

The Centrality of Preaching

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PREACHING occupies the central position in our Worship Services and Mid-Week meeting. This article is taken from a series of addresses on the subject of Worship. It explains from historical and Biblical perspectives the necessity for the centrality of preaching.

Preaching has an ancient and noble history. There have been ‘prophets’ around from ‘old time’ and even ‘since the world began’ (Lk 1:70; 2 Pet 2:1). Our Lord included Abel, one of Adam’s sons, among the ‘prophets’ (Lk 11:49-53). Enoch, the seventh in lineal descent from Adam, also ‘prophesied’ and his prophecy was recorded and preserved (Jude 14). Noah, in the time before the Flood, was a prophet or, more precisely, a ‘preacher of righteousness’. He evidently declared to his generation, not only the just requirements of the divine Law, but also the way of justification through the righteousness of the promised Christ (2 Pet 2:5). Later, Abraham was designated a ‘prophet’ (the first occurrence of the word in Scripture). He, along with all these others, faithfully communicated God’s Word to the family and to the community at large (Gen 20:7; cf 18:19). There are, then, clear indications that preaching was one of the earliest of the divine ordinances.

It is possible to trace the history of preaching from earliest times down to the time of Moses. He was, of course, an exceptional prophet to whom God communicated directly (Num 12:6-8) but, unable to bear the responsibility alone, the Spirit of God also empowered seventy elders who ‘prophesied, and did not cease’ (Num 11:25). Like their prophetic forerunners, Moses and his elders were extraordinary preachers. Supernaturally called and miraculously endowed, they were able infallibly

to declare the revealed will of God (See also: Exod 3:1ff; Ps 74:9; Ezek 3:10, 11).

Under Moses, however, ordinary preachers were also appointed. These were, in the first instance, Levitical priests, part of whose task was to ‘teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law’ (Deut 33:10; cf Ezek 44:15, 16, 23; Mal 2:7). Israel quickly discovered the benefit of having ‘a teaching priest’ in the midst (2 Chron 15:3). It was through the ministry of priests that the Lord was pleased to effect real reformation among the people (2 Chron 17:8-13).

In the Tabernacle, the sevenfold light of the Golden Candlestick which illuminated the Holy Place appears to have typified the preaching of the Word in the power of the Spirit of God (Exod 25:31-36; 40:24; cf Phil 2:15; Rev 1:4; 4:5). That there was actual preaching or teaching in the Tabernacle is strongly suggested by something which the Lord said to Aaron. ‘When ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation’, he said, ‘do not drink wine, nor strong drink’; and one of the reasons for this ban is ‘that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses’ (Lev 10:8-11).

The same applied to the solemn services of the Temple. Besides the offering of sacrifice and its accompanying ritual, there is solid ground for believing that the Lord’s servants regularly preached within the Temple’s holy precincts. ‘Prophets’ and ‘priests’ are described as going up together to ‘the house of the Lord’ (2 Kgs 23:2); and Jeremiah declares that it was their ‘wickedness’ (i.e. their erroneous doctrine and practice) which defiled that ‘house’ (Jer 23:11). Eventually, such terrible wickedness brought judgment. The bitter cry of

people was heard, 'Shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?' (Lam 2:20)

Now what exactly was their function in the Temple? It was - at least in part - to bring the Word of God to assembled worshippers. On one occasion, when Judah was attacked by the Moabites and their allies, Jehoshaphat, having called the people together, prayed for divine help. 'Then', we read, 'upon Jahaziel (an unknown prophet, who also happened to be a Levite)...came the spirit of the Lord in the midst of the congregation; and he said,... Thus saith the Lord unto you...' (2 Chron 20:5,13,14-17. See also: Deut 31:9-13 and Jer 36:1-6).

There was certainly regular preaching in the Synagogue. 'For', as the Scripture says, 'Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day' (Acts 15:21). It would not be at all unnatural for prophets to visit Synagogues and take the opportunity of delivering the Word of God to the people congregated there. We know that it was customary to resort on Sabbath-days to the prophets for scriptural teaching (2 Kgs 4:23). Levitical priests also ministered in synagogal worship (Neh 8:6-8).

According to Jewish writers, however, it was another class of ordinary preachers, the Chief Rulers of the Synagogue, who had special 'authority to preach and to expound the law'. This finds confirmation in the New Testament where one of these officials is represented as addressing a Synagogue congregation (Lk 13:14). This Chief Ruler (or Teaching Elder) could also give permission to any Rabbi present to read and preach the Word of God: and, once again, there are New Testament passages which bear this out, especially Acts 13:14,15, where Paul and Barnabas were invited to preach in the Synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia. On this passage Professor Hackett comments: 'It may have been known that they were teachers, or, as Hensen

suggests, they may have occupied a seat which indicated that such was their office'.

Preaching was retained as a standing ordinance in the Christian Church. As the glorious day of Christianity dawned, John the Baptist appeared 'in the spirit and power of Elias', 'preaching in the wilderness of Judea' (Matt 3:1). He introduced to men the long-promised Messiah who, after his public induction to office, 'began to preach' (Matt 4:17). The Lord Jesus subsequently sent out twelve disciples with the command, 'As ye go preach' (Matt 10:7); and, after his death and resurrection, he confirmed and enlarged their commission, saying, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel' (Mk 16:15).

In accordance with this commission, the Apostles and others went forth; and evidence from the book of Acts and the epistles shows the nature of their ministry to Jews and Gentiles alike. Although all the references are too many to be given here, take the following as a mere sample: 'Daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ' (Acts 5:42); 'they preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews' (Acts 13:5); 'Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching' (Acts 15:35); 'How shall they hear without a preacher?' (Rom 10:14); 'It pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe' (1 Cor 1:21); 'Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!' (1 Cor 9:16); 'Christ...we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom' (Col 1:28); 'Preach the word; be instant in season out of season' (2 Tim 4:2); 'God...hath in due times manifested his word through preaching' (Titus 1:3); 'Unto us was the gospel preached' (Heb 4:2); 'The word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you' (1 Pet 1:25).

In addition to the apostles, there were other extraordinary and temporary officers who were engaged in this ministry: namely, prophets and

evangelists (Acts 6:4; Rom 12:6; 1 Tim 4:2; cf 2 Tim 4:5). Eventually, however, ordinary and permanent officers succeeded them and these were known as preaching elders (Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 5:17). Their spheres of ministry were, generally speaking, in particular churches (1 Cor 12:28; Heb 13:7); but, at the call of God, some were 'sent' to preach Christ in the unevangelized parts of the world (Acts 13:1-3).

Hence, first-century preaching took place both within and without the churches. The apostles preached, for example, in churches at Antioch and Troas (Acts 15:35; 20:7). Prophets too regularly preached in such places (Acts 13:1,2; 15:30-32; 1 Cor 14:29-31), as did evangelists, it seems, for Philip settled at Caesarea, presumably to exercise a ministry in the church there (Acts 21:8) and Timothy and Titus preached for a considerable time in the churches of Ephesus and Crete respectively (1 Tim 1:3; 4:13; 2 Tim 4:1-5). As for the preaching elders, their preaching appears to have been mainly in the churches and at services arranged for public worship (Eph 4:11, 12; Rev 2:1 - 'angel' or 'messenger of the church').

The early church did have, however, an organized programme of evangelistic outreach, as may be seen from the apostle Paul's three missionary journeys (Acts 13; 14; 15:36- 41; 16; 17; 18; 19;20; 21:1-16). However, this was not something confined to apostles. Others, with the necessary gifts and calling, were 'sent forth' to reach the lost and to tell them of the one and only Saviour of sinners (Acts 14:14; Rom 16:7). This was envisaged by our Lord in his teaching (Matt 24:14; Lk 14:15-24) and especially in the Great Commission, for after saying 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations', he added, 'and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (Matt 28:19,20). 'He did not say', as Thomas Scott astutely observes, 'to death, or to eternity; for that might have been restricted personally to the apostles; but 'to the end of the world:' which includes all succeeding ministers, congregations,

and disciples, in every age and nation, even to the consummation of all things'.¹

One is left wondering how the early church survived without instrumentalists, actors, clowns, dancers, puppeteers, and escapologists! These are the pathetic modern substitutes for ordained preachers of the Gospel. For our part, we believe in the preaching of God's Word. We believe furthermore that not until preaching is restored to its rightful place will the church of today experience the promised and blessed effusions of the Holy Spirit. But why is preaching of such paramount importance?

First of all, preaching is a divine institution (Is 55:10, 11; Lk 24:47). The Lord has ordained that people will be blessed, not so much by attention to the outward letter of his Word, but rather by its faithful exposition and close application to the conscience. As stated by the apostle, 'it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe' (1 Cor 1:21).

Secondly, preaching avoids visual representation, thereby preventing the sin to which men are so naturally prone - idolatry (Deut 4:12). The absence of visual representation is certainly no disadvantage, for in true and powerful gospel preaching, the Saviour is so vividly described that he may be said to be depicted, or even exhibited before men's eyes (Gal 3:1).

Thirdly, preaching manifests the power of God. It is such a weak and feeble means, despised by the world and, sadly, often ignored by the church; yet, quite wonderfully, it becomes 'the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth' (Rom 1:16). Truly, 'the weakness of God is stronger than men' (1 Cor 1:25).

Fourthly, preaching humbles sinners. The Gospel is preached to them - and their duty is first to hear, then to believe. Does not this assume that men are spiritually ignorant, altogether incapable of

discovering the truth for themselves? It does indeed. Preaching convinces men that sin has darkened their understandings. It shows them that they need to be taught even the basics of our most holy Faith. As the Apostle Paul once said to the Athenians: 'Whom ye ignorantly do worship, him declare I unto you' (Acts 17:23). In the light of this, what folly it is to replace sermons with discussions! This wrongly suggests to sinners that they have valuable insights about God to share with others. Nothing could be further from the truth and - I submit to you - nothing could be more unhelpful to sinners themselves.

Fifthly, preaching proves to be most beneficial. Man has been created with a mind and therefore with the capacity for rational thought (which distinguishes him, incidentally, from all other creatures). Biblical preaching recognizes this and imparts to men vital knowledge, urging them at the same time to think seriously (Ps 32:9; Is 1:18; Acts 13:16). Salvation is, of course, a serious matter. It has respect to the safety and well-being of the soul for all eternity. Now if people are to be soundly converted, the first thing which must happen is that their minds must be enlightened and informed, to know God in his perfect holiness, themselves in their sinful misery, and Christ Jesus in his power and willingness to save. 'Ye were sometimes darkness', Paul writes, 'but now are ye light in the Lord' (Eph 5:8).

Sixthly, preaching meets the needs of all. The message of salvation is vitally important to all, but many have difficulty in understanding it. That is where preaching comes in. The Lord equips and appoints ministers to explain the truths of Holy Scripture. 'Understandest thou what thou readest?' Philip asked the Ethiopian. 'How can I', he said, 'except some man should guide me'. It was then that 'Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus' (Acts 8:30,31,35; cf Neh 8:8,12; Job 33:23,24; 1 Tim 4:13-15). The ordinance of preaching enables inquirers to

become acquainted with the message and, hopefully, with the Redeemer himself.

Seventhly, and lastly, preaching can actually bring to men's souls the Holy Spirit and his saving grace. Both Scripture and experience confirm this. The ministry of the New Testament is 'the ministration of the Spirit' (2 Cor 3:8).

Now as we read the biblical record, perhaps the most impressive feature of early Christian worship is the central position given to the preaching of God's Word.

When the Christian church first appeared, it was like a school. The Lord was the 'rabbi' or 'teacher' who was surrounded by 'disciples' (Jn 3:2; Matt 5:1ff). Christ therefore showed by his very example that, in the worship of God, preaching should have the most prominent place (Mk 1:21, 39; 6:2; Lk 4:16, 17). Furthermore, he repeatedly impressed upon the Twelve, the future leaders of his Church, that preaching was the duty primarily and even pre-eminently enjoined upon them. 'Go ye into all the world', he said, 'and preach the gospel' (Mk 16:15; cf Lk 9:1,2; 24:47).

After Pentecost, when the Christian Church was formally established, preaching retained this position of supreme importance. In the list of the elements of early Christian worship, we observe that preaching is mentioned first - before fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. 'They continued steadfastly', we read, 'in the apostles' doctrine...' (Acts 2:42). There is not the slightest reason for believing that this was something peculiar to Jerusalem services. From the glimpse we have of Christian worship elsewhere, we gather that it was customary for preaching to dominate. Paul met with the Christians at Troas for their Lord's Day evening service, when the Lord's Supper was usually observed, but during the time of united worship preceding the Supper, 'Paul preached unto them'; and, so enabled was he by the Spirit of God, that he 'continued his speech until midnight'

(Acts 20:7). It was only after Paul had preached this lengthy sermon that the believers at Troas held their communion service. We read: 'When he (Paul)... had broken bread...and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed' (Acts 20:11). This shows, without a shadow of a doubt, that preaching occupied the most important place in early church worship.

If further confirmation is required, reference needs only to be made to the epistles and to what is taught there about the preaching of God's Word. Throughout these apostolic writings, preaching is recognized as the highest function of the Christian ministry, more important even than the administering of the sacraments. The apostle Paul writes, 'Christ sent me not (so much) to baptize, but to preach the gospel' (1 Cor 1:17); and, exhorting Timothy to a faithful discharge of his ministerial duty, Paul calls his co-worker to give special attention to '(the) reading' (i.e. the public reading of Scripture) and to 'exhortation' and 'teaching' (1 Tim 4:13).

All the evidence available to us shows that in the first century preaching was the central act in Christian worship. Can we proceed a little further and discover some of the reasons for this? Yes, I think we can.

First of all, the Word of God, expounded and received, is the source of our Faith; and for this reason, if for no other, preaching deserves the prime place (Titus 1:1-3).

Secondly, whereas in praise and prayer men address God, in the readings and the preaching God addresses men. This makes the latter ordinance especially important (1 Thess 2:13).

Thirdly, 'faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God'. Since faith is the organ of all spiritual blessing, both in the individual and in the

church, the preaching of the Word should have greatest emphasis (Rom 10:17).

Fourthly, as preaching is the means to teach and enable us to worship aright, ever stirring up in us the spirit of praise and of prayer, it should always have priority (Jud 5:12; Jer 36:5-7; Acts 10:44-46).

Fifthly, God is pleased to use preaching in order to bring sinners from a state of nature to a state of grace. This teaches us to honour it above all other appointments (Rom 1:16; 1 Thess 1:5,6).

Sixthly, according to the Scriptures, a faithful preaching ministry is to be reckoned the chief honour of any people; and in worship this is best acknowledged by making it appear the church's greatest asset. How can we do that except by laying the stress upon the preached Word? (Rom 10:15; Eph 4:11).

Seventhly, and lastly, let it be understood that nothing so promotes God's glory as biblical preaching. Churches therefore should ensure that in every worship service the sermon is enthroned and receives the crown (2 Cor 8:23; 1 Tim 1:11).

The Puritan, Arthur Hildersham, was surely right to say: 'He that hath the spirit of Christ, (and) any true love of zeale of God in his heart, will joy in the plentifull and free preaching of the Word, which is a chief part of God's worship, a principall occasion of our most solemn assemblies.'²

It is clearly a matter of overwhelming importance that the minister preaches the Word of God. He is not to preach the morality of natural religion, nor the politics of a particular party, nor the philosophy of enlightened wisdom, nor the science of present-day humanism, nor the scholarship of modern biblical criticism. These are not only useless: they are pernicious substitutes for true biblical preaching.

The minister is to 'preach the word' (2 Tim 4:2; cf Jer 23:28,29). This was the manner of preaching in Old Testament times when the Levites 'caused

the people to understand the law'. We are told how 'they read in the law of God distinctly' and then 'gave the sense' (Neh 8:7,8; cf 2 Chron 17:8,9). Coming to the New Testament, we find the same method adopted by the apostles. At Thessalonica, for example, Paul 'reasoned' with his congregation 'out of the scriptures' (Acts 17:2). Apollos did the same. Indeed, he excelled in being 'mighty in the scriptures', and his ministry appears to have been wonderfully blessed as he proved 'by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ' (Acts 18:24, 28).

Systematic, consecutive, and expository preaching, through a passage, chapter or book, has certain definite advantages. For one thing, it is a practice sanctioned in the Word of God (Neh 8:13,18; Lk 4:16ff): for another, it enables the minister over a period of time to preach through the entire Scriptures, thus declaring 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27). Furthermore, it helps the congregation to remember the truth taught from that particular portion of God's Word (Is 28:10; Phil 3:1).

This is not to rule out other kinds of sermons: for example, the textual, doctrinal, and apologetic (the latter being concerned with the 'defence' of the Christian Faith). There is biblical warrant for these too (e.g. Acts 8:35; 17:18; 22:1).

Whatever the type, any given sermon will be directed either to the unconverted or to the converted. Paul mentions '(the) exhortation', or evangelistic sermon, which urges men to repent and believe; and '(the) teaching', or pastoral sermon, which instructs the church in the various doctrines of the Christian Faith (1 Tim 4:13; cf Rom 12:7, 8).

It is sadly true that some ministers never or hardly ever - preach evangelistically. How they can possibly justify this I do not profess to know. Surely one of the evidences of a true call to the ministry is that a man feels compelled to preach the good news of a full and free salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Necessity is laid upon me', writes

the apostle, 'yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!' (1 Cor 9:16; cf Lk 4:18, 19).

On the other hand, some ministers consistently fail to preach in such a way as to build up the believing people of God, even though our Lord's commission to Peter, and to all exercising the office of pastor, is stated to be, 'Feed my sheep' (Jn 21:15-17; cf Jer 3:15). According to the New Testament, one great object of the ministry is 'the perfecting of the saints': that is, the bringing of all believers to the full measure of spiritual growth (Eph 4:11, 12). It is little short of a tragedy if the preaching is unedifying.

In order to be effective, the preaching must also be discriminating. What does that mean? Well, it means that the minister must take care to address the different kinds of people in his congregation (firmly resisting the pressure always to direct the worship and preaching to a particular group e.g. the young people). He must also be concerned to minister to people's particular circumstances and needs. This is almost certainly what Paul means when, writing to Timothy, he encourages him to be 'a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth' (2 Tim 2:15).

Calvin thought there was an allusion here to a father distributing bread to his children. He added, 'Yet by this term I understand, generally, an allotment of the word which is judicious, and which is well suited to the profit of the hearers'³. Calvin's interpretation is likely to be correct. After all, did not our Lord teach his ministers to take care of 'the household (of faith)' so as to 'give' to all their 'meat in due season'? (Matt 12:45; Lk 12:42).

It follows, then, that sometimes preachers must deliver a word of rebuke: at other times, they must give a word of comfort. They must always be faithful to the Lord in this, not fearful of the people's response. Sadly, there will always be those who are critical of the preacher's matter and manner. Even the apostle Paul had his critics, but he determined

never to be intimidated by them. He wrote: 'If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ' (Gal 1:10).

No matter what the emphasis may be, a truly biblical sermon should always be related to Christ. The whole of the scriptures bears witness to the Saviour and to the universality of the gospel offer (Acts 10:43; Rev 19:10) and therefore the hallmark of a true preacher will be the clear declaration of Christ as the Saviour of the world: 'Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified'; 'My gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ...now is made manifest, and...made known to all nations for the obedience of faith'; 'We preach Christ crucified'; 'We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord'; 'Christ... we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom' (Acts 13:38, 39; Rom 16:25, 26; 1 Cor 1:23; 2 Cor 4:5; Col 1:27, 28).

A great deal could be written here about the manner of preaching. For example, the minister should aim to preach faithfully (1 Cor 4:1,2; Col 1:7); plainly (1 Cor 1:17; 2 Cor 3:12); diligently (Acts 18:25; 2 Tim 4:2); boldly (Acts 13:46; Eph 6:19,20); tenderly (Matt 12:18-21; 1 Thess 2:7,8,11); and movingly (Acts 20:31; 2 Cor 5:10). There is, however, one further aspect which deserves mention, if not special mention. God's Word must be preached solemnly and with all due seriousness.

Some modern 'preachers' appear to find it necessary to begin the sermon with a smile and a humorous remark. Then, they hold people's attention by telling foolish personal anecdotes and, worse still, by making flippant and irreverent comments upon some biblical passage. It is not at all unusual for the congregation to break out into laughter and even into carnal and euphoric applause. So far has contemporary preaching been debased. It is now often little more than worldly entertainment. Yet, according to Scripture, the preacher is 'charged'

before 'God' and with the vision before his eyes of 'the Lord Jesus Christ' who will one day 'judge the quick (the living) and the dead' (2 Tim 4:1,2; cf 2 Cor 2:17). In his preaching, he is told to ensure that the content evidences 'uncorruptness' (truth, without taint of error) and that the manner of presentation is with 'gravity' ('dignified seriousness' - A.R.Fawcett) (Titus 2:7).

Did not Paul set an example to preachers in this respect? Standing before Festus, the Roman Procurator, he spoke 'words of truth and soberness' (Acts 26:25). In apostolic times, the effect of such preaching was that people were 'pricked in their heart' and cried out, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' (Acts 2:37). Modern popular preaching produces a very different effect and, as a direct consequence, our churches are filled with 'converts' who seem totally incapable of taking the Christian life seriously. The blame for this is to be laid at the door of those preachers who would have been better employed as circus clowns.

Dr William Plumer once wrote: 'He who speaks of God, eternity, sin, salvation, death, judgment, heaven and hell in a frivolous manner is a contemptible trifler. With a buffoon for a preacher, no place is as the house of God or the gate of heaven. The Bible is not a jest-book; heaven is not a fiction; hell is not a dream; damnation is not a chimera. It is a solemn thing to die; it is a solemn thing to live. It is an awfully solemn thing to preach or hear the gospel. He who 'woos a smile' when he should 'win a soul' is a charlatan, not an ambassador for God' ⁴. Before concluding this chapter, something should perhaps be said concerning the length of sermons. We live in the age of the short homily. It is 10 to 15 minutes in some churches: in others, it is just a little longer, but most reckon 30 minutes to be about the limit. While Scripture nowhere legislates on this, it does supply us with several examples of lengthy sermons (See: Neh 8:1-3, 8, 18; Acts 20:9). Faithful ministers must discharge their duty, even as Micaiah did when

he said, 'As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak' (1 Kgs 22:14).

The preaching itself should be allowed 'free course' or 'freedom of movement', so that it can work in men's souls and thus be 'glorified' as 'the word of...salvation' and as 'the word of his grace which is able to build... (us) up' (2 Thess 3:1; Acts 13:46; 20:31). Believers who wish to see greater blessing in the church and in the world should pray for ministers 'that God would open to us (not close to us!) a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ' (Col 4:3).

Of course, ministers must never preach long for the sake of it and they should perhaps always bear in mind that 'for some sermons ten minutes are too long, and for others an hour is too short!' They would also do well to take into account the mental and spiritual capacities of their hearers, as indeed the Lord himself did during his public preaching ministry (Mk 4:33; Jn 16:12). However, if they prayerfully and studiously prepare their sermons, and then preach them to the blessing of people's souls, they shall happily discover that a congregation can be taught to appreciate preaching - and even to desire more of it.

Now, it only remains to be said that ultimately the most effective kind of preaching will be preaching 'in demonstration of the Spirit and of power' (1 Cor 2:4; cf 1 Thess 1:5; 2 Pet 1:16). Seeing these days are so desperately wicked, we should cry to the God of heaven that he may once again grant to his Church true and faithful ministers who will preach the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. Then we shall see remarkable manifestations of the divine power, the Church restored to her former glory, and the world moved to seek God in Jesus Christ.

Many in our churches are longing for revival but, strangely enough, not for preaching. Sermons, they tell us, are 'out' - especially straightforward

and solid expositions of Scripture. Are they so 'blinkered' as not to see the inseparable connection between preaching and the powerful visitations of the Holy Spirit? Let them read the Journals of George Whitefield! In the 1740s, as the following brief extracts show, Whitefield was in America preaching with remarkable power of the Holy Spirit: 'After I had begun (the sermon), the Spirit of the Lord gave me freedom, till at length it came down like a mighty rushing wind, and carried all before it'; 'At night the Lord manifested forth his glory... After singing, I gave a word of exhortation; and with what power, none can fully express, but those that saw it. O, how did the word fall like a hammer and like a fire!'; 'I had not discoursed long, but the Holy Ghost displayed his power; in every part of the congregation, somebody or other began to cry out, and almost all melted into tears'.

May the Lord graciously restore to his Church that kind of preaching attended with that kind of power and hasten the day when 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea'! (Is 11:9; Hab 2:14).

Notes

1. Thomas Scott, 'The Holy Bible with Explanatory Notes, Practical Observations, and Copious Marginal References' (London: George Virtue), vol 3, p 96.
2. Arthur Hildersham, 'CLII Lectures upon Psalm LI' (London: J. Raworth, 1642), p 723.
3. John Calvin, 'Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon' (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), vol 21, p 223.
4. William Plumer, 'Hints and Helps in Pastoral Theology' (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1874), p 161.