

Preaching

Our question for this month has to do with the preaching of the gospel. One of the young men of our congregation asks, “Must a person hear the preaching of the gospel in order to be saved?” and “Can a person be saved merely by reading the Bible?”

Scripture’s rule is that salvation and faith come through *hearing the preaching of the Word* and not just through the reading of the Word.” Personal evangelism is no part of our creed. There are a number of passages that make this point:

In Romans 10:13, 14 Scripture links salvation and the preaching of the gospel: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall thy 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?” Preaching, hearing Christ, faith, calling upon the name of the Lord and salvation are inseparably linked together in this passage.

Further, in Romans 10:17, the Word of God very bluntly states that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Notice, faith comes not by *reading*, but by *hearing* God’s Word. I Corinthians 1:21 is just as plain: “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

This is true not because faith and salvation depend on hearing the voice of a man, but because Christ speaks through the preaching of the gospel. In a way that is not fully understood even by those who bring the gospel, Christ makes His voice heard, and speaks to His own in such a way that they learn to recognize His voice.

“My sheep,” he says, “hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (Jn. 10:27, 28). And along the same lines, Paul, speaking to the Ephesian believers about their salvation, says that Christ came and preached peace to them (Eph. 2:17).

In John 5:25 Jesus says the same thing. He is not talking in verse 25 about the final resurrection of our bodies. Of that he speaks in verse 28. That hour is still coming. In verse 25 He speaks of an hour that has already arrived, in which those who are *spiritually dead* hear the voice of the Son of God and live.

It must be so. The voice of a mere man can do nothing to save lost sinners. The preacher’s voice cannot change hearts, convict consciences, produce faith and repentance, or call out of darkness into light. Only Christ’s almighty voice, the voice of the Son of God, can do that. If His voice is not heard there is no possibility of salvation: if it is not heard in the preaching, then preaching is a wasted effort.

This is not to say that the Bible is unimportant. Even in the preaching it must be Scripture only that is preached. Indeed, when the preacher starts telling stories and jokes and making commentary on current events he is no longer preaching and Christ does not speak through Him. He must do nothing more or less than explain and expound the Word of God.

Nor do we mean to deny that God uses the reading of Scripture, the witness of our mouths and lives to draw others to salvation. We know both from experience and from the Word of God that it is so. But even then He draws them to and under the preaching of the gospel that they may hear the voice of the Son of God, who alone is able to speak with saving power.

Are there exceptions to this rule? There probably are. There are always those, children who die in infancy or even before birth, the deaf, and those who are severely handicapped who are unable or have no opportunity to hear the preaching of the gospel.

Nevertheless, the rule of Scripture is: “faith cometh by hearing” and by that rule we must live. We may not say, “God is able to save me without the preaching of the gospel, and so I and my family can safely live apart from the preaching of the gospel and from the church whose calling it is to bring the gospel.” That is not only disobedience, but folly, for then we show no understanding of what Scripture says about preaching and no love for Christ who has promised to speak to us and to our children through the weak means and foolishness of preaching.

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