



**The Beginner's  
Guide to Expository  
Preaching**





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ISBN 1-85792-769-9

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Published in 2002  
by  
Christian Focus Publications, Ltd.  
Geanies House, Fearn, Tain,  
Ross-shire, IV20 1TW, Great Britain.

Printed and bound by  
MFP, Manchester

Cover Design by Alister MacInnes





• Preface •

There is an old adage that says, ‘Those who can, do, and those who can’t, teach’. I think this could be rephrased so that it states, ‘Those who can, do, those who can’t, write books about it’. My reason for writing a book on preaching was not because I think of myself as a brilliant preacher. Indeed, though I preach regularly, I am constantly reminded of my limited gift. I am just one of the many ‘ministers of the word’ who work hard so as to communicate something of God’s truth to those who listen.



So why write about preaching? Actually I have three reasons. Firstly, I love teaching or training others so that they can serve God more effectively. That is why I have spent the past twelve years of my life lecturing at Tilsley College. This book was designed as a practical introduction to the art of preaching. Secondly, I believe there is a huge need today for passionate, biblical preaching. This book came out of a deep desire to encourage others to give themselves to this great work. Thirdly, I have had the privilege of hearing many great preachers and have consciously tried to note what makes them so good (other than the fact that they are anointed by God). In this book I have attempted to summarise some of those key things so that others may benefit as I have.



There are a number of people I would like to thank as they have directly or indirectly contributed to this book. First and foremost I must thank my wife, Debbie, who puts up with the long hours that I work and is the



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most honest critic of my preaching, as well as my greatest supporter. I would also pay tribute to friends who have inspired me with their love of Scripture, not least my father who helped me construct my very first sermon. A special thanks to Jim Brown for proofreading the manuscript. I must also thank the staff at Tilsley College for their fellowship and the many stimulating conversations we have together. In particular I would single out my friend and colleague Allison Hill who makes my job so much easier by doing hers so very well.

I must also thank two groups of people. Firstly, the students at Tilsley College who sat through my lectures on preaching. It was in these classes that the material for this book came together and the feedback from those students has been of great value. Secondly, the members of the preaching group in my own church, Viewpark Christian Fellowship. It was in this group that the material for this book was refined and put into an accessible format. Thank you all.

It is my prayer that this book will enable its readers to preach a little better and in doing so contribute to the health of the church.



• 1 •

## The Biblical and Historical Basis of Preaching

I can remember as a boy being taken along to church. The songs were alright, the people friendly and the atmosphere generally warm. As for the sermons, I confess I could not see the point. Was it because I was so young? Perhaps it was because the preachers sometimes went over their time? Or maybe it was a combination of both. Whatever the reasons, my attitude was excusable on account of my tender years and lack of spiritual insight. What is less excusable, however, is the negative press that sermons get in the life of some contemporary churches.

Not all Christians today are enthralled with the idea of the ‘Sunday Sermon’. For reasons that will be investigated later, some Christians feel that preaching has had its day and should now gracefully lie down and die in order to make way for other more interesting items in the church programme. I must state emphatically that this view flies in the face of both Scripture and church history.

### **Preaching in the Old Testament**

Preaching, which is the job of declaring the Word of God, can be found as far back as Old Testament times. Some of the early leaders of the Old Testament believing community were preachers and they unashamedly declared God’s Word to the people (Deut.32 ; Josh.23-



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24). Even Moses, who felt utterly unable to speak, became a preacher (Ex.4:10-16). His protests on the issue were met with the reply that God would enable him to speak and teach him what to say. Despite his unwillingness, Moses became God's mouthpiece to the people.<sup>1</sup>

The Old Testament prophets carried on this mantle (Jer.11:6 ; Amos 7:14,15). Their sermons are different from today's in the sense that God was speaking through them in a particular way, inspiring them so that their words became Scripture. But there are also similarities between them and modern preachers. Firstly, they considered their job to be that of declaring God's Word, and all true preachers today do the same. As they spoke they conveyed what God was saying to his people, and that is the essence of the job of preaching, whether it was done in 2,000 BC or being done in 2,000 AD. Secondly, they challenged their audience to respond to God's Word, and encouraged them into a life of obedience. All true preaching makes this same appeal.

Though the words of the prophets became part of the canon of Scripture, and though the canon of Scripture is now closed, preaching today is based on Scripture. The Bible is our source of truth and is authoritative for all matters of faith and practice, the material from which contemporary preachers must draw their sermon content. In this sense, despite the unique role of the preachers of the Old Testament, we can join with them as in our own generation, we declare God's Word to modern day audiences.

**Preaching in the New Testament**

The New Testament is also full of preaching. Without



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question the greatest preacher in the New Testament was Jesus himself. It is equally beyond doubt that preaching formed a crucial part of the ministry of Christ. Jesus seems to have begun his ministry by preaching in the open air (Mark 1:14) while in Galilee.<sup>2</sup> He then called his Disciples, began his ministry of healing, and again Mark comments that Jesus continued in the ministry of preaching (Mark 1:39). Luke tells us that Jesus saw preaching as his mission in life (Luke 4:43). It was for this reason that he was sent. We also read that he frequented synagogues (Matt. 9:35) again with the express purpose of preaching. It has been pointed out that synagogue addresses encouraged debate and even heated discussion and were therefore different in their presentation from much of contemporary preaching.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless this was preaching in the true sense of the word.

Jesus did not see preaching as his work alone. He also wanted his followers to begin declaring the Word of God. In Mark 3:14 he appointed the Twelve so that he could send them out to preach. Later on we read that they then went out and preached everywhere (Mark 16:20). His burden and vision to convey God's Word to the world was being passed on to them.

It was clear from the very outset of the Christian church that preaching was seen as a crucial aspect of Christian discipleship. In Acts 6:2-4 the Apostles recognised that they were becoming so involved in practical caring for the church that the preaching of the Word was being neglected. They took action to ensure that this would not happen. It was not that they considered the work of caring for widows to be unimportant, quite the reverse, but they had such a high



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view of preaching that they considered it to be essential in the life of the church.

Paul was also a great champion of preaching. His ministry was full of it (Acts 15:35 ; 28:31). Like Jesus before him, Paul encouraged others to take up the responsibility of declaring God's Word. He told Timothy to find faithful men and train them up so they in turn would pass on God's message to others. He also left Timothy with the awesome responsibility to, '*preach the word ... in season and out of season*' (2 Tim. 4:1,2). Timothy was to commit himself to this ministry under all circumstances, whether it was convenient to do so or not.<sup>4</sup> Once again the priority of preaching was underlined.



### The Church Fathers



Once we go beyond the end of the canon of Scripture we note that preaching continued to be an essential component of church life. In the second century Justin Martyr wrote his *First Apology* in defence of Christianity, addressing it to the emperor. He described a typical Sunday service and made the point that preaching was an essential part of this Christian gathering. He states that during a service, '*the memoirs of the apostles or writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.*'<sup>5</sup>

Two centuries later Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, described the activities of the church from its inception. He mentioned the centrality of preaching in the life and experience of the church, describing the early Christians as people whose hearts were, '*smitten by the word of God*' and who were, '*ambitious to preach to those who had never*

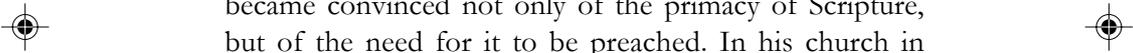


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*yet heard the message*.<sup>6</sup> Towards the end of the fourth century, a giant of a preacher called John Chrysostom (lit. golden-mouth) emerged. John Stott notes that Chrysostom's preaching was characterised by its biblical content, its straightforward interpretation, its practical application and its fearlessness.<sup>7</sup> Chrysostom, who was the Bishop of Constantinople, said that preaching was the only thing that would cure diseases in the body of Christ. Clearly the ministry of Christ was still being imitated and the faithful preaching of the word of God was a key feature of Christian ministry.

### The Reformation



When we come to the Reformation once again preaching features greatly. Luther, the great German reformer, became convinced not only of the primacy of Scripture, but of the need for it to be preached. In his church in Wittenberg, there were three services every Sunday and several during the week. Each of these included preaching within the programme. Luther himself had a heavy preaching ministry. His biographer, Roland Bainton, notes that, '*He (Luther) spoke often four times on Sundays and quarterly undertook a two week series four days a week on the catechism. The sum of his extant sermons is 2,300. The highest count is for the year 1528, for which there are 195 sermons distributed over 145 days*'.<sup>8</sup> Luther also gave advice on preaching which included the need to be willing to preach even in the face of great opposition and ridicule. There can be no doubt that Luther's preaching as well as his writings brought about the German Reformation.

Calvin demonstrated an equal commitment to preaching. In his *Institutes of Christian Religion* he



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endeavoured to sum up what it was that constituted a true church. His conclusion was that *'Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached...it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists'*.<sup>9</sup> He repeated this assertion again stating that wherever a Christian gathering *'has the ministry of the Word and honours it...it deserves without doubt to be held and considered a church'*.<sup>10</sup>

The emphasis that the Reformers had on preaching has prompted many to comment that the pulpit was higher than the altar.<sup>11</sup> Preaching was without doubt a central pillar of the Reformation.

### **The Puritans and Beyond**



The Puritans too were people who believed in preaching. Indeed they considered the sermon to be the climax of a worship service, something that was deeply honouring to God. For them a sermon was not something to be rushed, so brevity was not a feature for which they were noted. They were methodical in their preaching, working hard at sermon preparation, often writing out the whole sermon word for word. Their sermons were expository in nature, full of doctrine and very orderly. This did not mean, however, that Puritan preaching was dull and stodgy. Far from it! Their preaching was passionate, full of illustrations and they constantly applied the message to the lives of their hearers.<sup>12</sup>



One leading Puritan, Richard Baxter, wrote a book entitled *'The Reformed Pastor'*. In it he encouraged his fellow ministers to preach faithfully. He lamented the fact that, *'few ministers do preach with all their might'* and urged his readers to, *'awaken your own hearts, before you go to the pulpit, that you may be fit to awaken the hearts of sinners'*.<sup>13</sup>

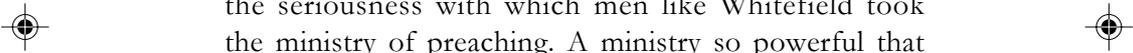


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Following on from the Puritans came two men whose names are readily associated with preaching, John Wesley and George Whitefield. They were used powerfully to reach many for Christ and to build up the church. Both were passionate preachers and both saw preaching as fundamental to the work of God.

Whitefield, with his legendary energy managed to preach twenty sermons per week in a ministry that lasted more than thirty years. John Pollock recounts an amusing occasion when an old man fell asleep while Whitefield was preaching in a New Jersey meeting-house. Incensed Whitefield clapped his hands loudly and stamped his foot to wake the man up and declared, ‘*I have come to you in the name of the Lord God of Hosts and I must and I will be heard*’.<sup>14</sup> Such stories demonstrate the seriousness with which men like Whitefield took the ministry of preaching. A ministry so powerful that people were literally felled under its influence as the Holy Spirit used the spoken word.<sup>15</sup>



### The Modern Era

Our modern era has also witnessed great preaching. Dr Martin Lloyd Jones, an assistant to Lord Thomas Horder, left his Harley Street practice to take up a pastorate at a small church in his native South Wales. Preaching was the great emphasis of his ministry and through preaching he saw the congregation grow from eighty worshippers to over five hundred.<sup>16</sup> From there he went to Westminster Chapel, London, where his preaching influenced literally thousands of people.

Billy Graham has also been used uniquely, particularly as an evangelistic preacher. Huge numbers of people have been drawn into a living relationship with



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Jesus Christ through his ministry. Many Christian leaders today point to the great influence that Billy Graham's preaching ministry has had, not only on their own lives, but on the spiritual tone of whole nations.

All this must convey a powerful lesson to churches today. Preaching is biblical, and it is a means by which God has spoken since Old Testament times. God has used preaching to win countless millions of souls for Christ. God has also used preaching to encourage, correct and stimulate his church over the ages, so that Christians from all cultures and walks of life are spiritually enriched and activated for service. That being the case, preaching must be seen as a precious gem that should be treasured and used for the glory of God.

**Summary:**

- In the Old Testament, men of God like Moses and Amos preached the word and impacted the nation.
- Jesus preached and chose 'the twelve' so that they would be preachers also.
- The Church Fathers continued the ministry of preaching.
- Preaching was at the heart of the Reformation and the Puritan era.
- God still uses preaching today to touch the lives of millions.

**Pause for Thought:**

Spend time reading a biography of one of history's great preachers and ask yourself the question, what motivated this person to be a preacher?