

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR

7844 GRIMSBY CIRCLE HARRISBURG, N.C. 28075

SEPTEMBER 2019

## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT PREACHING

*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines the Greek word for preaching as "To proclaim glad tidings; spec. to instruct (men) concerning things of salvation...used of glad tidings concerning the Kingdom of God, and the salvation to be attained through Christ...to announce the glad tidings of the Messiah, or of the kingdom of God." Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* further defines the word preaching as: "Preaching is not a lecture on God's kingdom. It is proclamation, the declaration of an event. If Jesus came to preach, this means that he was sent to announce the kingdom of God, and therewith to bring it into being. Other items of content mentioned is that there is remission of sins in the kingdom. The word proclaimed is a divine word, and as such is an effective force which creates what it proclaims. Hence preaching is no mere impartation of facts. It is an event. What is proclaimed takes place. The proclamation of Jesus is more than historical instruction concerning the words and acts of Jesus. Stories about Jesus, however edifying, are of themselves empty. If they are not understood in the light of faith in the risen Lord, they are simply stories of things that happened in the past and are valueless for the present. The reality of the resurrection constitutes the fullness of early Christian preaching. It is not human dogma which we are to teach to others, it is salvation history which must be preached." The Apostle Paul wrote concerning preaching: "Since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe...we preach wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we preach God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory" (I Cor. 1:21; 2:6, 7). Further, he stated: "Whoever shall call on the name of the Lord will be saved; (Joel 2:32). How will they call on Him in whom they have not believed, and how will believe on him in whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher and how will they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:13, 14). Much preaching today is audience driven and not Biblically driven. Oz Guinness in *No God but God* wrote: "It is worth pondering a *New Yorker* lament about what is lost in the brave, new 'audience-driven' preaching of the day: The preacher, instead of looking out upon the world, looks out upon public opinion, trying to find out what the public would like to hear. Then he tries his best to duplicate that and bring its finished product into the marketplace in which others are trying to do the same. The public turning to our culture, to find out about the world, discovers there is nothing but its own reflection. The unexamined world, meanwhile, drifts blindly into the future."

The words *preach*, *preached*, and *preaching* are used over 110 times in the New Testament and the word *preacher* 11 times. Interestingly the word *sermon* is not found in the Bible. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* States: "The Old Testament writers scarcely use the term 'preaching' to describe the mission of the prophets. These prophets were not bringing good news (gospel), they asked for a better and stricter obedience to the given law." The writer of Ecclesiastes refers to himself as "the

Preacher" nine times. However the word "preach" is used only two times in the Old Testament (depending on the translation): In Jonah 3:2 the prophet is to "*preach the preaching* that I bid you" (KJV), "*proclaim the message*" (RSV), "*proclaim the proclamation*" (NASB), and In Jeremiah 29:32 Shemaiah is to be punished "because he has *preached* rebellion against the Lord" (NASB), "taught rebellion" (KJV). Isaiah 61:1 it is prophesied that the Messiah would "*bring good news to the poor*" when Luke quotes this passage, he renders it *preach the gospel to the poor* (Luke 4:18). Many times, the prophets introduced their message with the phrase "the word of the Lord came unto me saying..." or "thus saith the Lord..." It is estimated that these words occur about 2,500 times in the Old Testament. It may surprise us to know the gospel was preached in the Old Testament: "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham..." (Gal. 3:8) and further, in speaking of Israel in the wilderness the Hebrew writer states: "For indeed we have had the gospel preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard" (Heb. 4:2). Noah is said to have been "a preacher of righteousness" (II Pet. 2:5).

I Peter 1:10-12 has an interesting word concerning the preaching of the prophets in the Old Testament: "The prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the spirit of Christ within them was indicating as they predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who *preached* the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look." This passage tells us the prophets did not know the full story about the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow so they searched and inquired about them. But it was not revealed to them, but to us by those who *preached* the gospel to us. Even the angels did not know about them, but desired to look (Greek: *to gain a clear glimpse*) into them. We wonder what the angels think as they look into some of the shenanigans that pass for preaching today. Just because a man is a "preacher" and preaches sermons does not mean he preaches the word of God. Sermons can be just "beating the air" (I Cor. 9:26) and can be "believed in vain" (I Cor 15:2). Paul warns young Timothy to "accurately handle the word of truth" (1Tim. 2:15). Concerning his preaching the apostle Paul states: "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel" (I Cor. 9:16).

Jesus began his ministry by preaching, or as Earl Stanly Gardner wrote: "Jesus came preaching." He inaugurated his ministry in his hometown of Nazareth with these words: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to *preach the gospel* to the poor, He has sent me to *proclaim* release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, and to free those who are oppressed, to *proclaim* the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4: 18, 19). Mark 1:14, 15 states "Jesus came into Galilee

*preaching* the gospel of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel.” The word gospel means “good news.” So, what was the good news Jesus preached? Salvation from sin? God’s love for mankind? That he would die for the sins of the world? These and other important subjects Jesus certainly taught, but they were not the main thrust of his preaching. Matthew states it this way: “And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and *proclaiming* the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23). Further: “Jesus was going throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and *proclaiming* the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 9:35). In the parable of the sower the word that was heard was “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19). Jesus said: “And the gospel of the kingdom shall be *preached* in the world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come” (Matt. 24:14). Luke’s words concerning the multitudes were: “He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:11). In fact, Jesus says the reason he was sent was to *preach* the kingdom: “I must *preach the kingdom* of God to other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose” (Luke 4:43). After his resurrection Jesus “appeared to them (the Apostles) over a period of forty days, speaking to them of the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

If the preaching of Jesus was the kingdom of God, then the preaching in the book of Acts must have been the same message Jesus preached. The Samaritans “believed Philip *preaching* the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). Paul’s *preaching* contained this same truth: Paul and Barnabas “encouraged the Disciples to continue in the faith, saying, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God’” (Acts 14:22). Paul “continued speaking out boldly for three months, *reasoning and persuading* them about the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). On his way to Jerusalem Paul told the elders at Ephesus: “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now I know that you all, among whom I went about *preaching* the kingdom, will see my face no more...for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:24-27). These verses show that “the gospel of the grace of God” and the “*preaching* of the kingdom” were the same thing and are summed up in verse 27 as being “the whole purpose of God.” When imprisoned in Rome Paul “*testified* about and *preached* the kingdom of God” (Acts 28:23, 31). How much about the Kingdom is preached today?

One of the most important aspects of the kingdom is the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Therefore, this was also a prominent theme of Apostolic preaching in the book of Acts and the Epistles, a subject chiefly overlooked in preaching today (except, of course, during the “Easter” season). Two sermons recorded in the book of Acts, one by Peter (Acts 2:14-36) and one by Paul (Acts 17:22-31) are good examples of what is missing in preaching today. The first thing we note about Peter’s sermon is that he used the scriptures, quoting extensively from Old Testament passages: Joel 2, I Kings 2:10; Psalms 16, 110, 132. He refers to the life of Christ and the crucifixion in only two verses (22, 23) but speaks of the resurrection and ascension of Christ in thirteen verses (24-36). This is not to say that His life and crucifixion are not important subjects and they certainly should be preached, we are simply saying that most preaching today is on these two subjects to the neglect of the importance of the resurrection and, especially, the ascension. How many church attenders have ever heard a sermon on the importance of

the ascension? And, for that matter, how often is the meaning of the resurrection, in comparison to the cross, preached to the modern church-attending members? When the risen Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene he told her “stop clinging to me, for I have not ascended to my Father, but go and tell my brethren, ‘I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God’” (John 20:17). One of the great tragedies of the church has been a failure to realize the significance of the ascension and getting beyond the cross. We are still “clinging” to Christ and will not allow him to ascend. We want to keep him at best on the cross, shedding his blood and not presenting it to the Father on our behalf in the Holy Place not made with hands. This is no way said to belittle, denigrate or minimize the cross. We are simply saying we should get beyond so much emphasis on the cross and give attention to things the cross made real for us besides the payment for our sin. Peter’s sermon is a good example of Biblical preaching.

The second great example of Biblical preaching is Paul’s address on Mars Hill to the Athenian philosophers in Acts chapter 17. After his unique and appropriate introduction, the Apostle begins his sermon to these philosophers with a declaration concerning the work of creation of this universe by God (verses 24-28). These Athenians, in all their idolatries did not know that the “unknown God” that they worshipped was the God who made the world and revealed Himself in His creation (ver. 23, 24; Rom. 2:20). Over and over the book of Psalms recognizes God as the Creator of the heavens above and the earth below as well as man himself (example: Psalm 104:24, 121:2, 124:8, 134:3, 136:5, 146:6). Other OT scriptures that speak of the God of creation are: II Kings 19:15, 16; Jer. 32:17; Neh. 9:6. One example in the NT is Acts 4:24: Early in the history of the church, in the first persecutions, when Peter and John were released from prison, forbidden to teach and preach in the name of Christ, we read that that the Christians assembled together and began their prayer with these words: “O Lord, it was you who made the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and all that in them is...” This is a good example for our praying today.

Paul also introduced the fact of the resurrection to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers that were saying, “What would this idle babbler wish to say?” and “he seems to be the proclaimer of strange deities. Because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection” (ver. 18). Paul’s message to them was that “God had furnished proof to all men He had raised Christ from the dead.” Their response was “when they heard of the resurrection of the dead some began to sneer...others said, “we shall hear you again concerning this” (verses 18, 31, 32). One fact we want to note about Paul’s preaching is that he never argues immortality upon the bases of man having an “immortal soul,” (which is the lie of Satan), rather he argues immortality based upon the fact of the resurrection Christ.”

Paul’s final point in this sermon was concerning the righteous judgment to come. He affirmed that God had “fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead” (ver 31). The “man” refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter, preaching to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, declared that God had charged the Apostles that they were to “preach unto the people and to testify that this is he who is ordained of God to be the judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42).

Apostolic preaching certainly proclaimed these three subjects that are striking examples of what should be preached today.