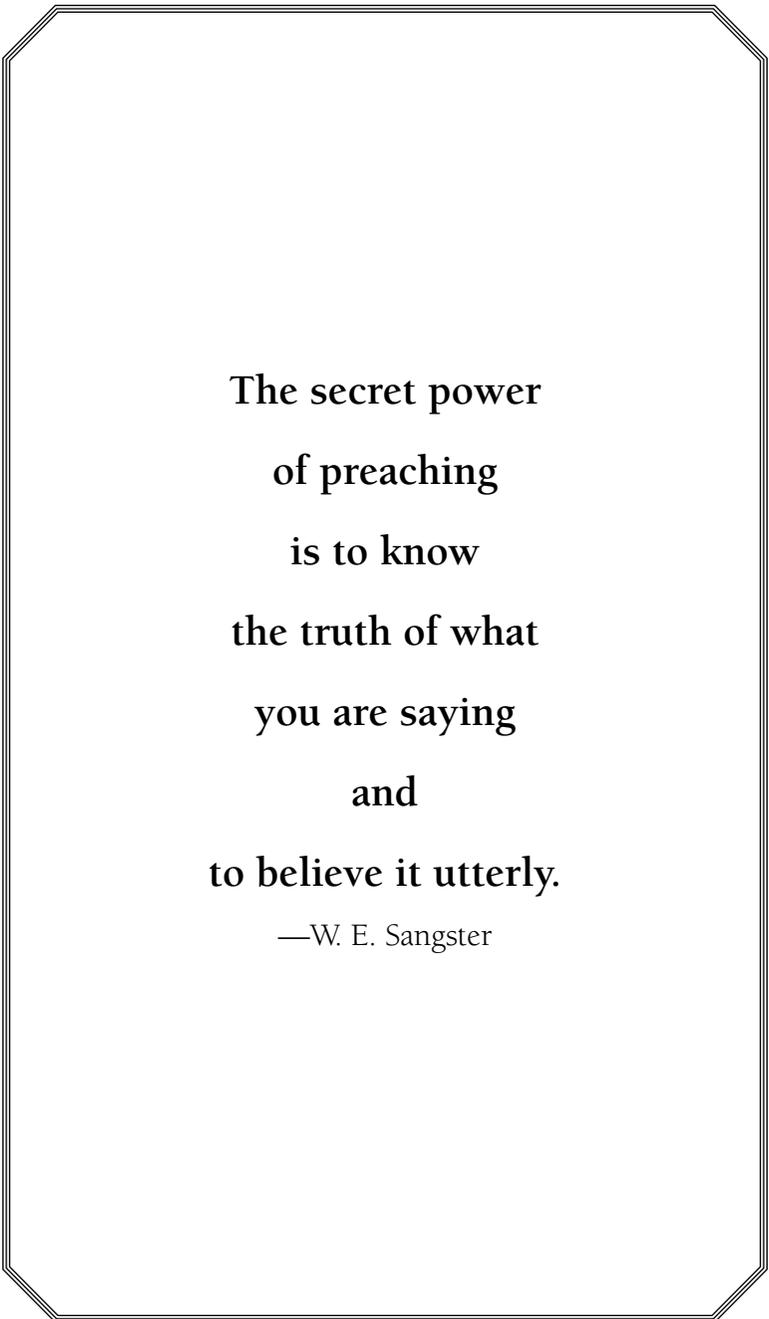
g. A character series. Singling out individuals from the Scriptures has rich possibilities. People enjoy hearing about people. These sermons will be based upon several paragraphs. Some of the material will be from passages the pastor will not read in the service, but all will be integrated by the units of revelation that are read and expounded. Here is such a series on “Yesterday’s Men with Today’s Message.”

- (1) The Wise Man Who Played the Fool (Solomon)
- (2) The Preacher Who Resented Success (Jonah)
- (3) The General Who Swallowed His Pride and Tasted Salvation (Naaman)
- (4) The King Who Kept His Word but Lost His Soul (Herod)
- (5) The Man Who Found Blessing in the Place of the Curse (Bartimaeus)
- (6) The Man Who Was Lifted Up by Looking Down (The Publican)
- (7) The Man with Good News Who Couldn’t Tell It (The Blind Man at Bethsaida)
- (8) The Man Who Drifted to Ruin on the Currents of Compromise (Demas)
- (9) The Man Who Came in Through the Roof and Went Out Through the Door (The Paralytic)

The possibilities of paragraph preaching in series with invigorating variety are more than a lifelong ministry can exhaust.

1. All unidentified Scripture quotes in this chapter are from the *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible.

Originally published as “Preaching Great Paragraphs,” chapter 3 of *Biblical Preaching for Contemporary Ministers*, comp. Neil B. Wiseman (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1976), 44-57.



**The secret power
of preaching
is to know
the truth of what
you are saying
and
to believe it utterly.**

—W. E. Sangster

Quoted by Donald Macleod in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, eds. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 384.

6

PREACHING GREAT BIBLE EVENTS

Millard C. Reed

MOST OF US BELIEVE that Jesus' words "Do not worry beforehand about what you will say" (Mark 13:11, NEB) refer only to the time when we are "arrested and taken away." They don't refer to our regular preaching schedule! On the contrary, we worry a great deal beforehand about what we will say and often later conclude that we did not "worry" enough. "What shall I preach?" is a legitimate and constant question.

The potency of the gospel demands that we must preach more than the opinions of men. Argumentation on nonessentials and philosophical debate simply do not reflect the sunlight of the gospel. The comment on English preaching just before the Wesleyan revival was "Moonlight ripens no harvests."¹

Revolution was about to erupt in the American colonies. The British Parliament had to find drastic new measures to deal with the situation or lose the New World. In that crisis hour, a lethargic King George III chose to address the legislators with his views concerning how cattle could be kept healthy.² It is not that the health of cattle is unimportant; but when a world is about to be lost, it is simply not a matter of primary concern. Considering the needs of my congregation, I must preach more than trivia, even good trivia. There is an urgency about every preaching situation that demands we deal with matters of primary concern.

The "fixed point"³ where all our preaching starts is the fact that God has acted to reveal himself and redeem us from our sinful condition. His mighty activity in history is the presupposition of meaningful preaching.

But preaching must be more than a recounting of history—even salvation history. Preaching must be an extension of the redemptive activity of God. The power of preaching is found in the fact that at a given time God acts—present tense—through the ministry of a specific preacher who speaks to his fellowmen in God's name by means of the Scriptures.⁴ The preacher announces the mighty activity of God in history—that the living God is present and acts redemptively in every situation.

One must then ask, “What is this redemptive activity of God, the rehearsal of which brings to pass that very activity?” Isn’t God at work in all things, so that to preach His activity is to preach almost anything? Yes and no. Yes, He is active in all things. No, that does not mean that any subject is equally usable for preaching.

What then is the foundation of all Christian preaching? Our answer—God’s great redemptive, creative activity is the creation, the new creation (the Christ event), and the re-creation (the second coming of the Lord Jesus). These are the major events. So if my preaching is to be a true expression of the redemptive activity of God, it must acknowledge all three dimensions. The “God who acts” is the God “who was” and “is” and “is to come.”

While the chronological order of these phases of God’s redemptive work is as listed above, the order of primacy is different. Priority in preaching is clearly held by the new creation—Jesus Christ, His incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, as well as Pentecost, which He promised and made possible. Without the Christ event the other activities of God would have no meaning. But through Him the others are illuminated with significance and hope. All, including the mysteries of the creation and the Second Coming, find their unity in Him.

PREACHING THE CHRIST EVENT—THE NEW CREATION

The request of the Greeks, “Sir, we would see Jesus,” is the central request of history. To know the redemptive activity of God, I must see Jesus. Paul saw Christ on the road to Damascus and later testified, “If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17, RSV). So we use the phrase “new creation” to refer to the total redemptive work of God revealed in the New Testament; God broke new ground there on the behalf of despairing mankind.

In our preaching it should be born in mind that these phases of the Christ event are not separate works. Thus, while it is necessary to consider them one at a time, the Incarnation cannot have meaning without the Crucifixion; the Crucifixion cannot have meaning without the Resurrection, even as the Resurrection is incomplete without Pentecost.

It must also be remembered that it is the eternal God who is acting, even though He is acting in time. So our redemption did not really begin at Calvary, nor even at Bethlehem, but in truth, “The Lamb [is] slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8).

a. The Incarnation is the act of God by which He reasserts His redemptive identification with His creation. When God created the universe and pronounced it “good,” He asserted the original moral quality of the creation. But sin defiled not only our first parents but also the whole earthly setting. All might anticipate rejection and damnation from God.

It is just at this point that the incredible news of God’s redemptive act in the incarnation of His Son breaks as such “good news.” It is the unique fact of

history. God is at work through Jesus Christ right here in the arena of human history. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory)” (John 1:14).

It is historically true. Jesus was “born of the Virgin Mary” (the Apostles’ Creed); He walked the stony hills of Galilee. A humble time and place actually knew Him. “We have seen with our eyes, . . . we have looked upon, and our hands have handled” (1 John 1:1) is the report of a man named John.

He has come all the way to where we are—all the way. He has taken on the form of a man. He became sin. It is incredible.

With His arrival to our hopeless place, we find hope. “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Matt. 11:5).⁵ Despair is shattered; I need never be lonely, for He has come to me.

This potent Incarnation message must be preached today. It will save our preaching from becoming irrelevant and other-worldly. It declares with strong accents that God is concerned about what is happening in His world. He is concerned about pain and sickness and social injustice. Jesus will say again as He said to His first-century audience, “The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you” (Mark 1:15, NEB). Immanuel—God with us—is still His fresh good news.

**IMMANUEL—GOD
WITH US—IS STILL
HIS FRESH GOOD
NEWS.**

b. The Crucifixion is His demonstration of the sinfulness of men, the love of Jesus, and the will of the Father. Paul wrote to the Galatians, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (6:14). The Cross must always be at the center of our preaching. That is not to say that we can easily love the Cross. There is a sense in which we must despise the Cross, for it demonstrates the powers of hell. Yet only the crucified Christ can liberate from the fear of death.⁶

The three important perspectives of the Cross are listed by James Stewart in his classic book *A Faith to Proclaim*. First, the Cross reminds us that the sinister forces of hell were at work at Calvary. The obvious schemes of sinful men were actually the historic, evil elements of pride, self-love, and fear, which have always been at work. The powers of darkness were there. The Cross is a cosmic battleground; it was the invisible, spiritual, demonic “rulers of the present age” that “crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8, RSV).

But the Cross is also a demonstration of the love of Christ. “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:6, 8). These are the words of Paul. But hear the words of Jesus: “No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself” (John 10:18). He

was not a helpless victim. Again He states, “Thinkest thou that I cannot pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt. 26:53). Christ suffering on the Cross was a willing expression of identifying love.

It was precisely in this fact that the forces of evil were defeated. P. T. Forsyth states it this way, “The holiness of Christ was the one thing damnatory to the Satanic power. And it was His death which consummated that holiness. It was His death, therefore, that was Satan’s final doom.”⁷

Paul states in Col. 2:15, “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (NIV). Calvin comments on that verse, “There is no tribunal so magnificent, no throne so stately, no show of triumph so distinguished, no chariot so elevated, as is the gibbet on which Christ has subdued death and the devil, and trodden them under his feet.”⁸

Not only is the Cross the demonstration of the sinfulness of men and the love of Christ, but it is also a demonstration of the purpose and will of the Father. It is marvelous how the disciples soon came to see the eternal purpose at work in the Cross. Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, “By the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). Paul states simply, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). Behind and through all troublesome detail of the Cross, the love of the Son and the purpose of the Father are at work.

These three aspects of the Cross must find their way into our preaching. Not only because faithfulness to the Scriptures demands it but also because faithfulness to our people requires it. We must recognize the Cross as an expression of the forces of evil, for, while the decisive battle has been won, the conflict still rages. The people to whom we preach are subject to the attacks of the devil designed through evil people as well as by direct temptation. In such a time they must hear that Jesus Christ is their Advocate and makes full identification with their distress. Even in the midst of the murderous multitude, God is working out His purpose both faithfully and redemptively.

The message from the torn veil must be repeated by us. That elegant symbol of *deus absconditus*, which held passing generations of Jewish worshipers in awe, was rent from top to bottom. Three Gospel writers recorded it. The God of mystery, who was always hidden behind the veil, and His forlorn and unfulfilled worshipers are now brought together. God is doing a new thing.

The despairing people in our congregation desperately need to hear of the crucifixion of our Savior and the message of sin, love, and purpose that emanates from the Cross.

c. Our Resurrection preaching is the declaration of Christ’s victory. Each of these aspects of the new creation is important, but without the Resurrection the whole Christian message falls to pieces. Paul was right. Without the empty

tomb, our faith, our hope, our preaching are all vain (1 Cor. 15:14). Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, and Good Friday are helpless to redeem. But with Easter they become the new creation act of God.

The early preaching of the New Testament Church was founded upon that faith (1 Cor. 15:38). “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom. 10:9). Christ is “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (1:4).

The 20th-century, Western mind is desperately in need of the message of the Resurrection. The congregation is filled with many who question the triumph of good over evil or light over darkness. There seems to be so much evidence to the contrary. In the midst of such foreboding conditions, they need to hear preaching like the proclamation of the 1st century, which declared the victory of Jesus Christ over death, hell, and the grave. The Scriptures recall ancient confessions, “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. . . . For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. . . . Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:20, 22, 57).

But as we preach these truths, the power of God makes them live again. Modern hearts will conclude, “I live because He lives.” Only the power of the resurrected Jesus, giving evidence of His vitality within the preaching and worship of the congregation, will meet current needs. The crisis hour that we face demands that every preaching effort announce again the redemptive work of God.

d. The preaching of the new creation is not complete without the message of Pentecost. The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that the ultimate purpose of Christ’s redemptive work was the sanctification of the believer: “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate” (13:12). Our preaching of the Christ event cannot be complete unless it clearly sounds the New Testament message of the coming and indwelling of the blessed Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:7-8). Here Christ insisted that His full work was to be continued by the third person of the Trinity.

It is imperative, then, that our preaching reflect the full power of the new creation. The Incarnation with its assertion of redemptive activity in the arena of human history; the Crucifixion with its message of the sinfulness of man, the love of Christ, and the purpose of the Father; the glorious Resurrection with its declaration of God’s victory for us over every enemy—all must shout from our pulpits every time we address our needy people. Every message must reflect these truths, but no less the message of Pentecost.

**IF “JESUS’ LIGHT”
DOES NOT SHINE ON
THE MESSAGE, IT IS A
DARK MESSAGE.**

There must be this essential coherence in the various dimensions of our Christ-event preaching. If one aspect of His redemptive work is neglected, the other aspects somehow become less powerful. Our waiting congregation must hear not only of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of our Lord but also that He has sent the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit has arrived to indwell the waiting heart of the believer, sanctifying and bringing under His Lordship all the wondering ambitions of the soul.

If “Jesus’ light” does not shine on the message, it is a dark message.

**PREACHING THE CHARACTER OF GOD—
THE FIRST CREATION**

Preach about the creation? Perhaps this does not appear to be a dominant theme of the modern pulpit. But remember that our basic task as preachers is to declare the mighty acts of God. Then consider how basic the creative work of God is to the Scriptures. The Genesis account of creation sets the pattern for all the Old Testament. The God who creates, determining all things and determined by none (*ex nihilo*),⁹ drawing order out of the void, is also the God who with mighty power calls out a people who are no people. He delivers them from the slavery of the past and promises to walk with them into the future. By the time you finish preaching the creation stories of Genesis, a great deal has already been said about the essential character of God and how He acts.

Any preacher who misses the basic connection between the new creation and the first creation has overlooked a rich and basic insight. When John begins his story about the redemptive life of Jesus, he feels compelled by the Holy Spirit to retell the first creation story. He understands that the redemptive power that brought the worlds into existence is precisely the power that is at work in Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. . . . That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew [received] him not. . . . But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God (*John 1:1-4, 9-10, 12*).

The last book of the Scriptures repeats the same theme: “I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. . . . Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. . . . Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 1:11; 4:8, 11).

This awareness of the eternal, creative, and redemptive purposes of God is basic to preaching with authority. Contemporary man has been educated, by and large, in an atmosphere that refuses to make any statements concerning eternal purpose. The absence of such a faith has resulted in widespread despair. Our gathered congregations need to hear of the mighty activity of God. The eternal God is at work and has been since, yes, even before the creation. He is the same God who acted in Christ Jesus.

PREACHING THE SECOND COMING— THE CREATION YET TO BE

The passage from Revelation quoted above stated, “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. . . . Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” It is clear from the biblical perspective that the God who acted in creation and who acted in the “new creation” has not now left us to our own destinies. The redemptive purposes that have been at work from the beginning are not exhausted now. Not only does He continue to manifest the creative powers invested in the “first creation” and the “new creation,” but the time will come in human history when He will again do a truly new thing; He will come again—“the creation yet to be.”

The New Testament preachers looked forward to this event because they anticipated it as redemptive just as the first creation and the new creation had been. It was not, therefore, set aside for conversations about last things. Rather, it was an anticipation of the continued activity of their redemptive God shining new light on all living. In the light of the Second Coming they were admonished to be watchful and sober (Mark 13:33; Rev. 16:15; 1 Thess. 5:6), faithful (Luke 12:42-44; 19:12-26; Mark 8:38), to live lives of moderation not too attached to the world (Matt. 16:26-27; Phil. 1:9-10; 4:5; Col. 3:2-5), to be patient (Heb. 10:36-37; James 5:7-8), and live lives of holiness (1 Thess. 3:12-13; 5:28; 1 John 2:28; 2 Pet. 3:11-13; Titus 2:11-13). All of these references and many more illustrate that the Second Coming faith was not a fascination about “when,” “how,” and “under what circumstance.” Faith in the Jesus who “was” and “is” was inseparable from hope for the Jesus who “is to come.” A doctrine of Christ is incomplete without the Second Coming.

Their lives were no naive detachment from the world—quite the contrary. They suffered great physical hardships. But they steadfastly declared that the God whom they served is the God who had acted in the arena of human affairs, creating the world with the power of His might. They believed that the birth of every child and the blooming of every plant was an evidence of that creative God.

They further believed that the Eternal Word, through whom the first creation was realized, became flesh, was crucified, dead, and buried, but the third day rose again. In this redemptive act He broke new ground. Every redeemed person then is a new creation.

But this is not the end for the New Testament preachers. This same Jesus will come again—right here in the center of human history where His other creative acts have occurred. When He comes, He will “make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). There is much that we of the old order cannot know about the new order. But we clearly declare that the God who created the existing order, who then, in the fullness of time, brought into reality the new creation in Christ Jesus, will someday again act creatively and redemptively. His is the power of consummation.

All of His creative activity reflects the constancy of His character. All is redemptive. All is “truly new.” All relates to the human life arena in which we find ourselves. It is impossible to think of the God who “was” and “is” without thinking of the God who “is to come.”

A good surveyor can direct his course through seemingly unconquerable mountain terrain if he can fix his sextant on three dependable distant landmarks. The biblical preacher has three fixed points for his preaching—the first creation, the Christ event, and the Second Advent.

True, our world is confused because it has lost its dependable distant landmarks. But our preaching can bring the people back to these foundation facts of the Christian faith. The basis of preaching can be nothing less than the mighty redemptive activity of God—the new creation, the first creation, and the creation yet to come. Every message that we preach must accurately reflect those longitudinal and latitudinal lines. Even when our subject does not relate primarily to these, the relationship must be clear and definite.

“What shall I preach?” is a basic, haunting, frequent question. The answer: “Preach the mighty acts of God—new creation, first creation, and the creation yet to come.”

1. George E. Sweazey, *Preaching the Good News* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), 59.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Karl Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 17.

4. *Ibid.*, 9.

5. James S. Stewart, *A Faith to Proclaim* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 11-47.

6. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 1.

7. Quoted in Stewart, *Faith to Proclaim*, 95.

8. Quoted in *ibid.*

9. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 9.

10. Langdon Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1959), 13.



Let self be abased,
Christ exalted,
the cross be central
and the plea be with passion.
May my eyes never be dry.
Just now, Lord, take me
out of myself,
usurp anything I've planned
to say when it's in the
way of YOUR message.
Here I am, Lord,
I'm your vessel! Amen.

—Mike Breaux

From "Change After a Much-Loved Predecessor," in *Leading in Times of Change* by Dale Galloway (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2001), 81.

PREACHING SCRIPTURAL HOLINESS

G. B. Williamson

IN AN ARCH OF MASONRY the entire structure is secure if the keystone remains firmly fixed in its place. In relation to all the other stones in the arch it is central in position and supreme in importance. By it they cleave together to make the arch strong.

The keystone illustrates the position of the doctrine of holiness in relation to all the fundamental tenets of our holy faith. There are two different views with regard to the holiness of God. There are some who hold that it is one among the attributes of God. There are others who have seen holiness as the essential nature of God that comprehends all of His moral attributes. Many able theologians have adhered to this latter view. Among them is Dr. H. Orton Wiley. While either of these positions justify the contention that holiness is central and supreme among the doctrines of the church, the latter supports the idea more perfectly. No system of theology can omit the doctrine of holiness. But the Arminian-Wesleyan teachings fall apart if holiness is not given its proper place as the central thought of redemption.

Holiness is the spinal column of Wesleyan theology. If it is not maintained in the central position, the system becomes weak. But with the doctrine of holiness recognized and proclaimed as central and supreme, the teachings of Wesley and his collaborators and their successors are more firmly grounded in reason and revelation than any other system of theology that has ever been advanced.

Since the teaching of holiness is so vitally related to all the doctrines that are held fundamental and central by the Church of Jesus Christ, the scriptural and logical preaching of any doctrine will lead to the proclamation of the message of holiness. The converse conclusion is also valid, namely, that the preaching of holiness to be scriptural and logical must include the preaching of every other essential doctrine of the Christian system. This conception opens up almost unlimited possibilities for preaching holiness with a doctrinal approach.

A lopsided judgment has been pronounced upon the leaders of the Church of the Nazarene. The accusation is they are making a hobby of holiness while neglecting scriptural regeneration. A reasonable man would know that no one can preach holiness without giving proportionate consideration to regeneration. That is true of all the other doctrines. If one would like to vary his theme, he has but to announce that he will preach on any phase of theology and he can relate holiness to it without distorting the truth he is expounding.

1. Doctrinal preaching about God, the Father, opens up wide areas for thought. It is a kind of preaching infrequently heard from our modern pulpits. Its revival would do much to clarify the concepts of God, make Him a living Reality and a Person understanding and approachable. Preaching about the personality, the nature, the character, and the attributes of God would require a firm grasp of the fact of His holiness and a clear declaration that He is holy and therefore commands all men to be holy.

The very thought of holiness must be inspired by the character and being of God. Dr. Wiley says in his masterful *Christian Theology*: "Holiness as it relates to the Father expresses the perfection of moral excellence which in Him exists unoriginated and underived. It is the ground of reverence and adoration—the standard of all moral goodness—and is eternally opposed to sin."¹

2. The doctrine of God, the Son, is also replete with possibilities for preaching holiness. Think of His preexistence, His humiliation, His incarnation, His exemplary life, His teachings, His sacrifice that He might be the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. All of this wealth of truth has close relation to the message of holiness and may be employed either in approach or application in a sermon.

Holiness as it relates to the Son is found both in His revealing and His redemptive mission. Holiness and love in the nature of God assume the form of righteousness and grace in the redemptive economy. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Here the love of God rests upon the foundation of His holiness. If love sent the Son, it was holiness that demanded the sacrifice. "Our God is a consuming fire." "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate."²

3. The doctrine of God, the Holy Spirit, opens a mine of material for preaching holiness, the extent of which few have explored. The Bible references to the personality and ministry of the Holy Spirit are numerous and intriguing. There are texts and teachings in the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of John's Gospel for several series of sermons. The Book of Acts is a record of the outpouring of God's Spirit at Pentecost and the subsequent events. Here again there are great stores of preaching possibilities. To omit the implications of holiness in these messages would be to present only half-truths that stop short of

the fullness of the gospel. The New Testament is filled with texts that magnify the work of the Spirit.

The name Holy Spirit not only affirms that the nature of the Spirit is holy, but it is His office and work to make people holy. Holiness as related to the Spirit is holiness imparted or made accessible to humanity. In God, holiness is absolute. In humankind, it is relative. It is “sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:2). By the work of the Spirit men are made “partakers of the divine nature.”

A ministry that magnifies the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing sinners to Christ and leading believers into the experience of entire sanctification will certainly be owned and blessed of God. This is the era in which the fullness of the Spirit is available, and this announcement should be made often and urgently.

4. The doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible is inseparable from the doctrine of holiness. “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21). “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible is an infallible Source of light for the understanding. It is a Guide to the conscience. It is the authoritative rule of faith and practice for holy living. It is the Foundation for Christian character. By the knowledge and obedience of the Word of God believers are naturalized for heaven through the ministry of the Spirit of holiness.

5. A right conception of sin is necessary to a clear, scriptural message of holiness. The twofold nature of sin must be understood and defined. That sin is the transgression of the law and must be forgiven on condition of repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ must be accepted. Furthermore, that sin is inherent in the nature of man, due to the fact that he is of a fallen race, is inescapable. This inward pollution, this defilement of the affectional nature, this perversion of the will can find its cure only in the efficient agency of the Spirit of God as He operates in the soul of man under the overarching provision of the blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed on Calvary. In this age in which the sense of sin has declined so amazingly, when evil is called good and good evil, the pulpit of the Church should picture sin in all its turpitude and declare the inevitable doom of the sinner. To do this only leads to despair if an adequate cure is not offered. In dealing scripturally and logically with the problem of sin and its solution, holiness must be preached as God’s provision and His requirement. When a preacher has delved into the great stores of truth in the realm that relates to sin and its answer in holiness, he will discover material to occupy his mind and his sermon schedule with substantial subjects for extended periods of time. Furthermore, preaching of this description is an absolute necessity in order that Christian experience may be vital and that character bearing the image of God may be built.

6. Preaching on the Atonement, if carried to a logical conclusion, leads to the declaration of a present, full, and final salvation from sin. This doctrine posits a holy God forever opposed to sin. He cannot condone sin in any form. He is represented in the Mosaic economy as unapproachable by sinful men. He dwelt in the holy of holies, which was separated from the holy place by the thick veil of the Temple. Nevertheless, this sin-hating God so loved the sinner that He gave His only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world. When Christ gave up the ghost on Calvary's cross, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from top to bottom.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (*Heb. 10:19-22*).

Here the preacher of holiness stands at the opening of a great area of truth. It is as wide as the race of man in its scope. It includes all the progressive revelation of God's purpose of redemption from the first promise of a Savior, when God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). It takes in all the types and ceremonies of the Old Testament. It comprehends the Messianic promises of the prophets. It is the underlying fact of the Incarnation and the Crucifixion. It is made effectual in the power of the Resurrection. It climaxes in the gathering of the Blood-washed around the throne of God to sing redemption's story and in the deliverance of the earth and the whole creation, from the curse precipitated by the fall of Adam.

When one sees such a vision of truth in relation to the preaching of holiness, he never again is concerned about exhausting the resources open to him in proclaiming this glorious message.

7. The doctrine of the Church has many ramifications. There is its mystic union with Christ, as the body of which He is the Head and Savior. He is the Bridegroom and the Church His chosen bride. It is the temple that is the habitation of God through the Spirit. Then there is the position and function of the Church in relation to the world and its evangelization. There are also the worship and sacraments of the Church. There are the conditions and qualifications for membership in the Church. From any of these angles of approach the message of holiness may be and should be proclaimed.

The psalmist said, "Holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever" (Ps. 93:5) and "Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (29:2). It is holiness that separates the Church from the world and makes it ready for its great missionary undertaking. Holiness hallows the worship of the church and vitalizes

the sacraments. It elevates the church to high levels of spiritual unity, heavenly fellowship, and holy service.

8. The doctrine of the last things, in all its phases is directly related to holiness.

- a. There are those who give much attention to the teaching of the *Lord's return*, but they seem to overlook completely the fact that holiness is the preparation for His coming. No one can be scripturally consistent and preach the Second Coming without preaching the second blessing. Note how inseparably the two thoughts are linked together in the Scriptures.

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation (*1 Pet. 1:13-15*).

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness? (*2 Pet. 3:10-11*).

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints (*1 Thess. 3:12-13*).

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it (*1 Thess. 5:23-24*).

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (*1 John 3:2-3*).

- b. Holiness has a bearing upon the *resurrection*.

Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years (*Rev. 20:6*).

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the

dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (*1 Thess. 4:16-17*).

Only those who are holy will answer the trumpet's call to rise to the glory of the first resurrection. A preacher can deliver a holiness sermon on Easter Sunday. He had better do it then or some people will never hear the whole gospel message. For a text he might use Heb. 13:20-21 or 1 Pet. 1:2-5:

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (*Heb. 13:20-21*).

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (*1 Pet. 1:2-5*).

- c. In preaching on the *final judgment*, it is certain that holiness must be preached as the only adequate preparation.

Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love (*1 John 4:17-18*).

This is but one illustration. There are many texts that show that holiness is the only adequate preparation for the judgment.

- d. There should be more *preaching about heaven* than we are hearing today. Heaven should be a more definite part of our everyday experience. The whole tenor of the Scriptures is that holiness is a requirement for entrance to heaven: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (*Heb. 12:14*).
- e. If only those conditioned for heaven in an experience of holiness will be accorded entrance to that blessed habitation of the just, then it must be evident that it is *holiness or hell*. No one should flippantly declare that it is "holiness or hell" but, having seriously and tenderly preached the torments of eternal punishment, a preacher should reverently and compassionately warn men that to escape hell they must be holy in the sight of God.

Thus it is seen that holiness may be, and should be, preached as a complement to every other doctrine of the Christian creed. But it may also be preached by a biblical approach, either in topical, textual, or expository sermons or in a combination of any two or all three of these sermon patterns.

1. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, Volume 1 (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1940), 374.

2. *Ibid.*, 376.

Originally published as "Holiness, the Keystone of Christian Doctrine," chapter 1 of *Preaching Scriptural Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1953), 11-22.

**Melt people,
don't maul them.
It is easier to
melt a block of ice
than to
break it up by
smiting it
with a hammer.**

—E. Stanley Jones

From *Sayings of E. Stanley Jones*, ed. Whitney J. Dough (Franklin, Tenn.: Providence House Publishers, 1994), 106.

PREACHING THAT CONNECTS

J. K. Warrick

DR. DENNIS KINLAW tells of leafing through the religion section of the Sunday paper one morning and finding a bold headline: “Greatest Story Ever Told—Told Poorly.” His first thought was, “Somebody has heard me preach and is writing about it.”¹ Every preacher can identify with his sentiment.

The fact is, however, every time we preach, someone hears us. And the questions every preacher must ask over and over are, “Did I tell the greatest story well enough for the hearer to get in touch with God? Did I bring people into a vital connection with God? Did my preaching help people connect my message with God and with the world they live in?”

In 1 Cor. 1:21 the Bible says that “God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (NIV). Two components are mentioned here—the foolishness of preaching and the content. Method and message. Effective preaching is preaching that connects. It is preaching that stirs and moves the hearts and minds of those who hear. It is preaching that connects, that elicits a positive response to God on the part of those who hear the message.

There are at least three basic things that we all can do to make certain that our preaching connects with our congregations: Be biblical. Our message is clear: “We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23-24, NASB). We preach Christ! That means we preach the whole truth about God because Christ “is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. . . . For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him” (Col. 1:15, 19, NASB). We preach Christ, and to do so we must preach the Bible!

1. Be biblical. That means we preach the gospel for it is the good news about Jesus Christ. Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16, NASB). Effective preaching, then, is first the proclamation of Jesus Christ to a broken world and a waiting church. And the goal of preaching

is to bring people into contact with God through the Lord Jesus Christ; the sinner to conversion through repentance and confession; the believer to holiness through surrender, consecration, and cleansing.

For this to take place, our preaching must be deeply rooted in the Bible. I personally prefer expositional preaching because it disciplines my mind and heart to give attention to biblical imperatives and exhortations—and what it does for me it does for those who hear me preach. For those of us with limited time schedules, such as the bivocational pastor, verse-by-verse expositional preaching gives overall direction and continuity without the weekly brainstorming on what to preach. When we are led in prayer to a particular book or character study in the Bible, as we move into that series our messages are laid out for us by virtue of the passage we hold in our hands. I have made it a practice for many years to discipline myself to do this two or three times each year.

At this time I am preaching through the Book of James. I have prayerfully planned 10 messages I am preaching on Sunday evenings. I am approaching James from the standpoint of our faith and how it affects every area of life. Here are my sermon titles for the messages from the Book of James:

“Who and Whose We Are: A Matter of Faith”	James 1:1-8
“Faith and Character”	James 1:9-18
“Faith and the Word”	James 1:19-27
“Faith and Community”	James 2:1-13
“Faith and Works”	James 2:14-26
“Faith and Words”	James 3:1-12
“Faith and Wisdom”	James 3:13-18
“Faith and Humility”	James 4:1-12
“Faith and the Future”	James 4:13-18
“Faith and Others”	James 5:1-20

I keep coming back to the word “faith” because I want my people to see that a confession of faith ought to equate to a new way of seeing the world and a new way of living in the world. My prayer is that when they read from James in the future, the Holy Spirit will remind them of some of the truth they will hear during these 10 weeks.

Now I can give myself to focused preparation rather than searching for a direction each week. These Sunday night messages from James can also be sources of inspiration for the midweek services as well. In doing this, I am connecting my people with the Word, and God speaks through His Word long after my words have been forgotten.

Some preachers may see this as departure from seeking the mind of God for the needs of the church on a more immediate basis. However, I have found that God can lead me months in advance in preparing messages that are suited for the time when they are to be preached. I have been amazed how often such passages of Scripture would address a particular subject at just the appropriate

time. In such cases, I am free to preach with liberty and abandonment for the people know I have not contrived to preach “at” an issue. Only God could have foreseen the possibility for addressing a particular subject that far in advance.

Some excellent books are available and provide good models for this kind of preaching. Eugene Peterson’s *Traveling Light*, an exposition of Galatians, is a wonderful model, as is Douglas Webster’s *Finding Spiritual Direction*, an exposition of James. Both of these have been helpful to me. For some real in-depth exposition, you might try some of Martin Lloyd-Jones’s material—what an expositor!

Our discussion up until now has been about biblical content. Message. The message preached must be biblical.

2. Be real. Now we move from content of the message to the person of the preacher. May I quote from Dr. Kinlaw once again? “The greatest problem in preaching is not the preparation of the sermon, but the preparation of the preacher.”² While Kinlaw, no doubt, has in mind formal training, his main concern here is the preparation of the preacher’s heart.

When I moved to my present assignment, evangelist Chuck Millhuff sent me the following message, which I have hanging in my study:

Within this little room it will often commence. It will develop and conclude in other places, even at the sacred desk. Yet here it is, that most often, flint will strike iron and the spark will begin the blaze. It is “The Message” we long for. We long for a burning coal from the altar, carried to our cooling hearts. Five minutes of terrifying unction in the congregation of the righteous is of more value than an hour of perfect preparation yet delivered in a sterile deadness. There is nothing worse than stillborn truth. What we long for is a message from the Main Office. And you shall bring it to us.

This preparation for bringing “the message” is a matter of prayer and study—and living honestly and openly.

The preacher is called by God but prepared through the disciplines of the Spirit and everyday living. Every prophet and preacher in the Bible is called, then prepared. Consider Moses on the backside of the desert; Isaiah through the loss of a personal friend and a temple vision; Hosea through personal suffering and abandonment; Elisha through his faithfulness to Elijah. Each of these persons was called by God and prepared by the Spirit as He worked through their life experiences. In their preaching and teaching each of these persons related their own stories in various ways as they led others to trust in God.

Effective preaching flows out of a life given completely over to Christ. The preacher’s personal journey of faith must be open to the scrutiny of others, if they are to believe in the message preached. I take my people into my life. I take them on vacations with me. I am willing for them to peek into my heart and

**WHAT WE LONG FOR
IS A MESSAGE FROM
THE MAIN OFFICE.**

home through personal illustrations that show how God is working in my life. Since preaching is telling the story of Christ again and again in many different ways to people who are looking for answers to the problems that await them after the hymn of invitation, it stands to reason they are interested to know if this stuff really works! I have only my own experience from which to speak.

Let me illustrate what I mean by being real in this area with a story by Walter Wangerin Jr. in his book *Mourning into Dancing*. Walter Wangerin and his wife were pastoring an inner-city church in Evansville, Indiana, and through their ministry there had adopted two black children. In the story I will tell he is teaching about the necessity of a parent giving his or her children the blessing of a good self-image—the joy of accepting ourselves as created by God. He illustrates the joy of such discovery in this story about his four-year-old daughter, Talitha.

In the summer of my daughter's fourth year of life, the six of us—two parents and four children—drove across the country to the mountains of Colorado to participate in my family's reunion there. Talitha peered at the world with an irritating enthusiasm. Her phrase for the trip was, "Don-cha love it?"—flopping her tongue out on the word love so that it left little dribbles on her chin. She drove her brothers (then seven and eight) to gloom and to bloody expressions. Every morning, every sandwich, every stream and tree in the landscape received from her the same obnoxious approval: "Don-cha loooooove it?"

"No, Talitha! No! We hate it." Joseph and Matthew, thereby, declared a deathless hatred for several states, two mountain ranges, countless sunsets, and finally for their Grandpa Wangerin. Well, my father rose up before all his children and his grandchildren and on Sunday morning began to preach, standing high on a crag, his white hair blown wild by the Colorado wind, his voice a roar of the prophets. Talitha was impressed. Ere Grandfather Wangerin had finished the oracle, she jumped up, threw out her arms to embrace all things, and cried at the top of her lungs: "DON-CHA LOVE IT?" "Sit down!" hissed Matthew. "Sit down, shuddup, and be sad. This is church."

On the journey back home we stopped in Hays, Kansas, for lunch. Hays on the prairie is nothing like the inner city where we lived. Hays struck my sons as foreign territory, spacious, unpretentious, drawling, polite—and white. We took a booth in a comfortable restaurant, six of us crowding around one table.

A waitress approached, digging a pencil from her apron, preparing to write our orders on a small pad. She glanced up at us, then froze a moment, frowning. One by one she gazed at the children. The children did what they figured you do in Hays: gazed back. The waitress began to tap the pencil against her nose. "Field trip?" she asked.

Suddenly I saw us as she must have seen us. "No," I said. "No, family reunion."

“These ain’t your students,” she said. “No,” I said. “Your kids?” “Yes,” I said. “All of ‘em?” “Yes.” That slowed her a moment. She pondered the information, tapping the pencil against her nose. Then her face brightened. “Adopted!” she announced. “Yes,” I said. She grinned. She leveled the pencil carefully first at Matthew and then at Talitha. “That one and that one. Right?” “Yes,” I said. “Right.” Well then, having solved the riddle, the woman wrote our orders on her pad, turned on her heel, and marched toward the kitchen door. But before she had left the dining room, Talitha, beaming, declared, “I know how she knew I was adopted.” “How?” I said. The child stood up and threw out her arms and shouted louder than Grandpa on the mountain: “BECAUSE I’M . . . BLACK!” The waitress was halted in the kitchen doorway. Hays, Kansas, turned in its chairs to stare at us, its many mouths agape.

And then . . .

Talitha caused her brothers a mortal anxiety by asking the diners, one and all, their opinion on the particular issue. “Don-cha,” she said with angelic joy, “just love it?”³

You can see the power of that illustration, can you not? You can almost feel everything they all were feeling in that diner on that day. That illustration from Wangerin is a slice of real life. He connects with it. People will remember it. I have used that illustration a number of times and months later someone will say about something, “Don-cha just love it?”

For those of us in the smaller church, this kind of honesty and reality is particularly helpful because the people already know us so well. They readily identify with us and are encouraged by our honesty and transparency. Our own testimony of answered prayer or admission of need or an embarrassing moment is often the one thing that keeps them from giving up; if you and I can do it, then so can they.

Be open and honest about yourself and honest about God. Be real.

3. Be relevant. By this I mean our preaching must be of some use to those living in our culture. It must be relevant. That is not to say that we should depart from the Scripture in order to attract a hearing.

We will be surprised, I think, to learn that our world is hungry for a word from God. There is tremendous unrest in our culture as people seek answers to life’s great challenges. Paul encountered just such unrest in Athens and captured the moment with his great sermon on the Unknown God (Acts 17:16-31). Talk about being relevant! And what about Jeremiah? In Jer. 32, we read the story of God leading the prophet to buy a parcel of land near Jerusalem as testimony to his faith in the promise of God that the Israelites would once again

**BE OPEN AND
HONEST ABOUT
YOURSELF AND
HONEST ABOUT GOD.
BE REAL.**

occupy the land. After the captivity, after the passing years, long after the soldiers of Babylon were gone, Jeremiah related to his cultural conditions by preaching and living his faith. He was relevant.

I was recently introduced to a book titled *On a Hill Too Far Away*, by John Fischer. He warns us to be honest about God and honest about sin in today's world. Fischer is a leader in the contemporary Christian music industry and, as such, his words are surprising. He says:

In case you haven't noticed, we seem to have acquired a new evangelical God. He does not burn with the fire of judgment or shine with the blinding white light of unapproachable righteousness. His Son is not stained with the blood of the sacrifice, nor are His followers aware of any blood on their own hands that would put them in need of such a sacrifice. He is in every way, a kinder, gentler God, much more in touch with the real "felt needs" of people than He ever has been. No longer sinners before an angry God, we are winners with a Cosmic Cheerleader.⁴

JESUS WAS RELEVANT.

HE MET PEOPLE
WHERE THEY LIVED
AND WORKED. HE
TALKED ABOUT BIRDS
AND SOIL AND SEEDS
AND STORMS AND
MONEY AND HEALTH
AND POVERTY AND
SICKNESS AND TAXES.

But this is not a god who can be helpful to people living in a culture adrift. Douglas Webster pens a powerful paragraph about Jesus after He had spoken the hard words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood in John 6:53-55. Webster says: "Jesus had managed to alienate just about everybody. The sobering truth in this extended discourse is that the gospel is radical communication, unsuited for neatly contrived, worldly categories and self-help comfort zones. The seriousness of the cross hangs over everything Jesus said."⁵

But Jesus was relevant. He met people where they lived and worked. He talked about birds and soil and seeds and storms and money and health and poverty and sickness and taxes and, well, all the stuff of life!

He connected with people! He told them the truth, but He told them the truth with word pictures, or parables, and illustrations from the stuff of life. Jesus was relevant.

Remember, the goal of preaching is to bring men and women into contact with God. I do not aspire to bring God into our culture in a dishonest way, but in such a way that the lives of men and women might be radically changed. My goal, then, is to bring biblical truth to bear on this culture in plain language, the language of daily life.

I share about my own spiritual growth and give personal testimony to new levels of faith. I talk about my friendships and my family—my daily life—the stuff that irritates and the stuff that blesses. People must know that I live in the

same world in which they live. Early in my ministry I began to give attention to the newspaper, particularly the editorial page, sports section, comics, and advice columns. This is what my people are reading and many are forming values and making decisions based on what they read. I try to incorporate some of this in my preaching. I read something from the *New York Times* Best-Seller List to find out what people are reading. A lot of spiritual confusion has come from people reading some self-help book that has had wide distribution and public acceptance but may well be filled with error. I need to know that and address it at some point. Being relevant is not compromising the truth; it is simply being aware of the lie and laying the truth over it.

BE BIBLICAL; BE REAL; BE RELEVANT

I want to illustrate what I mean by giving you an outline of a message I have preached, in one form or another, several times over the past five or six years. I have preached from this general outline in several revivals (most of them in smaller churches), camp meetings, zone rallies and, of course, from my own pulpit to my own people. My scripture is Heb. 12:1-13 (NASB). My text is verse 3, “so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.” My title for this message today would be “A Long Obedience in the Same Direction.” Let me give you my outline introduction: The goal of God is that “we may share in His holiness” (v. 10). This may well involve some discipline in our lives, and discipline often discourages us and weakens our faith. We are tempted to grow weary and lose heart—to give up. What can we do to prevent much of this weariness and to overcome these times when we want to quit?

- I. We must lighten our load.
 - A. Lay aside every encumbrance.
 - B. Lay aside the sin that so easily entangles.
- II. We must lengthen our stride.
 - A. We must keep on running.
 - B. We must run the race set before us.
- III. We must look to Jesus.
 - A. He is the reason for our faith.
 - B. He did not give up.
 - C. He has completed His race.

Is it biblical? Yes. This is an expository message from the first 13 verses of Heb. 12. Is the message real? I can talk about the things I have laid aside, the time of my sanctification and the growth that has come since that time, my times of discouragement and how God has helped me. I can be honest about some of the obstacles to spiritual maturity. Is it relevant? Few things are more relevant than a sporting event. This message can be preached from the perspective of a marathon. Encumbrances can be seen as warm-up suits that come off in the competition. Looking to Jesus can be spoken of as looking toward victo-

ry in competition. People can relate to this, and when they read Heb. 12 again, some of these thoughts will come back to them.

You see, I have given people something in that service that they can relate to in the world in which they live. It is **biblical**. It is an opportunity for me to be **real**. It is **relevant**. This message connects. People respond to it because all of them want to share in the holiness of God, but many of them are weary—they have considered giving up—they find hope!

Let me close with five important steps to preaching that connects. Five things we all can do to be preachers who preach messages that connect:

1. Develop and maintain a regular devotional life. Be a person of the Word and of prayer. Let everything else flow out of this.

2. Develop good reading habits. Read the local newspaper. Read books. If you have only limited time, get something like the *Reader's Digest* and keep up with what people are reading.

3. Listen to great preaching. Read great sermons. Get tapes. Get books. Study great preachers and preaching. I have tapes by great preachers and books that I read and reference often.

4. Spend as much time as possible with people. Become a people watcher. Study people. Use every possible occasion as an excuse to spend time listening to them and learning about their needs and the world in which they are living.

5. Enlarge your vocabulary. Fall in love with words. Words convey ideas. Ideas become philosophies and shape lives. Use words thoughtfully and purposefully. I want to be able to do with words what Michael Jordan does with a basketball or Joe Montana does with a football. Learn to make words work for the gospel. Enlarge your vocabulary.

Let's be preachers who connect with people. Let's be preachers who connect people with God. The formula is to be sure that every sermon is biblical, real, and relevant. Obviously, stating the formula is easier than putting it into practice. But making the formula work in preaching that connects will make a difference in people's lives and help them apply the truth we preach to the specifics of their lives.

-
1. Dennis Kinlaw, *Preaching in the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1985), 7.
 2. *Ibid.*, 17.
 3. Walter Wangerin Jr., *Mourning into Dancing* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 54-56.
 4. John Fischer, *On a Hill Too Far Away* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Publications, 1994), 27.
 5. Douglas Webster, *Selling Jesus: What's Wrong with Marketing the Church* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 108.

Presented at the national training conference of the Small Church Institute, in St. Louis, Missouri, March 1995.



People are driven
from the church
not so much
by stern truth
that makes
them uneasy,
as by weak nothings
that make them
contemptuous.

—George A. Buttrick

A LIFELONG QUEST TO IMPROVE OUR PREACHING

Tim D. Stearman

SEVERAL YEARS AGO there was an amusing story making the rounds about an elderly pastor who was retiring from the ministry. His church had planned an elaborate reception with testimonies and gifts. It was to be a real sendoff.

That morning as he and his wife were getting ready to leave, she presented him with a small package beautifully wrapped. He was delighted and carefully pulled off the ribbon and peeled back the paper. When he opened the box, to his delight and uncertainty he found three eggs and \$6,000 in cash. He was so puzzled that he asked his wife why this combination? What did it mean? She responded by saying, “Well, honey, we’ve been serving congregations for 47 years. Across those years I have always listened carefully to every sermon, and on the occasion when the sermon was below par, I would put an egg in this box.”

The old pastor thought about that statement and smiled. He thought, “Wow. Forty-seven years of preaching and only three bad sermons.” He said, “Well, dear, I understand about the eggs, but where did the \$6,000 come from?”

She said, “Well, every time I got a dozen eggs, I sold them.”

No matter how long we’ve preached, we’ve all laid some eggs. During a lifetime of preaching, we will preach a few masterpieces, a few dogs, and a lot of messages that are pretty average.

Our task as preachers of the Word is to continue to strive to improve our ability to communicate the gospel. The very nature of our calling seems to dictate that our study time is often relegated to bits and pieces, usually when we are tired and not too inspired.

I believe that all of us, no matter the size of our church, have the obligation, the responsibility, and the privilege of constantly improving those skills. After 25 years of pastoring in churches ranging from 74 to over 3,000 mem-

bers, I have never stopped trying to improve my skills. As a fellow preacher, I certainly have not arrived, but I have learned some things on my journey that I have found to be helpful.

PREACH THE BIBLE

IT IS THE WORD OF GOD THEY MUST HEAR.

We live in a day when people are often more interested in being entertained than hearing the truth. I happen to believe you can capture their attention, yet send them out wanting to know more. It is the Word of God they must hear. We may have exciting personalities and consider ourselves to be clever in the way we present sermon material, yet if they do not hear the Word, they quickly lose interest in our message.

I had a guest speaker from a large community church in Denver speak on a Sunday night this past summer. He had my crowd in stitches. It was one joke after another. He was a communicator, yet when he left, most of us had a difficult time trying to remember what the point of the message was because it was not tied to Scripture.

When I speak about preaching the Word, I am pleading that we share the gospel. With rare exception, no matter where a sermon begins, in some way bring it to the Cross and the story of redemption.

We are inundated today with how-to preaching. I do it myself. It is another sign of our times and our “meet my need” mentality. People no longer come to church to worship God; they come to see what He is going to do for them. As a result, they want us to preach on “How to Overcome Stress” and “Where to Find Happiness” and “How to Win the Battle with Depression.”

All of those are legitimate topics, but the preacher misses a powerful opportunity if those occasions are not used to point people to Jesus and the liberation of the Cross.

DISCOVER THE JOY OF STORYTELLING

Learn to tell stories. I discovered early on that the preachers that captured my attention were those who could mentally take me to places I had never been and show me things I had never seen. I still admire the person who can draw me into his or her world with only words. Have you ever listened to Garrison Keillor of Lake Wobegon fame? He is a master at painting word pictures. That ability is not just a gift. It is something that is very teachable. It just takes time, thought, and imagination. I study the way stand-up comedians tell stories. Their livelihood depends on their ability to keep a crowd.

There is a story that I am asked to repeat almost every year at Christmas-time. It goes like this:

The year was 1944 and World War II was raging. My father was already in India and one uncle was in a foxhole in Germany. My Uncle Sam Stearman was stationed in El Reno, Oklahoma, waiting for orders to be shipped to some unknown destination. Since the orders had not arrived and it was Christmas Eve day, a memo came out from the base commander that anyone on the base whose home was within a 150-mile radius could have a three-day pass for Christmas. Sam's parents lived in Wichita, Kansas, 147 miles away. Within the hour my uncle had his duffel bag packed and stood outside the gates of the base trying to hitch a ride. You see, all the buses and trains were already filled with holiday travelers. NO chance to ride public transportation.

Soon a 1936 Chevrolet sedan pulled to the side of the road. It was filled with a family making their way to Kingman, Kansas, which was 50 miles west of Wichita, and they said they would be delighted to help a soldier boy. Sam put his bag in the trunk, climbed over kids, and found his spot in the backseat. As they drove, it started to snow. Naturally, in Oklahoma, the wind accompanied the snow, blowing it horizontally across the primitive highway and making the windshield wipers almost useless. Twice the car slid off the road, only to be pushed back on the pavement by workers for the WPA.

At midnight, they finally skidded to a stop in Kingman and Sam got out of the car. Now he was only 50 miles from home. He stood for a while under a dim streetlight that only seemed to make the cold crowd into his government issue clothing. Yet in spite of the cold, he was going home for Christmas—and his parents didn't know.

It wasn't long before a man driving a poultry truck stopped and picked up the soldier. Sam climbed into the cab of that old truck and the driver carefully pulled back onto Highway 54 heading east toward Wichita. The going was slow, the wind was still strong and turkey feathers swirled around in the cab of the truck as it rattled its way through the early morning hours of Christmas Day.

Finally, at 3 A.M., they came to the end of the lane where Sam's parents lived. The wind had stopped by now and there were no streetlights. It was a cold, still night lit only by the faint glow of the moon. Sam began the short walk down the lane toward home. The snow crunched beneath his feet with each step that he took. As he inched down the street, there was not a light on anywhere—and yet, then he noticed that in the window of his parents' home there was one small light shining. He was surprised. My grandfather was so frugal that even a two-watt bulb would be extravagant if left on all night. Yet there it was. A little red Christmas light shining brightly tucked neatly inside one of those old-fashioned red cellophane wreaths.

When Sam reached the house, he climbed the steps to the porch. He

stomped the snow from his combat boots and rattled the screen door. In seconds my grandfather opened the door, staring out into the darkness until he recognized his boy. Soon, all the lights were on and coffee was perking on the stove when Sam asked the question, “Dad, why did you leave the light on in the window tonight? You know that my brother is in India and my brother-in-law is in Germany and you were sure I wouldn’t be home. Why did you leave the light on?”

**I DO NOT WANT YOU
TO HEAR IT; I WANT
YOU TO SEE IT.**

Grandpa answered in his typical way, “Oh, I don’t know, Sammy. I guess I left it on *just in case*.” *Just in case*. Two thousand years ago, God hung a light in eternity’s window *just in case* there was a boy lost in the storm or a girl who needed to find her way home.

When I use that story, I do not want you to hear it; I want you to see it. Sometimes in our efforts to be such great preachers we fail to learn from the greatest Teacher of all: Jesus. He spoke in stories and parables, and people flocked to hear Him tell heavenly truth in homespun tales. Read often and remember Matt. 13:34 (NIV): “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.” Where do we find such stories? That leads to suggestion three.

TRAIN YOURSELF TO FIND STORIES

I am on a constant search for stories and illustrations. It never stops. When I get up in the morning and read the newspaper, I’m looking for stories. When I fly, I am reading the in-flight magazine looking for stories. When I sit at the auto dealership waiting for service or at the doctor’s office, I am reading the old dog-eared magazines on the end tables, looking for stories.

Also, invest in your preaching. Buy good commentaries even if it is only one volume at a time. Buy the volume you are currently preaching from. If our books are considered the tools of our trade, then it is easier to justify the investment. Every mechanic worth his coveralls is constantly upgrading the equipment he uses to diagnose and repair automobiles. Yet we pastors seem to think that if those commentaries were good enough in 1920, they are more than adequate for today.

My investment beyond my big-ticket items is what offers me the greatest source of stories and illustrations. There are literally dozens of magazines and journals dedicated totally to the skill of preaching. I subscribe to several: *Dynamic Preaching*, *Homiletics*, *Preaching Today*, *Preaching*, and *Preacher’s Magazine* from NPH. I also subscribe to many secular publications: *Current Thoughts and Trends*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Premiere*, *Rolling Stone*. And, yes, *Holiness Today*.

I have discovered pastors across the nation who print their manuscripts every week and send them out. Few are sermons that I could use, but some of

them have been reading books that I never read and their sermons contain stories and illustrations that I have never been exposed to. Some charge a minimal fee; others send the material without charge: Norman Neaves, Church of the Servant, Oklahoma City; and St. Andrews Presbyterian Church.

Have there not been times when you would have paid for a great closing illustration? Well, why not do it before you need it?

Cultivate the habit of talking to other pastors about their sermons and especially their illustrations. Most are eager to tell about their latest masterpiece. Get into the habit of asking a simple question of your fellow pastors: “What is the best illustration you have heard lately?” or “Heard any great stories lately?”

BEGIN SERMON PREPARATION EARLY IN THE WEEK

I have made a new discovery. At age 51, I finally discovered the wonderful sense of freedom that comes from *finishing* my preparation early in the week. I realize that I have the advantage of staff to keep the wheels on at the church when I am away, but if I were starting over, I would find a way to make this my schedule.

Until this year, I have always protected Friday as my study day. I would often land in my study after a week of crisis, conflict, confrontation, hospitals, funerals, and fatigue only to discover that I had been beaten up by the week and had little in the way of inspiration left. And now I am supposed to compose something encouraging, inspiring, and helpful? It often did not happen.

I have changed my study day to Tuesday. It has become my Sabbath. My office knows that I am not available on Tuesday. By the time the lights are turned off on Tuesday night, my Sunday morning sermon notes are neatly tucked inside my Bible and I am ready to go.

With my sermon in completed form by Tuesday night, I now have four additional days to fine-tune that message. My mind is focused on the subject, and if I read or hear a story that fits or even improves the message, I have time to incorporate it. No such chance when the message is not completed until Friday night or, God forbid, Saturday.

With my sermon completed by Tuesday night, I have time to meet with those who will participate in the service and show them the sermon. We then have time to talk about music that would be appropriate. We have time to pull together a simple drama or prop.

With my sermon completed by Tuesday night, I now have the rest of the week to give to my people. It takes the panic out of preparation.

PLAN YOUR PREACHING SCHEDULE AHEAD OF TIME

While pastoring my first church, I discovered the wonderful freedom of knowing in advance what my title, text, and theme would be for the next Sun-

**PLANNING FOR
THREE MONTHS CAN
EASILY BE DONE IN
ONE DAY.**

day. I did that by planning three to six months ahead so I was never in a crisis for the following Sunday. Planning for three months can easily be done in one day. Think how much panic energy you will save across those months.

You will be amazed at how quickly you can put a plan together even for a year. Take a year's calendar and note how many dates and themes are already set for you. You will discover New Year's, Valentines Day, Lent, Palm Sunday, Easter, Pentecost Sunday, Mother's Day, Memorial Day, Graduation Sunday, Father's Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Round-up Sunday in September, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Advent. If you followed the themes of those dates on the calendar, you would have used 20 Sundays out of 52.

Helps for planning sermon series can be found in your local bookstore or library. Check the table of contents from various sermon books. Look for intriguing titles. Then see if there is a text given. Use those ideas as a spin-off starter for your own creativity. Then use your creative imagination to begin filling those titles into sermon spots not filled with holiday themes.

Another source for new ideas is the Internet. Search the Internet for interesting topics and creative themes. Two years ago I typed in the words "Easter+Sermon" and over 18,000 sites were found. I did not have time to look at them all, but I found a great title that I used for my Easter sermon that year. It was called "The Agony of Victory and the Thrill of Defeat."

To make the planning process work, take your resource material and get away for a day. I have gone to a cabin. I have used the public library. I have even taken my material with me to a lake along with a fishing pole. Spend time in prayer asking God how to arrange your preaching schedule in a way that would please Him. Maybe you would just want to start with a schedule for a month or two, but when you walk away from that day's work, you will feel organized, exhilarated, and energized. Suddenly you have a track to run on and you are no longer fighting the weekly battle of deciding, "What am I going to preach this Sunday?"

It is important to remember you are not a prisoner held captive by the schedule you have just developed. I always approach my sermon schedule with this prayer in mind: "God, this is the direction I feel that You would have me go. I just want You to know that You are free to change Your mind and mine at any time." Things happen in the life of a church that makes certain planned topics totally irrelevant by the time you get to that date.

For example, I live in Littleton, Colorado. The Sunday after the Columbine shooting, I *had* to address that issue. My sermon schedule was suddenly relegated to the back burner, and I spent that week trying to develop a sermon that would address a tragedy in our community.

DISCOVER THE FREEDOM OF PREACHING IN SERIES

I was pastoring in Oklahoma when the first PALCON was held on the campus of Bethany Nazarene College. I had been pastoring for two years by that time, and I was not enthused about going to another conference. Yet, in many ways, that conference was the most helpful, meaningful, and productive that I have ever attended. It was there that I was introduced to many things that would impact my ministry, not the least of which was preaching in series.

In PALCON I, Dr. William McCumber spoke to the group about series preaching, and his ideas seemed so revolutionary to me. He held up a copy of Barclay's *Daily Study Bible* and challenged us to use those as the basis for preaching through a book. I had never heard of Barclay, but I bought the books and went home and proceeded to take my Wednesday night crowd on a journey through the Book of James. I took my Sunday morning crowd through 1 John, and they loved it. Barclay had given me lots of help with the outline. My own reading supplied illustrations, and my heart warmed by God supplied the applications and conclusions. And I was able to fill up many more weeks in that sermon-planning schedule that I mentioned a moment ago.

Another way to plan the preaching calendar is to preach a series in the summer. It lends continuity to months that are otherwise scattered with activity. When people return from vacation, they know what the sermon is going to be about. In fact, I created bookmarks that listed the title of the series, the dates, and the titles of each message. I have people who have every bookmark still in their Bibles. These are inexpensive, can be done in your office, yet make a statement to your people that the pastor knows where he or she is going.

Series that fit the summer well are series on "The Apostles," "The Ten Commandments," "The Beatitudes," "The Seven Churches in Revelation," "The Holy Spirit: God in the Present Tense," "What Would Jesus Do?" and "God's Answers to Life's Limitations." As these series begin to take up more space in that sermon schedule, you are soon running out of Sundays rather than running out of sermons.

PREPARE A MANUSCRIPT

I realize this is a question for debate to some pastors. Here is my rationale. I believe the discipline that comes from writing a manuscript offers several advantages even if you never take it to the pulpit or preach from it.

1. *It answers the question of time.* You soon learn that each page of manuscript will normally take about two or two and a half minutes to deliver. The number of pages will tell you how long the sermon should be.

2. *It keeps you from getting lost in some detour.* Most pastors that I have watched chase rabbits down trails where no one wants to go would avoid that tendency if a manuscript had been prepared.

3. *You can carefully speak on issues that are delicate or even potentially volatile*

if you spend time on a manuscript. It will help you eliminate inflammatory words. It will force you to confront your own emotion concerning the matter and allow you time to think it through so that you can present the issue from a position of logic and fairness.

4. *It preserves your work.* I have a wonderful friend who preaches every Sunday without any notes, and I admire his skill. When he finishes the sermon, he does not have to worry about some sort of filing system because he has nothing to file. He also has no record of what he has preached and when he last preached on that passage or that topic.

ALLOW YOUR PEOPLE TO “SEE” THE MESSAGE

I have discovered how meaningful a simple prop can be in magnifying the impact of a message. If you prepare early in the week as suggested, you have time to let your creativity work.

I am told that baby boomers and those younger learn more quickly by seeing while those born before 1946 are auditory learners. How can you bridge the gap? I have discovered that even older people are more interested when something visual is present on the platform.

This idea comes from Jesus. When He walked through a meadow, He picked a flower and said, “Consider the lilies of the field.” When He stopped by a well for a drink, He spoke of “Living Water.” When He served the Last Supper, the bread and cup became props to help His audience understand what He was trying to teach.

Let me share some of the ways that I’ve used this technique.

Several years ago, there was a large auction at Sotheby’s, selling items that had belonged to John Kennedy. It was in the news for days before the auction. The Sunday after the auction, I preached on the value that we place on things that are not very important, and how we place little value on some of life’s most precious things. I had the platform set with items that resembled some of those from the auction. I had a rocking chair, an old set of golf clubs, and even a silver flatware chest that I presented as the president’s humidor. I had large price tags on each item with the price that the actual item had sold for. My people were immediately drawn into the premise.

Last Memorial Day, I preached a message from the story of Noah and God’s use of the rainbow as a reminder of His covenant with Noah not to destroy the earth again through flood. As people entered the sanctuary, they saw an assortment of things set just to my left of the pulpit. I had my mother’s wedding dress on a dress form. I had my Buddy Lee doll that I had played with as a boy. My wife’s small kitchen cabinet was there as were our daughter’s old Cabbage Patch dolls and the suit I was ordained in back in 1974. I spoke of “Memory Pegs” and how God continues to use people and places and events to remind us of His grace and His love.

Early last summer, I preached on the fact that we carry “baggage” through life that God does not intend for us to carry. When people entered the sanctuary, they saw about 20 pieces of luggage piled around in front of the pulpit. As I preached, I kept picking up more luggage until I was finally carrying about eight pieces. The visual effect had much more impact than if I had only mentioned it verbally.

Today, video can also play a role in how we present a particular part of our message. If a church has a video projector and a screen and a teenager with a video camera, you too can enter the video age. Tape a short testimony that would fit the message. Play it before, during, or as the conclusion. The advantage with tape is that you have control of time.

PREACH TO HEARTS AS WELL AS HEADS

The old adage is so true: “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” The people that we preach to are bright and articulate. They want truth and grace. But they want to know that they matter and that their life counts.

The credibility I have with my people is not based so much on the depths of my intellect as it is the hunger in my heart to communicate and help them. Sure, they want to be challenged to think, but they also want to “feel” the presence of God and the warmth of my heart. Tell them and show them you love them.

**THEY WANT TO
KNOW THAT THEY
MATTER AND THAT
THEIR LIFE COUNTS.**

FIND A MENTOR

You have to have someone you trust and can talk to, someone who can be your friend and adviser when you feel that no one else is there. But how does a mentor help with our preaching?

A mentor is someone who swaps sermon ideas with you. My mentor for almost 30 years has been my uncle. In my first church, he was only 20 miles across town from me where he served on staff at Bethany First Church. He was my hero, my friend, and on more than one occasion, my lifesaver.

But I realized that I needed to find others. On every district where I have served, I have made the effort to get close to a pastor in a church that was larger than mine. I realized that he was there for a reason. He knows how to do some things better than I do, and one of those things was probably preaching. At every district gathering, I would strive to spend time with this pastor. I would question him, get tapes of his messages or even copies of his notes. I studied his style, his approach, his skills, his vocabulary, his humor. I picked his sermon apart—not as a critic, but as a student.

A mentor can also be your best source of constructive criticism. Allow him or her to hear your tapes and study your notes. Listen to their suggestions. You do not have to agree with everything he or she says, but listen.

Though I would not consider them “mentors,” I continue to study the style of every preacher I come in contact with. Even television preachers have done something right in order to attract such an audience.

The challenge to keep growing as a preacher is lofty and continuous. But the results are worth every effort. Never stop learning. Never stop trying to improve. Don't let the enemy convince you that you cannot do it. God called you to preach the Good News. These are days when pastoring is as difficult as it has ever been. That is why the Good News is so important and our churches are dying of thirst for a preacher to step to the pulpit and proclaim, “Thus saith the Lord.”

Presented as “Ways You Can Improve Your Preaching” at the national training conference of the Small Church Institute, in St. Louis, Missouri, March 27, 2000.



The test
of a preacher
is that his
congregation
goes away saying
not,
“What a lovely
sermon,”
but,
“I will do
something!”
—Francis de Sales

From *Introduction to the Devout Life*, ed. Thomas S. Kepler (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1952).

ANOINTING: EMPOWERED SPEAKING FOR GOD

Neil B. Wiseman

WORDS LIKE “FOOLISH,” “audacious,” and “inconceivable” pop in our minds when we think about a human being speaking God’s message to the church and to the world. The idea that God uses a mere mortal as His spokesperson stretches the mind and scrambles the imagination of every preacher. And of listeners too.

The apostle Paul was so astounded by the whole arrangement that he said, “God in his wisdom took delight in using what the world considered dumb—*preaching*, of all things!—to bring those who trust him into the way of salvation” (1 Cor. 1:21, TM). Anointing—the hand of the Holy God on my shoulder—as I try my best to preach is beyond anything I can comprehend but is exactly what I need. And exactly what God provides.

When ministers get together, preaching becomes the topic of discussion. A year or two ago, I heard a veteran minister say at a seminar, “Though I’ve preached about 2,000 sermons, anointing is a hard concept to explain. I know when I have it. And my parishioners know when I don’t.” Nervous laughter rippled through the room.

Ministers chuckle sadly, because it is too often true, when they hear the old story about two faithful church members who discussed the sermon as they left church. One asked the other, “What was the pastor talking about in his sermon?” The second worshiper answered, “I don’t believe he said.”

Across 2,000 years of Christian history, conscientious preachers have known that authentic preaching demands more than mere human energy. It takes more than mental sharpness, or well-polished speaking skills. Accordingly, preaching needs a holy touch and a divine approval if it is to achieve what God intends it to accomplish. Someone suggested that substantive sermons need at least three essential elements: (1) a great preacher, (2) a great theme, and (3) a great occasion. The supernatural resourcing of God on great preachers, great themes, and holy settings is what this chapter is about.

CAN ANOINTING BE DEFINED?

Admittedly, abiding values like love, loyalty, faith, hope, and mercy are difficult to describe or define until they are experienced. Anointing belongs on that list. It is joyful to experience, difficult to explain, and available to every preacher. Struggling to explain anointing, a beginning preacher called it “an incredible turn-on where thinking, faith, feelings, devotion, and responsibility meet.”

Having his own difficulty with definition, a seminary professor suggests anointed sermons are something like a sacrament, where God uses ordinary stuff to accomplish supernatural results. The instructor went on to argue what we already know—every preacher is as ordinary as bread in Communion and water in Baptism. The professor was embarrassingly accurate about our ordinariness.

An experienced preacher-pastor insisted preaching has little worth or meaning until it is heard redemptively as a message to the gathered people of God from their heavenly King. In this view, preaching does not actually become preaching until it produces a responsive hearing among active listeners.

All who preach know anointing grips a preacher’s mind and stimulates the emotions. But there is more beyond this obvious impact. Anointing toughens, questions, and energizes the preacher’s entire being for the task of speaking reliably for God.

A British preacher of a generation or two ago, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, explained how he cultivated this anointing:

Seek Him! Seek Him always. But go beyond seeking Him; expect Him. Do you expect anything to happen to you when you get up to preach? Seek this power, expect this power, yearn for this power; and when this power comes, yield to Him. Do not resist. Forget all about your sermon if necessary. Let Him loose you, let Him manifest His power in you and through you.¹

Anointing Starts with a Holy Encounter

Anointing starts with a holy encounter with God. This encounter is like Jacob’s meeting with God when he said, “I will not let you go until you bless me.” It happens when a scripture makes a visceral claim on a preacher’s whole being. It fuels readiness, preparation, and sermon delivery. At the same moment, it questions the minister’s piety, pride, and purity.

G. Campbell Morgan spoke knowingly about this holy encounter: “Formerly it was said that a preacher was to ‘handle his text.’ But when a text handles the preacher, it grips and masters and possesses him, and he is responsive to the things he is declaring, having conviction of the supremacy of truth and having experienced the power of truth. I think that is what most produces passion for preaching.”² Such a holy connection with Scripture makes a preacher stretch for thoughts and search for words to express what God wants said and done. Anointing, or unction, infiltrates and illuminates the preacher’s toil with word

meanings, exegesis, contexts, propositions, structures, and creativity. Anointing is the sun at high noon enlightening and energizing every part of preaching.

To deepen our understanding of such a meeting with God, E. M. Bounds quotes an old Scottish preacher: “There is sometimes something in preaching that cannot be ascribed either to matter or expression, and cannot be described by what it is, or from whence it cometh, but with a sweet violence it pierceth into the heart and affections and comes immediately from the Lord.”³ That’s it—*anointing* is God’s way of empowering a frail human being to speak adequately or even supernaturally for Him.

This holy anointing does more than improve a sermon’s delivery—it makes the preacher aware that God saturates the whole sermon development and delivery effort. Spurgeon offers a lovely idea when he suggests that a part of anointing is the art of rightly using what we know. Such a holy anointing never results from merely seeking to have something to say. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was right: “To me there is nothing more terrible for a preacher, than to be in the pulpit alone, without the conscious smile of God.” Thus it may not be an overstatement to say that preaching without encounter is not authentic preaching.

Why go alone when you can have the Holy One to help you preach?

Anointing Ignites an Inner Passion

Lots of contemporary preaching, while technically acceptable, has little passion. Let’s be clear—sparks of anointing may be ignited at any point along the way in sermon preparation or delivery. But preaching, if it is to be life-changing, must be ignited somewhere along the way. London’s City Temple Pastor Joseph Parker of a past generation was so right in his strong statement, “It is fire that make a difference between one preacher and another; it is not intelligence or the mere use of the right words.”⁴

Samuel Shoemaker, gifted Episcopalian pastor and founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, advised preachers that this fire is needed so we may hear God “say fresh, vivid, exciting, moving, and convincing things through us . . . so that there is fire in us that leaps from Him to us and from us to them.”⁵

Anointing Develops New Insights

Anointed preaching always centers on Christ and clarifies our words about Him. Unction enhances the awareness of Jesus that is already partially present in the sermon study, brought there by the biblical passage, our experience, our character, and our commitment. Authentic anointing takes us back to Jesus again and again. His approving relationship is something like a father’s cheer at a Little League baseball game, or a mother’s loving word as her child leaves for school, or parents’ proud affirmation at their child’s college graduation. Anointing assures preachers that they have divine approval.

Unction increases insight, clarifies toil in the study, and focuses our creativity.

This God-nearness makes a preacher stand at full attention, ready to deliver his or her soul with a full assurance of being in sync with God. One preacher calls unction a Spirit-directed way of knowing. To sharpen our thinking about these supernatural dimensions of preaching, we must recognize that anointed preaching means to know what God wants said to a particular people in a specific setting at a given time.

ANOINTING STARTS WITH THE PREACHER'S BEST EFFORTS

How could preaching as a delivery strategy for the gospel have been around for such a long time? Across the centuries, thousands have preached. Millions have come to faith.

As we have seen earlier, God uses mere mortals to speak His message to the world and to the church. Their content for preaching comes from an amazing book that consists of 66 smaller books, most of which were written 2,000 or more years ago.

All things considered, the humanness of the preacher, the message, and millions of apparently disinterested people, makes preaching in the 21st century challenging. This all adds up to the fact that preaching must have the supernatural dimension, or it is all in vain. But that supernatural element usually does not show up until the preacher has given preparation high priority. But how is that done?

Requires Personal Piety

Anointing necessitates a creative connection with holy resources. To be able to keep connected, the preacher must intentionally keep his or her soul warm toward God. The minister must have an intimate relationship with Christ, so close that this connection shapes the thought, life, and preaching. G. Campbell Morgan insisted two generations ago, "Truth and life travel together in the preacher's preaching." Christ Jesus himself is our inspirational Example of the combination of spiritual power and ultimate truth in human form.

An insightful listener remarked to Scottish preacher Alexander Whyte, "Today you preached as if you had come straight from the Presence."

Whyte answered shyly, "Perhaps I did."⁶

That's an important part of the whole issue. Even though intimacy with Christ is seldom discussed in relationship to preaching, it is the beyond-doubt secret of spiritual effectiveness in proclamation. Anointing unites the holy presence of God and the human frailty of the preacher. As a result, he or she is able to speak insightfully and inspirationally for "the Holy Other." God's strength and human weakness meet in an anointed sermon, so the preacher can sing, "Now let the weak say, 'I am strong.'"

This personal spirituality experience component of preaching is just the

opposite of what I sometimes see in my preaching students. When such a situation arises, I say, “Your sermon is biblical and well-prepared, but your eyes show nobody is at home in your heart.” Too many of us try to preach with well-furnished minds but empty hearts. Years ago unction and passion and anointing were so absent in one American frontier preacher that the Indian chief insightfully remarked, “Big thunder, no rain.” Sad but true, the pioneer’s descendants still live among us—in fact we may be some of them.

Writer Gary Thomas offers a challenge to preachers to care and cultivate personal spirituality:

The church has lost much of its authority to address the slide into the moral morass because some of our pastors have produced lives that make them candidates for TV talk shows. I think we need a new revolution. . . . I’m tired of hearing about how “inspired” a new preacher is, of what a new spiritual manifestation is coming down from heaven. Instead, I want to see character. I want to see men who have made the hard moral decisions and thus have embodied the excellence of the Christian faith. I want to hear about people who have made every effort to add to their faith goodness.⁷

Embraces a Holy Foolishness

The apostle Paul, to make sure no one misunderstood the reality of God using human weakness, announced that God planned to save people through the “foolish” strategy of “preaching” (1 Col. 1:21). The secret is a divine anointing that transforms a foolish-appearing and incredibly complicated human communication process into a redemptive event.

Authentic anointing produces certainty in the preacher’s mind that preaching is more than a human-initiated, self-centered oration. This unction makes preaching a supernatural communication event that brings authority and fervor and insight to the preacher, so he or she proclaims the good news of what God is doing through Christ at the present moment.

Let’s be more specific. What, then, is anointing for preaching? It is allowing oneself to become a supernatural spokesperson to speak for God to human needs around us. Or to say it even more precisely, anointed preaching takes place at the intersection at which the Spirit of God, the Word of God, the preacher, the message, the hearers, the human needs, and the setting all connect.

Judges the Preacher’s Character

Real anointing requires that a preacher allow the meaning of a biblical passage into the intricacy of his or her own thoughts and character. Before preaching, the preacher must allow Scripture to scrutinize personal sensitivities, suspect inner motives, strengthen intrinsic weaknesses, and question pride. This passionate realization of the Almighty speaking to the preacher through a biblical passage helps the minister of the Word get ready to preach with the awe and

**ANOINTING, THE
REAL KIND, OFTEN
NAGS AND PESTERS
AND QUESTIONS AND
BLESSES THE
PREACHER LONG
BEFORE THE SERMON
IS PREACHED.**

amazement that he or she is trusted to be God's spokesperson.

Authentic anointing most often starts with musing, discovery, engagement, imagination, involvement, soul-searching, reflection, spiritual stretching, and a willingness to be shaped personally by a biblical truth. Anointing, the real kind, often nags and pesters and questions and blesses the preacher long before the sermon is preached. It often wakes the spokesperson at night or makes him or her anxious about personal worthiness to speak before stepping behind the pulpit.

Think of how God trusts us. As God's anointed spokespersons, He gives us opportunity to point people to the sunburst of the gospel in the middle of the

blackest storms of contemporary culture. That requires that a preacher know a lot about both sunshine and darkness.

Opens the Mind to New Truth

Genuine anointing shows we are so intimately acquainted with God and awed by Him that we diligently try to understand and apply biblical truth accurately to our times, our churches, and ourselves. A passion for preaching always helps us speak clearly and plainly.

Joe Bayley states the issue conclusively with this story: "Graffiti scrawled on a wall at a university read, 'Jesus said to them, "Who do you say that I am?"' And someone had written in reply, 'You are the eschatological manifestation of the ground of our being, the kerygma in which we find the ultimate meaning of our interpersonal relationships.' And Jesus said, 'What?'" Bayley continues: "Our Lord was profound, but simple in expression. Ordinary people heard Him gladly, eagerly. To use an old but true way of expressing it, He put the cookies—or the bread of life—on the lowest shelf where anyone could reach it. And so must I."⁸

To have unction in preaching requires that a preacher genuinely understands the gospel and has a do-or-die, lifelong commitment to it. With a word of apology to author John Stapleton for a bit of editing, his stalwart sentence summarizes the spiritual dynamics of preaching: "Passion lifts up the right words in the right order and sends them forth from the preacher on wings of sound as a message from the speaking God to the listening people."⁹

Increases the Urgency Factor

Authentic anointing makes a preacher anxious about the spiritual condition of all who hear the preaching. Every contemporary pulpiter should seriously consider these five sentences written by Richard Busch:

The Holy Spirit will move them [the hearers] by first moving you. If you can rest without their being saved, they will rest too. But if you are

filled with agony for them, if you cannot bear that they should be lost, you will find that they are uneasy, too. I hope that you will dream about your hearers perishing for lack of Christ and begin to cry “O God, give me converts or I die.” Then you will have converts.¹⁰

UNCTION STARTS WITH SCRIPTURAL SATURATION

Wrestling with the message and meaning of a scriptural passage is where anointing originates. Without this Bible saturation, the sermon lacks relevance to hearers. Dennis F. Kinlaw, Old Testament scholar, evangelist, and former president of Asbury College, himself an exemplary model of anointed preaching, helpfully explains the important place of the Bible as our Source for unction in proclamation.

In Kinlaw’s 1984 preaching lectures at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, he recounted his student days in Princeton when Old Testament scholar Otto Piper remarked in class:

You know, young men and young ladies, many people feel that Calvin and Luther produced the Reformation. But it wasn’t Calvin and Luther. What happened was that when Luther read the Book of Galatians, he listened; and when he listened, it exploded inside him; and when the truth of Galatians exploded inside him, he didn’t have any better sense than to go tell it to other people! A similar thing happened with Calvin. Calvin’s congregation knew what he was going to preach on a given Sunday because he simply started with the verses following the one where he quit the previous Sunday.¹¹

Such an explosion of the meaning of Scripture is needed in every congregation, especially in this turbulent period of human history.

Regrettably, a serious setback occurred somewhere along the line of church history. Piper described the detour: “The great tragedy of the Reformation was that when Luther died, Melanchthon edited his work. And when Calvin died, Beza edited his work. Melanchthon encouraged the people of Germany to read the Bible to find Luther’s doctrine in it, while Beza encouraged the people of Geneva to read the Bible to find Calvin’s doctrine.”¹² There is an important lesson here for us. A preacher who seeks anointing does not read the Bible to find something to say but to be personally found by the truth of Scripture. What is to be said follows.

God’s Message for the Preacher

Well-known veteran pastor Gardner C. Taylor, who impacted Brooklyn through 30 years of preaching at Concord Baptist Church, reminds us with powerful language: “The magnificent anomaly of preaching is to be found in the fact that the person who preaches is in need himself or herself of the message which the preacher believes he or she is ordained to utter.” Then Taylor

adds this forceful question that demands our answer, “How dare such a person address others, in the name of God, who are no worse off than the spokesman?” He continues: “This is almost incredible presumptuousness which ought to prompt every preacher to pray with anguish and bewilderment in the spirit of the words of the song of my own forebears, ‘It ain’t my brother and it ain’t my sister but it’s me, O Lord, standin’ in the need of prayer.’”¹³ All this is growing confirmation that the starting point for anointing begins when the preacher sees how the Bible intimately exposes oneself to one’s own gaze while waiting before God. The result is spiritual self-discovery—a missing ingredient in much of contemporary preaching.

IN PREACHING, THE REAL PERSON SHOWS.

As everyone knows, anointing is inescapably connected to a preacher’s fidelity and honor and faith. In preaching, the real person shows, whether a preacher knows it or not. The minister engages in self-revelation when opening his or her mouth in the pulpit.

Since every preacher reads the Scriptures and sees the world from a personal vantage point, the preacher needs to submit to as many accurate reality tests as can be found. Such a test of reality was posted on the vestry wall in an Aberdeen, Scotland, church. Its purpose was to confront every preacher as he mounted the pulpit stairs. The placard read, “No one can both glorify Christ and himself at the same time.” A similar placard in blazing letters might be beneficial in pulpits everywhere.

Such a reality becomes a preacher’s spiritual serendipity while preparing to preach. Kinlaw offers this forceful insight about the self-discovery aspect: “We must present the Bible not only as the Word of God, but as the Word of God about us. . . . That can occur only through the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit. Then, when the Spirit’s internal revelation breaks into the preacher’s mind and attends his preaching, it has the potential for radically transforming people’s lives.”¹⁴

At this present moment, perhaps the greatest need for supernatural preaching power is for every preacher to authentically hear what Scripture says personally so that others can be told about the discovery. Only as God’s Word permeates a preacher’s life does a holy anointing flow through the sermons that follow.

Cure for Deadly Dullness

Remember Eutychus, the New Testament man who fell asleep during one of Paul’s long sermons? David H. C. Read, longtime former pastor of Manhattan’s Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, in a charming magazine article once discussed what makes preaching interesting. He suggested we can keep contemporary Eutychus from feeling toxic boredom by communicating the mental

excitement of personally encountering the Word of God. After a paragraph decrying dry dullness, Read observes, “The trouble with ministers, missionaries, and church workers is that they are always meeting and talking with ministers, missionaries, and church workers.”¹⁵ How incredibly correct. Too often we use an inside vocabulary to try to reach an outside world. Why choose the dullness that comes from talking too much to ourselves when we could enjoy and share the spiritual excitement of Scripture with the people who hear us preach?

Unction, then, produces a growing awareness for a preacher that there need not be boredom if the minister has come fresh from the Presence. Such freshness comes from internal preparation—prayer, meditation, and waiting on God. The ensuing anointing makes a sermon into a message. Then the Spirit of God actually transforms the preaching into an event in which the grace of God impacts the people.

UNCTION IS FREE, BUT IT COSTS PLENTY

Anointing in preaching, even though it is a gift from God, is costly business, expensive in effort and faithfulness. Anointing requires a lifelong resolution to be an effective preacher. It costs commitment and dedication to speak usefully for God. Divine anointing begins with holy living by the preacher, and that costs much in devotion and duty to Kingdom priorities. But it pays too.

Concerning the cost of unction, Douglas Bennett, professor at Southern College in Collegedale, Tennessee, insists, “Spirit-anointed preaching does not come without our being willing to pay a great price—that of being broken by God, molded by prayer and prostrated in humble dependence upon God for power.”¹⁶

Beyond specific study and general preparation, anointing demands spiritual preparation for a particular preaching event. One redemptively effective preacher I know spends the last two hours before each preaching event soaking in the message; it is no surprise that he seldom preaches without a sense of holy unction. Princeton’s Andrew Blackwood, sometimes called the dean of preachers of his generation, addressed this issue insightfully:

The biblical sermon is likely to be worth as much or as little as it costs in time and thought, in work and prayer. In his study, the prophet can build his altar and lay the wood on it. There he can lovingly place his sacrifice—the waiting sermon. All of this he is glad to do as well as he can, but still the fire must come from God. Come the fires will, if he prays before he works, and if he works in the spirit of prayer.¹⁷

The Lord’s anointing is seldom experienced by one who has given little effort to preparation. I say “seldom” because I believe God sometimes takes pity

**ANOINTING
REQUIRES A LIFELONG
RESOLUTION TO BE
AN EFFECTIVE
PREACHER.**

on congregations whose pastors refuse to pay the price for anointing; then God gives blessed utterance to their pastor for the people's sake. God always allows us to preach without anointing if that's our desire. But why preach in human strength, however gifted you may be, when you can have divine empowerment?

Try paying the extravagant price of powerful preaching with prayer, personal spiritual formation, brokenness, thorough preparation, and even occasional fasting. Then you will be ready for God to trust you with this holy enablement. Though this commitment demands energy, produces humility, and makes us totally dependent on God, the resulting anointing is well worth any price.

And the people will be grateful.

1. Quoted in Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994), 57.

2. G. Campbell Morgan, *Preaching* (New York: Revell, 1937), 36.

3. Quoted in E. M. Bounds, *The Preacher and Prayer* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1963), 73.

4. Dennis Kinlaw, *Preaching in Demonstration of the Spirit and Power* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 41.

5. J. Daniel Baumann, *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 285.

6. Morgan, *Preaching*, 37.

7. Brief quotation in *Current Thoughts and Trends* 11 (June 1995), 21.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Kinlaw, *Preaching in Demonstration*, 41.

10. Richard Busch, "A Strange Silence," *Christian Century* (March 22, 1995), 316.

11. Kinlaw, *Preaching in Demonstration*, 11.

12. *Ibid.*, 12.

13. Gardner C. Taylor, *How Should They Preach?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 27.

14. Kinlaw, *Preaching in Demonstration*, 15.

15. David H. C. Read, "Eutychus—or The Perils of Preaching," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (n.d.), 170.

16. Douglas Bennett, "Spirit-Anointed Preaching," *Preaching* (Sept.-Oct. 1989), 27.

17. Andrew Blackwood, *Preaching from the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1941), 196.

Originally published as chapter 3 of *The Untamed God: Unleashing the Supernatural in the Body of Christ* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1997), 54-65.

CONTRIBUTORS TO *A HOLY PROCLAMATION*

J. B. CHAPMAN

Dr. J. B. Chapman started his ministry as an evangelist at age 16 and pastored churches in Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas. In the course of his influential ministry, he served as district superintendent, college president, founding editor of *Preacher's Magazine*, editor of *Herald of Holiness*, and general superintendent. The book from which his chapter in this book is taken, *The Preaching Ministry*, was based on Dr. Chapman's chapel presentation on preaching—the first lecture series at NTS. He was the most influential champion for the establishment of the seminary. Many believe his message *All Out for Souls*, delivered to the district superintendents in 1946, focused the Church of the Nazarene away from introspective legalism to outward mission for winning the world to Christ.

ROSS W. HAYSLIP

Rev. Ross W. Hayslip was an effective, well-loved pastor whose ministry spanned 52 years in six locations. He served churches in Wooster, Ohio; Carthage, Missouri; Whittier, California; and Tucson and Oro Valley, Arizona. He served as professor and college chaplain for 3 years at Nazarene Bible College, Colorado Springs. He was a frequent contributor to *Herald of Holiness*, *Preacher's Magazine*, and *Come Ye Apart*. He served on many different district and denominational committees and boards, including the General Board and the College Board at Bethany Nazarene College (now Southern Nazarene University). At a time when most people retire, he continued as an associate minister in Arizona.

W. E. McCUMBER

Dr. W. E. McCumber was ordained in 1945 and pastored churches at Atlanta and Thomasville, Georgia; Lake Wales, Arcadia, and Ocala, Florida; and Quincy, Massachusetts. He has served as evangelist and professor at Eastern Nazarene College and Point Loma Nazarene College. He served for 11 years as editor of *Herald of Holiness*. In every assignment he was known and loved as an inspiring preacher of the Holy Book.

W. T. PURKISER

Dr. W. T. Purkiser, with his gifted teaching, writing, and preaching, helped systematize and clarify the theological foundations of the Church of the Nazarene. After pastoring on the Southern California district from 1930 to 1937, he served as professor, dean, vice president, and eventually president of Pasadena College (now Point Loma Nazarene University). From there, he was appointed professor of English Bible at Nazarene Theological Seminary. He went on to serve as editor of *Herald of Holiness* for 14 years. A faithful churchman, Dr. Purkiser sat on the General Council of the Nazarene Young People's Society and also the Council of Education. In the course of this already full career, he managed to author 26 books, among them *God, Man, and Salvation*, a classic theology text still referred to as a cornerstone of Nazarene theology.

MILLARD C. REED

Dr. Millard C. Reed was elected president of Trevecca Nazarene University in 1991. Earlier in his ministry, he served congregations in Missouri, Kansas, Wisconsin, and Tennessee. He was founding pastor of Overland Park, Kansas, Church of the Nazarene in 1966, and he served Nashville First Church for 17 years. Dr. Reed is a contributor and author of several books, including *Proclaiming the Spirit*, *Let Your Church Grow*, and *Biblical Preaching for Contemporary Man*, from which his chapter in this book is taken.

TIM D. STEARMAN

Rev. Tim D. Stearman has served as pastor of Denver First Church of the Nazarene since 1993. Before that he served pastorates in Del City, Oklahoma; Independence, Kansas; and Tulsa, Oklahoma. He served the denomination as director of Adult Ministries between 1988 and 1990. He has served on various committees and boards including the advisory boards on the Joplin, Northeast Oklahoma, and Colorado Districts. He has written for *Holiness Today*, *Standard*, *Come Ye Apart*, and *Preacher's Magazine*. His chapter in this book is based on a presentation made to the Small Church Institute.

J. K. WARRICK

Dr. J. K. Warrick serves as pastor of Olathe College Church adjacent to the campus of MidAmerica Nazarene University. The church has more than 3,000 members and is one of the largest churches in the denomination and in the state of Kansas. Warrick has pastored churches in Oklahoma, Texas, Ohio, Florida, and Indianapolis. He has served on many boards and committees, including the university boards at Mount Vernon and MidAmerica. His chapter in this book is based on a presentation made to the Small Church Institute.

G. B. WILLIAMSON

Dr. G. B. Williamson pastored 16 years in Farmington, Iowa; Chicago; and Cleveland before being elected president of Eastern Nazarene College in 1936. He served there until 1945, when he was called to pastor Kansas City First Church of the Nazarene. The next year, Dr. Williamson was elected general superintendent, a position he held for 23 years. In 1968, at age 70, at a time when most people retire, Dr. and Mrs. Williamson joined the faculty of Nazarene Bible College, Colorado Springs, where they both taught for nearly 10 years. Williamson, more than any other one individual, challenged the church to establish the Bible college. His wide-ranging ministry extended to writing, as well; he authored eight books, including *Overseers of the Flock*, *Preaching Scriptural Holiness*, and biographies of Roy T. Williams and R. C. Ingram.

NEIL B. WISEMAN

Dr. Neil B. Wiseman served pastorates in California, Washington, Colorado, and Florida. He taught at Trevecca Nazarene University (6 years) and Nazarene Bible College (15 years, 8 of those as academic dean). He holds degrees from Olivet Nazarene University, Nazarene Theological Seminary, and Vanderbilt Divinity School. His service to the denomination includes director of PALCON I, founding editor of *GROW* magazine, director of Small Church Institute, and editor of *Preacher's Magazine*, producer of the Layman's Tape Club and the Minister's Tape Club and the first editor of the *Dialog Series*. He has written and/or edited 20 books.

MILDRED BANGS WYNKOOP

Dr. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop developed her inquisitive mind into an effective ministry as a theologian. During her years of ministry she served five colleges and seminaries. She helped establish the Japan Nazarene Theological Seminary while she served as a missionary in Taiwan and Japan. Wynkoop was the first woman to serve as president of the Wesleyan Theological Society. Her book *A Theology of Love* continues to be used in theological schools around the world. She was honored posthumously, along with her husband, Ralph, by the establishment of the Wynkoop Center for Women in Ministry at Nazarene Theological Seminary.