

Introduction

- A. The subject - negatively.
 - 1. Some of you know that we have unusual views of preaching, for example, that we do not believe in the so-called well-meant offer of the gospel.
 - 2. If however, you expect a long diatribe against the well-meant offer this afternoon, you will be sadly disappointed.
 - 3. I have no intention of using this valuable time in being negative.
- B. The subject - positively.
 - 1. Instead, I want to deal with the very positive and valuable question: What is preaching?
 - 2. The answer to that question is little understood today.
 - 3. I hope to that you will see some of the implications of what I say about preaching and perhaps understand a bit better why we do not believe in the well-meant offer, and why we have other "strange" views of preaching.

What Is Preaching?

- I. Its Character
- II. Its Author & Authority
- III. Its Practice

I. Its Character.

- A. Most have a very wrong idea of preaching.
 - 1. Others, with a less Biblical view, would think of preaching primarily in terms of emotional appeals and attempts to "get people saved."
 - 2. Others view the pulpit as forum for holding forth on various topics of current interest, politics, social issues, etc.
 - 3. Those who have a more sober view of preaching would tend to think of it in terms of instruction but would think of it simply as another form of teaching and would make no significant distinction between it and other kinds of religious instruction.
- B. Let us begin with a Biblical definition of preaching.
 - 1. As such: Preaching is the authoritative proclamation of the gospel by Christ, according to the Word of God, through the ordained minister of the church (cf. H. Hoeksema).
 - 2. Elements (note the following):
 - a. Preaching is different in that it has authority and power and that authority is in the final analysis the authority of Christ Himself.
 - b. That authority and power is present in the preaching because Christ is really the one speaking in the preaching of the gospel.
 - c. Christ speaks through the preaching when (and only when) it is faithful to the Word of God.
 - d. And He uses in this work those whom He has appointed and sent, the ordained ministry.
- C. Let me explain briefly some of these things:
 - 1. When we say that preaching has authority, we mean that in the preaching the hearers must be confronted with the demand, Thus saith the Lord, and must understand that their hearing and obeying or not hearing and obeying is a matter of life and death.
 - 2. When we say that preaching has power, we mean what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 1:16, that preaching is the power of God unto salvation.
 - 3. When we say that preaching must be faithful to the Word of God, we mean that politics, personal reminiscences, social commentary, entertainment, etc., have no place in the preaching, but that preaching must be exegetical, i.e., it must do nothing more or less than explain the Word of God in the Scriptures.
 - 4. When we say that Christ uses the ordained ministry of the church in preaching the gospel, we mean that the calling to preach belongs to the church, not to mission boards and other para-church organizations, and that the church carries out this calling through ordained ministers of the Word.
- D. Conclusions:
 - 1. It follows from these points, therefore, that preaching is different from every other kind of speaking and public discourse.
 - 2. But all of these points depend on the second point, that Christ is the one who speaks through the preaching and that is the point I want to emphasise first of all and especially.

II. Its Author and Power.

- A. The fact that Christ speaks through the preaching is critical to a proper understanding of everything the Bible teaches about preaching.
1. What do we mean by this?
 - a. We mean that when preaching is carried out in obedience to the Word of God then those who hear, hear not only the voice of the preacher but the voice of Christ Himself.
 - b. This happens through the work of the Holy Spirit who uses the preaching, but this detracts not one whit from the clear Biblical teaching that it is Christ who speaks.
 - c. We mean, too, that all who come under the preaching hear this voice of Christ, even if they are not aware of it, even unbelievers. Or to put it differently, the Holy Spirit always uses the preaching - it never returns without an effect.
 - d. It is not easy to know how this happens, but Scripture says it is so, and indeed it must be so.
 2. We refer you to the following Scripture passages:
 - a. John 5:24, 25.
 - b. John 10:3-4, 27-28 (w/ application).
 - c. Ephesians 2:17 (14-17).
 - d. Ephesians 4:21 (20-21).
 - e. Hebrews 1:2 (1-2).
 - f. Thus all those who believe under the preaching are able to say what John 4:41, 42 says.
 3. As we said, it must be so.
 - a. Only the voice of Christ has power to save. If all that is heard in the preaching is the voice of the preacher there is no explanation of the fact that people are saved under the preaching. No human voice, no matter how eloquent and persuasive has the power to draw men out of spiritual death into everlasting life, etc.
 - b. No preacher's voice can break hearts of stone, and wills of iron.
 - c. Many seem to think otherwise - they bring in so-called power evangelists and others as though it all depends on the man who preaches and not on Christ.
 - d. If the power of preaching was the power of the preacher then no one would ever be saved under the preaching of the gospel. Only God can save.
- B. This has all sorts of implications.
1. It is first of all the reason why preaching is the power of God unto salvation.
 - a. It is called this in Rom. 1:16 and in I Cor. 1:18 (implied in Rom. 10:17) - means of election.
 - b. It is this because, as I Cor. 1:24 says, it is Christ, the power and wisdom of God.
 - c. This is the reason why I do not believe that the gospel is a well-meant offer. Not only does Scripture never use that language, but an offer in the usual sense of that term is far different from a power. Indeed, if the preaching is such a power, what need is there of an offer?
 2. It is also the reason why preaching has a two-fold fruit.
 - a. Paul speaks of this in I Cor. 1:19, 23, II Cor. 2:14-16.
 - b. Because Christ speaks in the preaching you will never leave as you came in, but will either have been softened, saved, and sanctified by the power of Christ in the preaching, or hardened to your own condemnation. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
 - c. This is a tremendous thing and very frightening, but we must remember that it too is part of the triumph of gospel (II Cor. 2:14).
 3. That Christ speaks in the preaching is also the reason why preaching is authoritative.
 - a. If it is only a man speaking in the preaching, men and women and children may regard it or disregard it as they choose, with little or no consequence. What does it matter in the end, after all, whether you hear or do not hear me?
 - b. But if you understand that Christ is speaking then it is another matter entirely. Then to refuse is to refuse Him, and you know what that means (Heb. 12:25).
 4. Again, it is the reason why the preacher as a man is of relatively little account in preaching.
 - a. Paul speaks of this in I Corinthians 2 in connection with what he says in chapter 1 about the power of preaching (vss. 1-5).
 - b. It is not the eloquence of the man, nor his gifts that matter so much as whether or not the Word is preached. (vs. 2).
 - c. Indeed, Christ often uses very weak means in order to demonstrate that the power is not of man but of God (vs. 5), something that ought to give great confidence to faithful preachers.

III. Its Practice.

- A. This has many implications for the actual business of preaching.
1. If preaching is to be the hearing of Christ then the preacher must be sent (ordained).
 - a. One of the words for preaching implies this, the word "to be a herald or ambassador." It implies that the preacher is a sort of mouthpiece for Christ, but to be such he must be authorized by Christ. To say, Thus saith the King, a man must be sent by the King.
 - b. It is also plainly taught in Romans 10:15.
 - c. That this is done through the church is plain from Acts 13 - even the apostles did not go out on their own but were sent by the church with laying on of hands or ordination.
 - d. It is also necessary as the example of an ambassador shows. Even if another says the same thing but is not sent there is no urgency to what he says. He has no authority.
 - e. Our opposition to lay preaching, therefore, is not something arbitrary or selfish, but flows from the very nature of preaching, though at the same time we insist that the preacher as a man is relatively unimportant.
 2. It is also the reason why preaching must be limited to the Scriptures.
 - a. That is where Christ speaks and nowhere else - not in calls for political or social reform, or in different forms of entertainment, however valuable those things may be in their own right. Preaching that is not bound to the Scriptures, is not preaching and has no power.
 - b. That means that preaching must expound and explain the Word of God. It must be expository preaching, something that is almost entirely gone today. Preachers all too often simply pick a topic, think of some nice thoughts and hang them on a text, rather than busying themselves with the hard work of understanding and explaining the Word.
 - c. In doing this the preaching must focus on Christ. It must demonstrate, as Spurgeon said, that wherever you cut the Scriptures they flow with the blood of the lamb. The preaching is all Christ, from that point of view - Christ crucified for our sins, raised again for our justification, seated in power at the right hand of God, making continual intercession for us, and coming again in judgment. A Christless sermon is not preaching.
 3. It explains why the whole of the Scriptures must be preached and why no hearer may fault the preacher for preaching what he does not like if it is from the Word of God.
 - a. Do you as a preacher dare preach anything less than the whole message that Christ, your Lord has sent you to speak? Woe is me, Paul says, if I preach not the gospel. The preacher can neither abandon his calling nor preach less than all the truths of Scripture because he is assured that Christ has called him in order that Christ may speak through him to His people.
 - b. Do you as hearers dare to fault the preacher when he in preaching from the Scriptures steps on your toes and speaks of things that make you uncomfortable? He is only saying what Christ has ordered him to say. Fault not him if he brings you the Word and you do not like it, fault Christ who speaks through him.
- B. Conclusions and Application.
1. Conclusions.
 - a. That is preaching according to the holy Scriptures.
 - b. That is what we need today if the church is to prosper and God's people be blessed. We not great men, but we need to hear once again the voice of Christ in the church through sound, biblical, expository preaching.
 2. Application.
 - a. Is that what you want? I trust that if you are saved you want nothing else, for no voice will ever again be sweet to you if once you have heard the voice of the Son of God calling you by Name. And you will never want to stop hearing either - at every opportunity, on every Lord's Day.
 - b. Do not say, though, that you want sound preaching and then refuse to hear. Do not be like the Jews of old who said to one of God's prophets, Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits (Is. 30:10).
 - c. Pray for men who will speak to you the Word of God in season and out of season, and receive them when God sends them to you.