

To Exalt Christ

To Equip, Encourage, Exhort and Edify God's Elect

The Value of Preaching

Nehemiah 8:1-4a, 5-6, 9-10; Acts 2:14-47

What is it that takes up ¼ of 1% of your time each week? That amounts to 20-25 minutes. It is listening to a sermon being preached. Martha asked AI the very same question and it came up with the very same immediate answer – preaching. I was astonished that something so secular could so quickly name something so sacred as the preaching of God's holy word. It did not say a talk or a lecture but specifically preaching.

Therefore, this morning we are going to look at the subject of preaching and determine its value, its worth, its importance, its place in our faith/life. We will use two passages of Scripture as examples of preaching and teaching, one from the OT and one from the NT. Preaching is one distinctive mark of the Judeo-Christian faith.

It really had its full commencement with the apostles as they went out to proclaim Christ and the gospel. The book of Acts contains the names of at least a dozen apostles who faithfully preached the gospel after Pentecost. The four gospels, especially John's gospel, plus the letters of Paul, Peter, James and Hebrews are really sermons that are still being preached to us by the apostles.

However, some time after the close of that apostolic age, preaching declined because of less use of the Bible. The Reformation and the Reformers of the 16th century, in particular, John Calvin, Martin Luther and John Knox, brought the church back to the Bible, back to the authority and centrality of the word and consequently restored the practice and value of preaching.

It is noteworthy that preaching is usually at the top of the list when it comes to a congregation choosing a new minister. Other attributes such as pastoral care and leadership are important but preaching and thus its teaching element is still the number one consideration when choosing a new pastor.

I want to start our study of the value of preaching by referring to William Perkins, 1558-1602. He was an English Reformed Puritan preacher and author. One of his books is entitled, *The Art of Prophesying* which is all about preaching. In the preface, dated 12 December 1592, he wrote – *“Preaching has a two-fold value: It is instrumental in gathering the church and bringing together all of the elect. Also, it drives away the wolves from the folds of the Lord. Preaching is the allurer of the soul by which our self-willed minds are subdued and changed to a life of faith and repentance. It is also the weapon which has shaken the foundations of ancient heresies.”*

Perkins speaks to the power and the purpose and thus the value of preaching and the preacher. According to Perkins, preaching has a two-fold value. **First**, it gathers the church. It collects the elect, those that God in his grace has called to faith in Jesus Christ through the preaching of the gospel. It is one reason why we are here on a Sunday morning. We come as the elect of God to hear the word of God through his preacher. Preaching presents the word of God which is *“living and active.”* according to Hebrews 4:12. It is not dead but alive and active, working, like yeast in dough that causes it to rise, causes us to rise so that as Perkins said earlier – *“our self-willed minds are subdued and changed to a life of faith and repentance.”*

Its **second** value Perkins points out is that it *“drives away the wolves from the folds of the Lord... [it is] the weapon which has shaken the foundations of ancient heresies.”* IOW orthodox preaching protects the believer and consequently the church from apostasy/error. Wm. Perkins gives two important values of preaching. It gathers and guards the elect.

Now from Nehemiah and Acts we shall see three additional values of preaching - Reverence – Response - Result. Both of these preaching events occurred in Jerusalem, but 600 years apart. Both were during a feast. Both record huge crowds. Both had only one preacher each, Ezra and Peter.

Reverence For The Preached Word.

In Nehemiah 8:1 we read that the people – “...*told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.*” Verse 2 says there were men & women, so probably children too. IOW a typical congregation.

The “*Book of the Law of Moses*” would be the Pentateuch, the first five books of the OT which contained the Law as God had given it to Moses. They requested the word because the reading of the Book had been neglected during their captivity in Babylon. Now, having returned from exile, there was a thirst, a hunger, a desire to hear the word of God. Their request showed reverence for the preached word of God, thus its value.

We see a further value of reverence for the preached word when Ezra opened the Book of the Law. What did the people do? They all stood up. (8:5). At St. Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford Florida, the congregation stands for the reading of God’s word. Ezra read from daybreak to noon from a high wooden platform that was purposely built for the preaching of the word, just like a pulpit. That length of time would have been about six hours and Neh. 8:4 says that “*all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.*” They stood that long and listened attentively, carefully, mindfully, devotedly, reverently.

They understood the value of the preached word. The people wanted it. The people stood as Ezra read it. The people listened attentively. You sense that there was possibly an unrecorded reverent hush, a quiet stillness that came over the people that day as they listened to the preached word.

Rev. James Hurd passed on to me this true story. Al Martin was a gifted preacher. On one occasion during his sermon as a guest preacher, the lights in the church suddenly went out. He had to finish his sermon in the dark. During his closing prayer however, the lights came on. It was discovered that the lights in the sanctuary were set so that, if there was no movement in the sanctuary the lights would go off. The people were so still during his sermon that the lights went off. They so revered the word of God as it was preached as to be perfectly still.

Now as we shift from OT to NT, Acts 2 also shows reverence for the word of God. Peter preached quoting three passages from the OT – Joel 2:28-32; Psalm 16:8-11 and Psalm 110:1. Peter like Paul saw the value in using the word of God. He used Joel to preach about the coming of the Holy Spirit and the Psalms to speak of Christ. To use the word, to handle it correctly (2 Tim 2:15) is to reverence and value it as Peter did.

Peter preached at the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem. What set this feast apart, was the coming of the Holy Spirit as promised by God in Joel 2 and by Jesus in John 16:7 and Acts 1:8. Each apostle was filled with the Holy Spirit that day. That infilling enabled Peter to preach as he did on that day of Pentecost. John Calvin commented – *“When the minister by speaking only what God puts into his mouth, [then] the inward power of the Holy Spirit is joined with his outward voice.”*

Peter revered the written word but also the incarnate Word. Peter preached Christ, the living word, the word made flesh. Peter preached, as did Paul, Christ crucified, dead and buried but raised by God to life on the third day as promised, then exalted to the right hand of his Father. As Peter preached the people listened reverently as he had told them to do. (2:14).

Ezra preached the Law. Peter preached of the one who came to fulfill the law. Reverence is the first value of preaching. The second value of preaching is the -

Response To The Preached Word

What happened when Ezra opened the Book? Two things happened. First the people stood. Neh. 8:5. But then in Neh. 8:6 we read - *“Ezra praised the Lord...and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen! Then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.”*

Even before the word was preached both the preacher and the people were moved to worship, to adore, to praise the Lord of the word. Anticipation led to spontaneous exultation.

Another response comes from verses 9 -10 where, as the people heard the word preached, they were moved to mourn and weep. They had come under a strong, irresistible conviction of sin. But then Nehemiah told them they were not to grieve for the joy of the Lord is their strength. God’s word convicts but also consoles those who genuinely confess their sin and repent. The 3c’s in order are – conviction, then confession, then consolation.

Such is the power of the preached word to a people made receptive by the Holy Spirit. Was the Holy Spirit there as Ezra preached? In Nehemiah 9:20 and 30 there is reference to the Holy Spirit who *“instructed”* and *“admonished”* the people. That is what happened to the people that day in Jerusalem. As Ezra preached the word, they experienced the Spirit’s power to convict and they responded accordingly. But they also knew his power to forgive; to turn genuine repentance to that of rejoicing.

We see the same response in Acts 2 as Peter preached the full gospel, the fullness of Christ. He left nothing out. Peter preached, laying out before the people how Christ was accredited by God through miracles; how he was put to death on a cross, then raised to life by God from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God; how God made him both Lord and Christ.

With the preaching of the gospel, Luke recorded in Acts 2:37 the response of the people – *“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”* They asked the most important question and Peter gave the most important answer – *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”* Preaching the word, brings conviction of sin followed by repentance. They were *“cut to the heart.”* Calvin calls it – *“the fruit of the sermon.”*

The apostle Paul referred to the word of God as the *“sword of the Spirit”* (Ephesians 6:17b). Peter wielded the word that day and many days after, as did Paul and all the apostles, as did the Reformers through the centuries. William Perkins said - *“Preaching is the allurer of the soul by which our self-willed minds are subdued and changed to a life of faith and repentance.”* 3000 people were *“subdued and changed”* that day in Jerusalem, changed *“to a life of faith and repentance.”*

Coming back to Peter’s preaching in Acts, in verse 42 we read the further response – *“They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* As in Nehemiah’s day the response to preaching was worship at which the word was preached. They joined with others in holy communion remembering the Lord’s death and praying together. Theology, leads to doxology. Preaching also leads to a – **Result Of The Preached Word.**

Francis Schaeffer in his 1976 book, *How Should We Then Live?* dedicated two full chapters to the Reformation. He said it brought a return to the Bible and it being regarded as society’s final authority for life and faith. It made for a stable environment in all areas of society. As the preached word brought conviction of sin it changed those *“self-willed minds”* that Perkins spoke of.

As individual lives were changed, families were impacted; society as a whole was changed. Preaching has power because the power is in God’s word. It is when, as Calvin said, the *“inward power of the Holy*

Spirit is joined with his outward voice.” The inward power is the Holy Spirit. The outward voice is the preacher. Preaching still has value as God continues to call preachers to proclaim Christ and the gospel.

Amen. So let it be!