

Reformed Worship: The Anatomy of a Worship Service

Lesson 11: Jesus Gets Up to Preach

Intro

In true preaching, there's not a man on stage trying to sell you a bill of goods, or a man up front trying to persuade you of his opinions and win you as one of his followers. *In true preaching, Jesus Christ Himself is the one who is actually speaking.*

The preaching of the Word in worship is the means by which God consecrates a people for Himself. It's the preaching of God's Word, through the power and blessing of the Holy Spirit, that *calls sinners* out of their sins into salvation and that *sanctifies saints* until they reach the fullness of the maturity of Christ.

The Witness of the Apostolic Church

- I. Defining preaching as “the living Christ speaking to His church,”—even if the culture dares to try and cancel that reality—is simply defining it as Scripture defines it, Eph 2.17; Rom 10.14; 1Cor 2.3-5.
 - A. 1Th 2.9-13: “we proclaimed” (v.9), “we exhorted, encouraged, and charged” (v.12); and yet: it's “God who calls” (v.12), it was “God's own word” which they heard in the apostle's preaching, and it was therefore to be received not as the word of men, but as “the word of God,” because that's what it really is (v.13), cf. 1Tim 4.13; 2Tim 4.2
 - B. Second Helvetic Confession (1562): “the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.”
 - C. When we recognize it's *God's* Word and not *man's* that should be coming from the preacher's lips, then we can start to make sense of how something as simple and foolish as preaching can have such marvelous results, WSC 89; Acts 2.42, 27; 4.4; 6.7; 10.44; 12.24; 13.48-49. In all these instances we see that the church of God grows as the Word of God is preached.

The Foolishness of Preaching

- I. Why does God bless the preaching, when the world's opposed to it as foolish? So that our faith will rest on the power of God and not on the skill, charisma, eloquence, or personality of men, 1Cor 2.1-5; 1Cor 1.17-21
 - A. A Sending Christ
 1. The first thing Paul says is that he preaches because he's been sent by Christ to do so, v.17; 1Cor 9.16; Jn 20.21. The apostles were sent out by Christ to lay the foundation of the NT church and now all preachers are sent out by Christ to build on that foundation, 1Cor 3.10; 2Tim 1.6
 2. This is how we must view preaching: a preacher is a man sent by Christ, to represent Christ, and speak for Christ. In his (biblically faithful) message, we're hearing the Lord Himself and no one else. True preaching doesn't present the preacher, it presents the sending Christ, 2Cor 4.2-5
 - B. A Simple Message
 1. 1Cor 1.17. If preaching were about the preacher's skill, abilities, and charm, the cross would be emptied of its power because the herald would be obscuring the King who sent him. When preaching becomes about entertaining jokes, quaint illustrations, feel-good stories, self-help tips, or personal anecdotes, Christ is no longer seen. A simple Bible-based, Christ-centered gospel message ensures that we see and know the sending Christ, 1Cor 2.2
 - C. A Saving Power
 1. 1Cor 1.18. While to unbelievers it seems like utter nonsense, to those who recognize it as God's wisdom, the preaching of the Word of God is the power of God unto salvation, Rom 1.16.

2. Have you noticed that God loves preaching? He loves it because He loves saving sinners and sanctifying saints, and this is how He's chosen to do it.
3. So we, too, should love preaching. We should love it when the pastor steps into the pulpit to deliver God's Word because it's a moment of salvation for God's people. We should love preaching because God loves preaching. It's a mystery how God does it, but we should love that God can take a man of like nature with us and can, through him, speak tenderly and effectively to us by His Holy Spirit.

The Wisdom of Man

- I. The wisdom of man rejects God's view of preaching, God's use of preachers, and God's use of preaching. Yet, preaching remains the primary means of saving the lost (Rom 1.17) and growing the church (Eph 4.11-16); and Christian worship (at the center of which is Christ's preaching) remains the primary tool of discipleship (1Tim 2.5-7; 4.13-16; 5.17; Acts 20.20, 29-32).
 - A. Many churches consider preaching *too intellectual* and so water them down theologically. Others consider preaching *irrelevant and boring* and so add props, gimmicks, and multimedia presentations until preaching becomes performing, exhortation becomes presentation.
 - B. Many are convinced that preaching is *too simple and too plain* to have saving and sanctifying power. But that just betrays *how worldly* the church has become *and how forgetful* the church has become that preaching is not a tool in the hands of men to grow the church, but rather a means of grace in the hands of Christ to save the lost and build His kingdom!
- II. If salvation is in *Christ's* hands, then why would the church want to do anything other than proclaim Christ, preach Christ, and promote Christ?!
 - A. The gimmicks used to attract the world will be the gimmicks by which they judge their relationship to Christ and the gimmicks that will keep them coming week after week.
 - B. The staying power in those churches is not the preaching of Christ, but the exciting attractions, the hip minister, and the feel-good experiences.
- III. We must never stray from the simple means of grace, WSC 88.
 - A. "The Word inscripturated and the Word incarnate are specific about the right techniques for church growth: the divinely given and divinely commanded means of Word, sacraments, and prayer." –Hart
 - B. "Nothing else we do in the church's program of ministry should detract from these central instruments of grace, and indeed everything else we do should promote and coalesce with them." –Ligon Duncan
 - C. To despise the preaching of God's Word is to despise the *sending* Christ, the *preaching* Christ, and the *saving/sanctifying* Christ. And how do you think that'll affect your Christian joy and walk?
 - D. To despise the herald sent by Christ is to despise the *wisdom* of Christ, the *mercy* of Christ, and the *tenderness* of Christ. And how do you think that'll affect your ability to get anything from Christ out of the preaching?

The Power of God

- I. What the church culture needs is a rediscovery of the power that's packed into a biblically faithful sermon. It's a supernatural moment where God raises the dead to life and conforms the living to Christ—which is why Christ's preaching is an unrepeatable and not-to-be-missed *event*. Streaming captures the words, but not the event. And a recording can make a record of it, but it can't repeat it.
- II. Preaching is one of the greatest and most excellent aspects of pastoral ministry and it's the church's and the Christian's greatest need.
- III. So come to the preaching to hear Jesus speak and, whatever the message, whomever the herald, Jesus *will* meet with you and you *will* be changed.