

Why A Sermon?

Recently, I gave a message entitled 'Why a Pastor,' and today I am going to pursue the theme a little further, in order to answer those, not in this congregation, who have been so badly abused by false ministers that they have antipathy towards any authoritative preaching of God's word. Strange, really because if it were not for preaching, none of us would be here!

Instead, they point to scriptures like 1 Corinthians 14:26-30, 34. This seems to suggest that all, at least all the males, were regularly speaking rather than just the elders.

'How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. If any man speak in an *unknown* tongue, *let it be* by two, or at the most *by* three, and *that* by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If *any thing* be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.' 34, 'Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law.'

Sermons, they claim, divide the preacher from the brethren. By the minister facing the congregation there can be no interaction or interruption such as would allow individuals to make a contribution, as we read of here.

Well, let's look at our practice in the Church of God. Here we have had three elders who regularly give sermons, and interspersed between we have interactive bible studies produced by the men who wish to provide such a service. Most do so; in fact almost all men are regularly on our speaking rota.

The implication of this criticism is that a preacher must consider himself 'special' because he speaks and others listen, and don't get a chance to contribute.

Is that so? Well, in my last message I provided the bible authority for a Pastor, and I explained that part of a Pastor's role is to encourage the development of all the talents and gifts God has given to His people. So, here, all who wish to, are encouraged to develop their ability to teach and preach the word of God, in preparation for our future roles as Kings and Priests in God's Kingdom.

Here, in this church in our bible studies and occasionally in sermons it is not uncommon for people to interrupt to make a comment, ask a question or add an additional scripture. At least that seems to be so when I am speaking, and so, I believe our closeness and informality allows everyone to make whatever contribution they wish, to our services overall.

Why are our services so organised? Let's look at what the bible says about preaching.

Romans 10:14-15, 'How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!'

A preacher. The Greek word here is *Kerux* – a herald. It is used of a preacher of the gospel.

1 Timothy 2:7, 'Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, *and* lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.'

2 Timothy 1:11, 'Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.'

And of Noah, a preacher of righteousness - 2 Peter 2:5, 'And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.'

The word comes from the Greek Kerusso, Vines P.201 a. - to be a herald

b. - to preach the gospel

c.- to preach the word

2 Timothy 4:2, 'Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.' So, preaching interprets the meaning of God's word and acts, into the contemporary situation. Preachers expound the word of God by bringing the past events and instructions we find in the Bible right into our own vital present experience.

Preaching must be based specifically upon God's word. 1 Corinthians 1:18, 'For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.' Interestingly, the word preaching here is the Greek 'logeos' - from the Greek logos, as it is in Hebrews 4:2, 'For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*.'

So, as God's word says 'How shall they hear, without a preacher?', this shows that a preacher must carry forth God's word as a herald, proclaiming the good news of the gospel to the world in words all can understand.

Many may find it foolishness, 1 Corinthians 1:21-23, 'For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.' But to those God is calling it means salvation through the grace of Jesus Christ! We can gather from this that a preacher must be capable of reaching out, beyond the church, to carry Christ's gospel of witness and warning to the world - something we have done through website and film, and by various other means!

The great prophets of the Old Testament heralded God's direct messages in just such a way. They often warned against the people's sins, Ezekiel 18:31, 'Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?' and Joel 2:12, 'Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye *even* to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning.'

They too carried God's message to the leaders of the nation - 2 Chronicles 15:1-2, 'And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD *is* with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.' They instructed God's people in the Law - 2 Chronicles 17:7-9, 'Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes, *even* to Benhail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nethaneel, and to Michaiiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. And with them *he sent* Levites, *even* Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, priests. And they taught in Judah, and *had* the book of the law of the LORD with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people.'

They interpreted the "sense" of God's law to their hearers in their particular circumstances, Nehemiah 8:7-9, 'Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people *stood* in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, *and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*'

The prophets of old were guided by God through the Holy Spirit, even as God guides his true leaders today. God does not change his way of communicating with His people, Ephesians 4:11, 'And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.' and Romans 12:5-8, 'So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, *let us wait* on *our* ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, *let him do it* with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.'

Today, God's ministers are charged with preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God in its broadest sense. The New Testament uses some 30 different terms to describe the preaching of John the Baptist, Jesus and the Apostles, and those most commonly used can be grouped under either proclamation (to herald or evangelise) or doctrine (to teach God's word). In practice these functions often meld together

Let's look at an example.

1 Corinthians 15:1-7, 'Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.' This is a written sermon to the Corinthians. It contains the core of the gospel message based on Christ's sacrifice and His fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies. Paul then builds upon that to explain the resurrection and exhorts the brethren to faithfulness, verses 20-23, 50-52, and 58.

'But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.'

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.'

'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.'

Paul was a serious preacher, and his sermons could last a long time, see Acts 20:7-12. It is apparent from this account that Paul's speech or sermon was not an interactive bible study – he alone was speaking to the congregation and for a lengthy period.

Another example of powerful preaching is found in Stephen's address in Acts 7:1-53. This too weaves narrative and scriptural history together with interpretation of the contemporary situation in Israel. It is in effect a grave warning to the religious leaders of Israel, and, as such it fits into the definition found of preaching in Thayers Lexicon "to proclaim, always with a suggestion of formality, gravity and authority which must be listened to and obeyed."

By no means can it be claimed that preaching was something introduced into the church by people like Diotrephes, 3John:9, 'I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.' It was always a vital part of God's way to get His

message over to the people. I can just imagine John the Baptist's expression had he been told that he could only sit down to interactive bible studies with the scribes and Pharisees. cf Matthew 3:1, 'In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea.' Not that there is anything wrong with bible studies either, but strong and authoritative preaching, designed to motivate the listeners to repentance is as much a part of the required spiritual diet of Christians as is a sit down discussion of Proverbs, or instruction about God's Plan for mankind.

As I said at the start, antipathy to preaching in some people, stems from ministerial abuse, associated with hierarchies, dominion (Matthew 20:25-26) and un-biblical rulership. It is quite understandable, but as members of the very family of God, they will be required to use this biblical method of education, along with teaching and example. God doesn't change his methods – so what instructions do we see that a young minister received from Paul, now that the Holy Spirit has been given? 2 Timothy 4:1-3, 'I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.' Is this any different from God's instructions to his ministers in the Old Testament? Isaiah 58:1, 'Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.'

In the last message we covered the scriptures that say pastors are also bishops or overseers. Their responsibility is to provide whatever spiritual food is needed to shepherd God's people, with the goal of the Kingdom of God. Hebrews 13:17, 'Obey them that have the rule over [guide- Greek] you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.'

Brethren ,I too have experienced ministerial abuse. I have sat through months of nothing but oppressive messages, with all other speakers banned. I have seen people driven out of church who wished to be there. I have seen police with guns requested by the minister to remove the deacon and his wife and children, and finally I was myself put out for speaking up to protect God's people from that minister. That was the start of my own ministry long ago and I know how much I despise rulership and oppression, but despite that fact,I know that God measures me by one particular scripture [John 13:35, 'By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.']

I will not flinch from the responsibility to preach, Colossians 1:25-29, 'Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; *Even* the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; *that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.'

Why? Because it is my job to train you to be priests yourself. Ephesians 4:11-16 'And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ***For the perfecting of the saints***, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.'

What should I preach? -Acts 20:17-21, 'And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I

came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: *And* how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.’ and verses 27-28, ‘For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.’

The same as Paul – the whole council of God !

So, brethren, sermons should remain a part of your church experience [even written ones like this] and hopefully they will always answer a need which has been revealed, somewhere amongst God’s people, not necessarily amongst those present in the room. But, if its contents emanate from the word of God, it will always help edify God’s people in preparation for their future role when Christ returns, even if it is of necessity spoken with authority – *the only authority that counts* – the living word of God!