



HOW TO SPEAK AT SPECIAL EVENTS







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CHRISTIAN
FOCUS





ISBN 1-84550-277-9
ISBN 978-1-84550-277-5

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Previously published in 2003 by SMBC Press
with the title *How to Prepare a Bible Talk*

Published in 2007
by
Christian Focus Publications,
Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire,
IV20 1TW, Scotland, UK

www.christianfocus.com

Cover design by Moose77.com

Printed and bound by CPD, Wales

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FOREWORD

The book you are holding has been written by 14 different authors with one common purpose: to equip you to prepare a talk from the Bible that provides a clear explanation of what the text says, and how it applies to the life of your listeners.

It is important to note that all of the authors have prepared their own chapters independent of one another.

Our target audience is not the theologically trained pastor, but the person in the pew who is called on to preach occasionally, or who takes a turn on the roster to speak at Youth Group or lead the Bible study group.

We have tried to provide the equipment to present Bible talks to all sorts of groups in all sorts of settings.

All of the authors are practitioners and I am grateful for their willingness to contribute their insights into this book. I trust you will find it really helpful as you prepare your next Bible talk.

Thanks to Otto Peeters, missionary pilot, and good friend, who saw the need for a book like this and who initiated this project.

Special thanks from all of the authors to Sarah Buckle-Dykes for her editorial contribution, which makes us read better than we are able to write.

David Cook







SECTION 1

PREPARING YOURSELF







1.

PREACHING: A DEFINITION

SAM CHAN

Our Christian meetings focus upon preaching. The Bible also speaks a lot about preaching. Most of the Bible's major characters were preachers. Poor old Jonah once ended up in the belly of a fish because he had tried to get himself off the preaching roster. And preaching has also been a key feature in the history of the Christian church. George Whitefield (1714–1770), the English evangelist, sometimes preached thirteen sermons in one week and to crowds as large as 100,000.

I have been asked to provide a definition of preaching as a foundation for the rest of this book. But how should we define preaching? Should it be defined by its method? I was once invited to preach to a youth group on a Friday night. The organisers had creatively set up the night with an unconventional programme of film, drama, interviews, loud music and games. When it was my turn to preach I thought that I would reciprocate with an equally creative unconventional sermon. Afterwards, the organisers told me how disappointed they were because I had failed to 'preach the Bible'. Maybe they thought that unless I preached a Sunday 'three-point' sermon, which followed a Bible passage 'verse-by-verse', I had failed to 'preach the Bible'?





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When I was studying at Sydney Missionary and Bible College, one of our fellow-students had a PhD in education and he would try out his latest theories in our preaching workshops. When he preached, he would dazzle us with a combination of preaching, singing and computer slide-shows. He certainly had our attention, but we were never sure how to critique his sermons. I would still argue that he had faithfully 'preached the Bible'.

The Bible hardly restricts us to only one method of preaching. The Old Testament prophets sometimes preached in oracles and sometimes acted out their message. The apostles changed their style of preaching according to their audiences and settings. Jesus sometimes preached a formal sermon and sometimes preached in puzzling parables. I don't think Jesus would ever have scored well in one of our contemporary preaching workshops. In fact, I'm not sure where we would even find a three-point verse-by-verse sermon in the Bible. So perhaps we are heading in the wrong direction if we try to define preaching by a method.

Instead, our aim will be to provide a theological definition of preaching. Our method will be to begin with a suggested definition, survey how this is supported by the Bible's storylines own presentation of preaching, and then come to a conclusion.

A definition of preaching

Preaching is a joint activity between God and the preacher: God speaking his Word, through the human proclamation of God's Word, which the Spirit applies to the hearer.

Survey of the Bible's storyline

Our definition of preaching contains three parts. We will now support each of these parts by surveying the presentation of preaching in the Bible's storyline.

1. God speaks his Word

God reveals himself to us in many ways, one of which is through his speech, that is, God speaks his Word to us. This is a foundational concept of the Bible. Phrases such as 'this is





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what the LORD says', 'God said', 'the LORD has spoken', and 'the Word of the LORD' occur over and over again in the Bible.

A few years ago the Tickle-Me-Elmo doll was the 'in thing'. My parents bought one and, sure enough, if you tickled Elmo, he would squirm and squeal. That is, until the batteries died. Then Elmo just sat there and said nothing. Idols and false gods are like a Tickle-Me-Elmo with dead batteries. They don't do or say anything. Instead they sit, collect dust and can be sold for \$2 at a garage sale.

In contrast, God is the God who speaks his Word. He is the speaking God. On the first page of the Bible, God speaks the heavens and earth into existence. At both Jesus' baptism and transfiguration, God speaks, 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him'. And on the Bible's last page, God speaks from his throne in heaven.

But how does God speak his Word to us? In the Bible, God speaks through a variety of methods, sometimes through dreams, visions, angels, a voice and even a donkey. But in addition to all these, God often speaks through human messengers or proclaimers – especially the prophets in the Old Testament and Jesus, the apostles and the Christian church in the New Testament. The writer of Hebrews sums this up for us: 'In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...' (Heb. 1:1-2).

The Bible affirms that God does speak through his human messengers. These messengers are speaking God's Word. For example, when the prophet Nathan conveys God's promise of an everlasting covenant to King David (2 Sam. 7:4-17), David responds by identifying Nathan's message as God's own words (2 Sam. 7:28). Later, King Solomon looks back to Nathan's message and declares, 'And now, O God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come true' (1 Kings 8:26; 2 Chron. 6:16). Solomon also identifies Nathan's message as God's own words.

Therefore, in this brief survey of the Bible, we can say that God is a God who speaks his Word to us, and one way is through his messengers or proclaimers.





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2. The human proclaims God's Word

What makes someone a proclaimer of God's Word? There are four important criteria: they are commissioned by God; they are anointed by the Spirit; they receive their words from God; and they faithfully proclaim God's Word.

The life and ministry of Moses exemplify these four criteria. Firstly, Moses is commissioned by God. In Exodus 3, God appears to Moses and commissions him to be his prophet:

God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: "I AM has sent me to you"'.

God also said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites, "The LORD, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has sent me to you"' (Exod. 3:14-15a).

As someone commissioned by God, Moses speaks on God's behalf and his words have the same authority as God's words.

Secondly, Moses is anointed by the Spirit. We learn this from the following narrative:

Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with [Moses], and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again (Num. 11:25).

The Spirit authors God's words and empowers Moses and the other prophets to 'prophesy', that is, to speak God's words. But without the Spirit, it is impossible for anyone to speak God's words.

Thirdly, Moses receives his words from God. After Moses receives his commission in Exodus 3, he hesitates to go because he is not 'eloquent' (Exod. 4:10). As a result, the LORD replies:

'Who gave man his mouth? ... Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.' But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do





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it.' Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, 'What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? ... You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him' (Exod. 4:11-16; see also Exod. 6:28-7:2).

Due to Moses' reluctance, his brother Aaron can speak in his place. God tells Moses to 'speak to' Aaron and 'put words in his mouth' and Aaron will be the 'mouth' of Moses. God points out that this models the way he deals with his prophets, where he speaks to his prophets and puts words in their mouths, so that when they speak, they are his 'mouth'.

Fourthly, Moses faithfully reports God's words. Moses obediently reports God's message accurately, without changing it, despite much opposition. In Moses' ministry, God repeatedly commands Moses to 'Go ... tell ...' or 'Go ... say ...' (for example, Exod. 3:16; 18; 4:12; 6:11; 8:1; 9:1; Deut. 5:30) and Moses obeys and faithfully reports God's message.

But, besides Moses, who else fits these criteria to become proclaimers of God's Word? In Deuteronomy 18, God promises, 'I will raise up for them a prophet like [Moses] ... I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him' (Deut. 18:18). In other words, God promises to raise a future prophet in the model of Moses: he will be commissioned by God ('I will raise up...'), he will receive his words directly from God ('I will put my words in his mouth...') and he will faithfully report God's words ('he will tell them everything I command him'). Deuteronomy 18 does not mention any anointing by God's Spirit but perhaps implies it in the promise that the prophet will be 'raised up' by God 'like' Moses. As the Bible's storyline unfolds in the Old Testament, prophets follow in the footsteps of Moses, especially major figures such as Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Amos.

In the New Testament, Jesus begins his earthly ministry by quoting this passage from Isaiah and then claiming that he has begun to fulfil it:





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The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4:18-19).

In doing so, Jesus announces that he is commissioned by God ('He has sent me...') and anointed by God's Spirit ('The Spirit of the Lord is on me') to preach God's message. Jesus also implies that he has received his words from God (for he is commissioned and anointed) and he is about to faithfully proclaim it ('to preach good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners ... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'). Among other things, Jesus claims to be the ultimate Prophet who fulfils the promise of Deuteronomy 18 – a prophet like Moses.

More importantly, Jesus is not merely like Moses, Jesus now replaces Moses as the chief Prophet, the chief proclaimer of God's Word. But it is even more than this. In John's Gospel, Jesus is called the Word because he himself is the message from God, namely, God becoming flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14). To proclaim God's Word is the same as proclaiming Christ.

But at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, just before he ascends to heaven, Jesus gives the same commission to his disciples or apostles:

'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8).

As a result, the apostles now continue Jesus' earthly ministry; they are commissioned by Jesus and anointed by his Spirit to faithfully preach the message about Jesus. Notice how the commissioning and message are now transformed to be specifically Christocentric, that is, focussed upon Christ.

But we also discover that all Christians, not just the apostles, are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We are to continue Jesus' earthly ministry, part of which involves faithfully proclaiming God's Word.





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Firstly, Christians have been commissioned by Jesus. For example, at the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus gives his disciples and all subsequent Christians a commission to 'go and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you' (Matt. 28:19-20). This commission remains in effect until 'the very end of the age' (Matt. 28:20). In another example, Paul argues that we have been given 'the ministry of reconciliation' and are appointed as 'Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us' (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Secondly, Christians have been anointed by the Spirit. At the day of Pentecost, when God pours out his Spirit upon the apostles, Peter claims that this marks the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy that in the last days all of God's people will have the Spirit and be empowered to prophesy (Acts 2:16-21).

Thirdly, Christians have received God's Word. In the New Testament, 'the Word of God' gradually came to refer more specifically to 'the gospel' – the news that Jesus Christ has come to be Lord and Saviour and all must repent and trust in Jesus. This 'Word' originally was Christ himself. But after Christ's ascension to heaven, 'the Word' referred to the gospel about Christ as proclaimed by the apostles and then as written (or inscripturated) in the texts of Scripture. All Christians have received this Word. For example, Peter encourages his readers by stating, 'For you have been born again ... through the living and enduring word of God. ...this is the word that was preached to you' (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

Fourthly, Christians are to faithfully report God's message. For example, Paul argues that God 'has committed to us the message of reconciliation' (2 Cor. 5:19). In another example, Paul exhorts Timothy, 'I give you this charge: Preach the Word...' (2 Tim. 4:2).

Therefore, in this survey of the Bible, we have found that the human proclaimers of God's Word have been commissioned by God and anointed by his Spirit. They have received their words from God and they faithfully proclaim the message that has been given to them. In the Old Testament, the model was Moses. But in the New Testament, Jesus not only becomes the model for his apostles and all Christians, but Jesus is also the





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message. As a Christian, to be a human proclaimer of God's Word is to be a faithful witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. The Spirit applies God's Word

We cannot overstate the importance of the Spirit in the preaching of God's Word. We have already examined, albeit too briefly, how the Spirit is necessary in preaching because he authors God's Word and empowers the preacher to proclaim God's Word. Without the Spirit, it is impossible for the preacher to proclaim God's Word. But the Spirit also has a role in the person who hears God's Word being preached.

What is this role?

A friend of mine once attended a class on preaching. As an exercise, the teacher took the class to a cemetery and asked them to preach to the graves. They preached but, of course, nothing happened (thankfully!). The exercise illustrated that if preaching relied only upon human words and communication skills, then our preaching cannot provoke anyone to faith, obedience and action. The teacher probably had in mind the vision from Ezekiel 37 where God commands Ezekiel to preach to a valley of dead bones. As Ezekiel preaches, God sends 'breath' (which is a Hebrew pun for 'Spirit') into the bones and they come alive. As part of the application of the vision, God announces, 'I will put my Spirit in you and you will live...' (Ezek. 37:14).

The Spirit is necessary in preaching because he enables the hearer to understand the preached Word. Notice Paul's argument to the Corinthian church:

'[B]ut God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing





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spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned' (1 Cor. 2:10-14).

A person with the Spirit, who has experienced the regenerating and illuminating work of the Spirit, can understand the preached Word, of which the Spirit is the original author. But a person without the Spirit lacks the ability to recognise the wisdom of God's words.

The Spirit is also necessary because he guides people to the truth, moving the hearer of God's Word to faith, obedience and action. In John 14–16, Jesus promises to send the Spirit who will teach the disciples and remind them of Jesus' teachings (14:26); testify to Jesus (15:26-27); convict the world regarding sin, righteousness and judgement (16:8-11); guide them to truth (16:13); and glorify Jesus (16:14). This promise was fulfilled by the Spirit's work in guiding the apostles when they preached the gospel and wrote the New Testament. But it is also being fulfilled by the Spirit's ongoing work, as he continues to guide people today. The Spirit uses the teachings and testimonies of Jesus, as inscripturated in the Scriptures, and proclaimed through the preaching of God's Word, to testify to and glorify Christ, guide people to the truth and convict them regarding sin, righteousness and judgement.

Therefore, in this survey of the Bible, we have seen that the Spirit applies God's Word in the life of the hearer. The Spirit enables the hearer to understand what has been preached and then moves the hearer to respond in faith, obedience and action.

We began with a suggested definition: Preaching is a joint activity between God and the preacher – God speaking his Word, through the human proclamation of God's Word, which the Spirit applies to the hearer. This definition was supported by our survey through the Bible's storyline. We have seen that preaching is a joint activity that involves a partnership between God and the human preacher. God speaks and the preacher faithfully proclaims God's Word. But we can also





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note that preaching is a Trinitarian activity, in which God speaks his Word, this Word is the gospel about Jesus Christ, and the Spirit is the one who authors God's Word, empowers the preacher to preach God's Word and applies God's Word to the hearer.

