

The Priority of Preaching

Romans 1:16

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel [a]of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

When you think of a church’s priority, what comes to mind?

We live in a day in which there is a lot of confusion over this question. Many churches are a reflection of our society, which has become satiated with entertainment. Neil Postman, in his profound book titled, “Amusing Ourselves to Death,” wrote, “Toward the end of the nineteenth century . . . the Age of Exposition began to pass, and the early signs of its replacement could be discerned. Its replacement was to be the Age of Show Business.” **In show business, truth is irrelevant; what really matters is whether we are entertained.** Substance counts for little; style is everything. **In the words of Marshall McLuhan, “the medium is the message.”**

Paul continues in Romans 3:1-2, “What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.” In Romans 3:2, in what seems almost to be an incidental reference, the Apostle Paul uses a term for the Bible that ascribes to it the highest possible authority, **“the very words of God.”**

Today, I want us to us to examine what it means to be entrusted with “the very words of God,” not from the perspective of its possession but from the perspective of its proclamation. To that end, I want us to see the priority of preaching in the church of Jesus Christ.

First, let’s look at the priority of preaching in the ministry of Jesus. At the very outset of his ministry, Matthew 4:17 says that “Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’” Mark 1:14 records that “after John [the Baptist] was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, preaching the good news of God.” And in Luke 4:43 Jesus said, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.” And then Luke 4:44 adds, “And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.” In fact, He quoted from Isaiah 61:1-2, and said: “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 favor.” **The Scripture clearly shows the importance of preaching in the ministry of Jesus.** And then he demonstrated this priority in his own life by his example of making preaching and teaching preeminent in his ministry.

Second, we see the priority of preaching in the Ministry of the Apostles and Disciples. The first-century church’s emphasis on preaching reflected the priority of Jesus. The first event in the life of the first-century church, following the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, and the birth of the Church was Peter’s sermon, as seen in Acts 2:17-21, “And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour

out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” **And Acts 2:41 tells us that on that day 3,000 people received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, and the thus began the greatest movement in this history of the world – the universal, mystical, Body of Christ, know as the Church.**

The book of Acts is largely the record of apostolic preaching. In fact, 25% of the book of Acts consists of sermons and significant speeches. No fewer than 19 significant speeches and sermons occur in the book of Acts. **In fact, Acts 4:2 records the displeasure of the Jewish officials that the apostles “were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” But Acts 5:42 reminds us they were not distracted and, “day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.”**

The priority of preaching in the first-century church is seen in how the apostles handled the difficulty that arose when the Greek-speaking Jews complained that the Aramaic-speaking Jews were overlooking their widows in the daily distribution of food. The Twelve apostles had the people elect what we now call Deacons in order to handle

and service aspects of the ministry. Why? Acts 6:4 reminds us so that the Twelve could give their attention “to prayer and the ministry of the word.” Acts 8:4 reminds us that after the first great persecution of the church broke out, “those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” After his conversion on the Damascus Road, Acts 9:20 tells us Paul immediately “began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.” All the way to the very last verse, Acts records again and again how the first-century church “continued to preach the good news” of the gospel”

Children of God, the mandate to preach and the priority of preaching came from Jesus himself. During his earthly ministry Jesus instructed his disciples, “As you go, preach” (Matthew 10:7). And after his resurrection, in his Great Commission, he said, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15).

This call to preach is best summed up in the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:17a: “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.”

It is clear that preaching drove the ministry of the first-century apostles and disciples. The faithful *proclamation* and *exposition* of the Word of God, has always been central to the church’s mission.

The question today is: “How did we get to where we are today in America?” **First of all, it seems to me America is become detached from any common devotion.** I am reminded of Judges 17:6 that says, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Listen to me very

carefully today – when there is common devotion, “every does what is right in their own eyes.” The sad truth is, even in our so called “Christian homes” the Word of God is never discussed, there is very little commitment to biblical principles, and when our young people go away to college, *some liberal professor becomes the authority in their lives.* And we been given this warning in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12, “that they should believe the lie,...who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

I am reminded of Paul’s experience in Athens’s as he saw a city filled with idols and given over to idol worship. This would indicate that polytheism was rampant. One does not have to look for long to find that America has fallen to our idols as well.

Someone said that the cause of true Christianity’s decline in America is the disintegration of our culture. And as our culture becomes more diluted more and more people are willing to accept Satan’s lies, until no one challenges their validity.

George Barna, in his book, “If Things Are So Good Why Do I Feel So Bad,” writes, “The information barrage has led to a nation of people who feel culturally naked, personally disconnected, professionally perplexed, spiritually undernourished, and emotionally uninspired. Although we have the machines and the means to grind out reams of information, we have little grasp of how to humanely interpret that data or to wisely apply the accumulated knowledge represented in the ocean of facts readily accessible.”

Now please do not misunderstand what I am saying today: I am not saying that no one wants to be a Christian anymore. Today as in Paul's day, even in Athens, there were "God fearing" people. The problem as I see it, is we have forfeited our historic ethics and morals to the gods of achievement and comfort. Our moral compasses have been reprogrammed to point to a new north. Our sense of God's Word and Will has been compromised so that as a nation we have almost no fear of God or intention of respecting His rules. We have replaced the presence of God with well-intentioned but superficial religious activity. We have substituted cultural idols for the eternal God. We have swapped the preeminence of the Creator for the centrality and pampering of self. And the result of our hatred, anger, and division has left us with a nation that is spiritually bankrupt, morally depraved, and ethically uncertain.

As I look and listen, it seems to me, there are two extremes making their way in today's Church.

First, some are so "open minded" that they accept almost any idea as valid. Apparently this was the attitude that Paul faced at Athens. The people seemed to be open to all ideas. And yet, they rejected the gospel of Christ because there was a measured of accountability to God. Ladies and gentlemen, living the Christian life requires commitment. And that is something that is vividly missing in today's Church!

Second, others rejected traditional religion altogether. I realize that we have brought some of the problems on ourselves. Far too many churches have developed a "holier than thou" attitude towards far too many people in our society.

Romans 1:21-25 & 28 tells us about such people, “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised...Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

We must proclaim Christ to a society that we know has its mind set against God. Understand that the message of Jesus Christ has always been “foolishness” to those who were perishing. On the surface real spirituality does not sparkle to this world. A.W. Tozer wrote, “True spirituality manifests itself in certain dominant desires.

1. First is the desire to be holy rather than happy.
2. A man may be considered spiritual when he wants to see the honor of God advanced through his life even if it means that he himself must suffer temporary dishonor or loss.
3. The spiritual man wants to carry his cross.
4. Again, a Christian is spiritual when he sees everything from God’s viewpoint.
5. Another desire of the spiritual man is to die right rather than to live wrong.
6. The desire to see others advance at his expense.

7. The spiritual man habitually makes eternity-judgments instead of time-judgments.

The good news is that at the heart of true spirituality is exactly what this society needs. If we will live our Christianity to the fullest those around us will see its reality in spite of all the changes our society may go through. We have been entrusted with the very words of God. Cherish the Word of God, not only as you read and study it yourself, but also as you hear it preached.