

The Centrality of Preaching

Charles E McLain, Th M
Professor, Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary

Local church leadership has never been single-faceted. Pastoring has always required more than just one talent or one ability. The pastor's job requires abilities and skills in several areas. Several areas demand his time and energy and attention. The multiplication of responsibilities which rest on the pastor's shoulders is reflected in the New Testament titles used to describe the pastoral position. He is at once an elder (*presbyteros*), a bishop (*episcopos*), a shepherd (*poimen*), a teacher (*didaskolos*), and a preacher (*kerux*). The pastor is responsible to perform a variety of tasks in different areas of church life.

Without the proper Scriptural focus and foundation to his ministry, the pastor can lose his spiritual balance resulting at best in time wasted spinning his wheels or at worst in becoming a specialist in a related but secondary area. If the pastor is to maintain a Scriptural balance in his ministry and fulfill all his God-given responsibilities, he must focus his attention and energies where Scripture does — on preaching. In the pastor's multi-faceted ministry preaching must be the core.

Administrator, educator, counselor, prophet, pastor, social worker, maybe custodian, secretary, mimeographer, plumber, carpenter, and husband and parent on the side — he is expected to be many things, indeed even wants to be . . . The one thing claiming precedence over all the others, demanding to stand at the center, because it has been the distinctive, necessary task of the ministry in every age, is the matter of proclamation. Nothing else will substitute for it. Its priority is absolute.¹

Central to all the various aspects and responsibilities in the pastor's ministry is preaching.

The Centrality of Preaching in the OT Foundation

Preaching is not a uniquely NT activity. NT preaching did not arise from a vacuum, but finds its foundation in the activity of the OT prophets. Although the OT prophets were involved in diverse

activities such as preaching, receiving and recording revelation, performing miracles, advising and influencing governments and kings, and foretelling the future, the core of their ministry was preaching. The centrality of preaching in the prophets' ministry is evidenced by their titles, commission, and practice.

The Prophets' Titles. The prophet was known by designations reflecting his preaching activity. The OT uses three such designations for the prophet.

The first and most frequent title used for the OT prophet is *nabhi'*. Although the etymology of this term is uncertain and therefore of no practical help in determining its meaning, usage in the OT is quite clear.² In both its noun and verb forms *nabhi'* refers to the proclamation of God's word by preaching.

One indication that *nabhi'* refers to the proclamation of God's word is found in its application to Aaron in Exodus 6:28-7:2 when Aaron is appointed as a spokesman for Moses. At the time of Moses' initial commissioning (Exodus 4) he raised the objection to God that he could not speak because he was 'slow of speech and slow of tongue' (v 10).³ In response God provided Aaron, who could 'speak well' (v 14), to speak for Moses. In verses 15-16 God outlined the process by which Aaron would function as a spokesman for Moses. First, Moses would receive a message from God. Then Moses would relay that message to Aaron who would orally and publically proclaim the message to its recipients. Moses put the words from God into Aaron's mouth and Aaron functioned as Moses' mouthpiece.

When the commission was renewed in Exodus 7 it was because of Moses' objection that he was unable to speak for God since he had 'uncircumcised lips' (6:28-30). God's response is the same — Aaron is to be Moses' appointed spokesman (7:1). The procedure is the same — God will speak to Moses; then Moses will speak to Aaron and then Aaron will speak to Pharaoh and the children of Israel (v 2). However, in this passage Aaron is given the title of *nabhi'* (7:1). The title is appropriate since Aaron is to speak forth a message he has received from a superior. As a *nabhi'* Aaron was simply a spokesman for a superior proclaiming the message of the superior with the authority of the superior.

Another indication that *nabhi'* refers to a preacher of God's word is found in God's promise of a coming Prophet like Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-22. The nature of the Prophet's function is clearly and repeatedly set forth. In verse 15 he is one to whom Israel should 'hearken'; that is, when he speaks he is to be heard and obeyed. In verses 16-17 God reminds them of the historical

setting at Horeb when they asked for a spokesman (preacher of God's word) so they would not have to listen directly to God's words again. In verse 18 the method of the *nabhi'* will be to hear God's words and then to proclaim them to the people. In verses 20-22 the consequences of falsely declaring to speak for God are given. The *nabhi'* was a spokesman for God.

A third indication is found in I Samuel 3:19-20 where it is recorded that Samuel was established as a prophet (*nabhi'*) before the people of Israel because "the Lord was with him, and let none of his words fail." Samuel as a *nabhi'* was a preacher of God's message.

A final indication that *nabhi'* refers to a preacher of God's word is found in the LXX.

The Septuagint translators understood *nabhi'* to have this meaning, for they translated the word by the Greek *prophetes*, a noun derived from the preposition *pro*, 'for, on behalf of,' and the verb *phemi*, 'to speak,' hence 'to speak for another.'⁴

As Bess points out, "the verb to prophesy . . . is used preponderantly to signify the preaching of the message of God."⁵ *Nabhi'* refers to an "appointed regular speaker for a divine superior, whose speech carries the authority of the latter."⁶ The prophets were God's spokesmen.

The second two titles, *ro'eh* and *hozeh*, are similar to one another. Both titles are from roots expressing the idea of seeing or looking at and both are commonly translated "seer" (I Sam 9:9; II Sam 24:11; I Chr 29:29).⁷ Although these titles highlight the nature of the reception of the prophets' revelation as being through visions, they do not simply refer to the fact that the prophet only received revelation from God, but "that they were considered discerners of the will of God, who could relay that information to people."⁸

The first indication that the 'seers' were in reality preachers of God's word is seen in their being equated with the term *nabhi'*. In I Samuel 9:9 the historian tells his readers that the *nabhi'* in ancient times had been called by the title *ro'eh*, both terms applying to the same person and the same function. Samuel is called both a *nabhi'* (I Sam 3:20) and a *ro'eh* (I Chr 9:22; 26:28). Gad in David's time is called both a *nabhi'* (I Sam 22:5; II Sam 24:11; I Chr 29:29) and a *hozeh* (I Chr 21:9; 29:30; II Sam 24:11).⁹ The titles *ro'eh* and *hozeh* are used synonymously with *nabhi'*.

A second indication that 'seers' were preachers of God's word is seen in their function. In I Samuel 9 the servant "looked upon Samuel as a prophet, for he immediately stressed the principal function of Samuel, ' . . . all that which he speaketh will surely come to pass.'"¹⁰ The servant knew that Samuel would speak God's

word to them. In Isaiah 30:9-10 Yahweh's rebellious children (v 9) command the 'seers' (*ro'eh*) to 'see not' and the 'prophets' (*hozeh*) not to 'prophecy' but to 'speak unto us smooth things.' Both the *ro'eh* and the *hozeh* were preachers of God's word whose message these 'rebellious children' wanted softened and made more favorable.

In Amos 7:12-13 Amaziah, the wicked priest of Bethel, tells Amos, "Go, you seer (*hozeh*), flee away to the land of Judah . . . and there do your prophesying (*naba'*)! But no longer prophesy (*naba'*) at Bethel." Two things are evident in this passage: 1) In Amos' days a 'seer' (*hozeh*) was commonly associated with the act of 'prophesying' (*naba'*); and 2) the 'seer' (*hozeh*) functioned as a preacher of God's word. Amaziah's complaint to Jeroboam (vv 10-11) was stimulated by and based on Amos' spoken words throughout the land. Amaziah was offended and frightened by Amos' preaching. In his answer Amos first relates his commission from God to prophesy (vv 14-15) and then delivers another personal message to Amaziah from God (vv 16-17). As seer, the prophet was not simply a receptor of revelation but a messenger to carry and to proclaim revelation to the people. "The function of the seer . . . is to speak the message which has already been received through seeing."¹¹

Hebrew prophecy was not mere prediction or social reform but declaration of divine will.

The heart of Hebrew prophecy is not prediction or social reform, but declaration of divine will — preaching. "To the Old Testament mind the prophet stood from beginning to end as the authoritative speaker for Jehovah."¹²

The Prophets' Commission. The prophets were commissioned by God to preach His word. A survey of a few prophetic commissions points to the centrality of preaching in the prophets' ministry. Following his vision of the Lord and the cleansing of his mouth (the main organ of a spokesman) (Isa 6:1-9), Isaiah was commissioned by God to "Go, and tell his people." Jeremiah having been chosen and set apart before birth (Jer 1:5) to be a prophet was commissioned with the words, "Everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak." Then God touched his mouth (the main organ of a spokesman) and said, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth." Ezekiel following his heavenly vision was sent by God to "speak My words to them whether they listen or not" (Ezek 2:1-10). Amos in his testimony to the rebel priest Amaziah reveals that he was commissioned by God to "Go prophesy to My chosen people Israel" (Amos 7:10-17). Jonah's commission was "Arise, go to Nineveh . . . cry against it" (Jonah 1:2). The OT prophets were

commissioned by God to be His spokesmen; to be proclaimers of His word — to preach.

The Prophets' Practice. The OT prophet was a preacher. The OT prophetic books are essentially books of sermons. The prophets received God's revelation for contemporary issues and proclaimed it to His people and other nations as moral and ethical preachers. Amos repeatedly declares, "Thus says the Lord" (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6) and admonishes the people to "Hear this word" (3:1; 4:1; 5:1). Obadiah declares "Thus says the Lord God" (1:1). The book of Jonah contains the story of a prophet who first flees, then fulfills, and finally follows up his preaching assignment from God.

Wood concludes that "the greater part of their declarative ministry was in preaching to the people of their own time. They were really much like preachers of today, urging people to live in a manner pleasing to God."¹³

The Centrality of Preaching in the NT Function

The centrality of preaching in the NT could be pointed out in several ways. One could survey the content of the twentyseven books of the NT for material directly or indirectly related to preaching and see its centrality in the ministry of the NT pastor. A W Blackwood has pointed out that "almost every book of the twenty-seven is either the direct product or a by-product of the 'apostolic preaching.'"¹⁴

On the other hand, one could survey the vocabulary of the NT for the variety and frequency of terms relating to preaching and see its centrality. G Campbell Morgan observes that "all the words in the NT . . . that refer to the exercise of speech for the impartation of truth" are used to indicate some phase of this work of preaching.¹⁵ TDNT lists thirty-three separate words used at some point in the NT to express the idea of preaching.¹⁶ These thirty-three words describing the pastor's position as preacher (*kerux*) are used well over 150 times compared to a total of 111 combined uses of the other four terms describing the pastoral position. This too shows the centrality of preaching to the pastoral ministry. However, for the purpose of this study the ministries of John the Baptist, Christ, the Apostles and the early church will be surveyed to show the centrality of preaching in the function of the NT pastor.

Prophets urged people to live in a manner pleasing to God.

Preaching in John the Baptist's Ministry

John the Baptist served not only as the forerunner of Christ's ministry, but also as a direct link to the foundation of the OT prophets. Before his birth, it was declared by the angelic messenger that John would minister like a prophet (Luke 1:17). At his circumcision Zacharias, his father, being filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied that John would minister as a prophet preparing the way of the Messiah (1:76). No explanation is given concerning the significance of this designation since both his parents and all Israel were familiar with the ministry of the OT prophets.¹⁷ John was to be a preacher of God's word.

John's ministry was filled with preaching (Matt 3:1; Mark 1:6-7; Luke 3:2-3, 18). During his ministry his preaching of God's word led to his recognition as a prophet by the common people (Matt 21:26; Mark 11:32; Luke 20:6). Christ also recognized and proclaimed John as the prophet who would prepare for His own coming by preaching (Matt 11:7-15). Christ's questioning in Luke 7:24-30 is significant on this point. He asked, "But what did you go out to see? A prophet?" Christ phrases His question in such a way as to prompt an affirmative answer and then, lest the point be missed, answers the question in the affirmative. Christ recognized that the people went out to John expecting to hear a prophet. "Jesus does not mean 'merely to look at a prophet' but 'to see him so as to get into personal touch with him,' i e to hear him and his proclamation with their own ears, to let him move them to repentance."¹⁸ During his ministry he was commonly associated with the OT prophets (Matt 11:13; 16:14; Mark 6:14-15; 8:28; Luke 9:7-8, 19). John was also recognized as a preacher by the early church (Acts 10:37; 13:24).

John was sent by God to bear witness (John 1:6-8, 15). A principal means of fulfilling that commission was preaching. "The NT opens with John the Baptist preaching to multitudes who have gone out to hear one who they thought was a prophet."¹⁹

Preaching in Christ's Ministry

Christ's ministry on earth was multi-faceted. Christ performed miracles, taught, witnessed, rebuked, encouraged, and ultimately died for the sins of mankind. At the center of Christ's ministry was preaching as revealed by His title, His commission, and His practice.

Christ's Title. Two of Christ's many titles point to His preaching ministry and its centrality. First, He is called the Word (John 1:1, 14; Rev 19:13). As the Word He is God's message to man. In Hebrews 1:1-2 Christ as God's message is equated with the oral messages of the OT prophet-preachers. However, He was not simply God's message, but God's "spoken" message (John 1:18b; 5:24; 12:50; 17:8); God's message of life (John 1:4; 14:6); God's

message revealing Himself (John 1:14, 18; Heb 1:3a); God's message of redemption (John 1:11-13; 5:24; Heb 1:36). Christ as the Word was not simply God's message to mankind but God's message declaring (preaching) God to mankind.

Secondly, Christ was called a prophet in the same sense as John the Baptist and the OT prophets. The common people, both inside (Matt 21:11, 46; Luke 9:7-9; John 6:14; 9:17) and outside Jerusalem (Matt 16:14), recognized Christ as a prophet in the line of the OT prophets and John.

Christ identified Himself with the line of the OT prophets. In Matthew 13:53-57 the inhabitants of Nazareth are astonished by the wisdom of His speech as He proclaims God's word in their synagogue. Their astonishment is turned to offense as they recall His humble childhood in their town. Christ responds to their offense with the words, "A prophet is not without honor except in his home town, and in his own household." With this response Christ identified Himself as a prophet based on his proclamation of God's word. Lenski notes, "The fact that Jesus here classes himself as a prophet is perfectly in order, for the contempt arose during his teaching."²⁰ Again in Luke 13:33-35 Christ not only announces His coming death but also identifies Himself with the OT prophets.

The early church understood Christ to be the promised prophet of Deuteronomy 18 who would proclaim God's word (Acts 3:22) in the same fashion as Moses did.

The centrality of preaching in Christ's ministry is reflected in His titles. He is the Word — the message of God. He is a prophet in the line of the OT prophets. As a prophet He is God's spokesman proclaiming God's message.

Christ's Commission. Christ's commission in coming to earth was to provide salvation for mankind (Luke 19:10; John 3:17; Heb 2:9-18). However, it must be realized that a great significance was placed on preaching as an integral part of that commission.

Upon His return to His hometown of Nazareth in Luke 4 Christ took part in the synagogue service by leading the public reading of scripture. For the reading He turned the scroll to Isaiah 61 and read verses 1-2a. After being seated He claimed the passage's fulfillment for Himself (v 21). In effect He was publicizing His commission from God. 'Anointing' (v 18) speaks of being set apart for a special purpose — being commissioned. The essence of the commission centered on preaching — "to preach the gospel (*euangelisasthai*)"; "to proclaim release (*keruxai*)"; and "to proclaim (*keruxai*) the favorable year of the Lord." Christ recognized that His God-given commission was to focus on preaching.

In John 5, Christ addresses the Jews and defends His ministry as originating in God's commission and as being directed by God's

will (vv 19, 21, 23, 27, 30, 36, 37, 43). Throughout His defense He repeatedly refers to His preaching ministry and His spoken word. For instance, in verse 24 He specifically states, "He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life." The application of salvation through faith was accomplished by belief in the spoken word.

In Christ's high priestly prayer in John 17 Christ's commission and preaching are again closely connected. Christ being sent by God spoke only the words He was commissioned to speak (vv 7-8). Also Christ commissioned His disciples in the same manner as God had commissioned Him (v 18) — to go preach God's word (Matt 10:7; Mark 3:14; 6:12; Luke 6:15, 20; 9:2; John 17:20).

Christ clearly revealed to His disciples that the purpose for which He was sent by the Father was to preach. In Mark 1:38 Christ bids Simon and his companions, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach (*keruxo*) there also; for that is what I came out for (*exelthon*)." Then in Luke 4:43 he responds to the multitudes by saying, "I must preach (*euangelisasthai me dei*) the kingdom of God to other cities also, for I was sent (*apestalen*) for this purpose."

Several aspects concerning Christ's commission can be noted from these two passages. First, Christ was under a compulsion to preach. In Luke 4 he uses the word *dei* denoting a compulsion of any kind.²¹ Plummer points out that this word is used by Christ and of Christ throughout the NT.²²

Second, the object of His compulsion was the need to preach. In Luke 4 the word *dei* is preceded by the aorist infinitive of *euangelizo*; Christ's compulsion was to announce or proclaim the kingdom of God. In Mark 1 *hina* introduces the aorist subjunctive form of the verb *kerusso*; Christ went to the surrounding towns for the purpose of preaching. Christ was under a compulsion to preach God's word.

Third, His compulsion to preach was the result or essence of His commission. Christ uses two different verbs in these passages that point to His commission. In Mark He says, "for that is what I came out for." Some would understand this to refer to His departure from Capernaum (vv 21ff). However, the verb *erchomai* is used technically of Christ's coming from heaven. TDNT notes,

The word belongs to the circle of ideas connected with the divine epiphany. Of particular significance for the Messianic task of Jesus are the sayings in which He speaks of His coming in the first person. . . . In them we see Jesus' certainty of mission.²³

John uses the same root as Mark, *erchomai*, several times to refer to Christ's commission in coming from the Father to earth.²⁴

*Christ was sent by God to proclaim
God's Word to mankind.*

In Luke Christ states, "for I was sent for this purpose." The verb *apostello* is generally used in the NT with the idea of "commission linked with it, no matter whether the one who sends or the one who is sent claims prior interest."²⁵ This verb is used regularly to refer to Christ's commission (Matt 15:24; 21:34; Mark 9:37; Luke 4:18; John 3:17, 34; 5:36-38; 6:57; 7:29; 8:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21). The emphasis on His commission is heightened in Luke 4 by the use of the first person (I) and the passive voice (am sent). "It is not a matter of personal opinion or wish but the manifestation of a mission to which he has been ordained and 'sent.'"²⁶ Christ was sent as a spokesman for God — as a preacher of God's word.

Fourth, His compulsion to preach as a result of His commission is evidenced throughout His ministry. The Mark and Luke passages are not parallel. They refer to two separate occasions when Christ proclaimed to His followers that a primary purpose for coming to earth was to preach God's word. In Mark He follows up His statement by preaching (present active participle) "throughout all Galilee." In Luke He follows up His statement by preaching (present active participle) "in the synagogues of Judea." Christ fulfilled His commission by extensively preaching God's word.

An integral and primary part of Christ's commission from God was to preach. Christ was sent by God as a messenger to proclaim God's divine word to mankind.

Christ's Practice. Christ's practice during His earthly ministry centered in preaching. Following His temptation, when He withdrew into Galilee, He began His ministry with preaching (Matt 4:12-17; Mark 1:14-15). His preaching began in the mold of John the Baptist's preaching — "Repent; for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Christ's own claim was that He preached in the same mold and line as the OT prophets (Luke 16:16). Throughout all Galilee He preached the gospel of the kingdom (Matt 4:23), swelling the size of His audience with His healing ministry (Matt 4:24-25). This preaching pattern continued throughout Christ's ministry (Matt 9:35; 11:5; Mark 1:39, 45; Luke 4:16-24, 43-44; 8:1; 9:6, 20:1; Eph 2:17). In cities and villages (Matt 9:35; 11:1; Luke 8:1; 9:6; John 4:41); in the temple, synagogues or uninhabited countryside (Mark 1:39, 45; Luke 4:16f; 20:1; John 8:20); gathering crowds by His miracles or merely by His presence (Mark 1:39, 45; Luke 9:6) Christ preached the gospel (Matt 9:35; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:6; 20:1).

Preaching in the Apostles' Ministry

What a thrill it must have been for the apostles to be commissioned by Christ (Matt 10:7; Mark 6:12; Luke 9:2) with the same commission He had received from the Father (Mark 1:38; Luke 4:43). It was a commission that they did not easily forget or neglect. Peter testifies to the fact that Christ 'ordered' (*parangello*) the apostles to preach (Acts 10:42). At Christ's directive, preaching was to be the core of their ministry — they might heal and counsel and visit, but they must preach. And preach they did!

The Acts of the Apostles is a book filled with the preaching of the apostles. Luke begins this book with the events of Pentecost which are centered in Peter's sermon (2:14-47) and concludes the book with Paul's preaching (28:31). The chapters in between are filled with apostolic preaching, its results and its outreach. In chapters 3-4 Luke records Peter and John's healing of the lame man (3:1-10); preaching to the crowd that gathers (3:11-4:3); and their resulting arrest for preaching. In chapter 5 an angel releases Peter from prison in order to continue his preaching. In chapter 6 the church appoints deacons in order to relieve the apostles of responsibilities that would keep them from ministering the word (6:4). In chapter 8 Peter and John are preaching in Samaria. In chapter 9 Paul is converted and begins his preaching ministry (vv 20-30). In chapter 10 Peter preaches to Cornelius and his friends and relatives. In chapter 11 Peter reports concerning his preaching to Cornelius. In chapter 13 the Holy Spirit sets Paul apart and he leaves Antioch on his first preaching mission (13:5, 14-44; 14:1-3, 6-7, 20-21, 25). In chapter 15 Paul begins to plan a return to the churches that had been established through his preaching (v 36). Paul's second trip is filled with preaching in city after city (16:10, 17; 17:1-3, 10-13, 18; 18:4-5; 19:8, 13, 20; 20:2, 7-11, 18-31). In chapter 21 the Asian Jews stir up Jerusalem because of Paul's preaching (v 28). In chapter 26, Paul mentions his experience of preaching before King Agrippa (vv 19-20, 22-23). Luke's history of the apostles' ministry is a history of their preaching.

Preaching in the Early Church

Preaching held a central place in the ministry and worship of the early church. As Hoyt has pointed out, not only did the church begin in preaching but also "preached the Gospel before it was written."²⁷ The centrality of preaching in the early church is reflected in its history and epistles.

The History of the Early Church. Preaching was so central to the growth and spread of the early church that its practice was not

limited to the apostles. In Acts 7 and 8 two of the church's first deacons are found preaching. Stephen's public proclamations (6:8-15) caused him to be brought before the Sanhedrin where he delivered the message recorded in chapter 7 that resulted in his death.

The great revival in Samaria recorded in Acts 8 was due to the preaching of Philip. His Christ-centered preaching (vv 4, 5, 12) resulted in the salvation of many (v 12) and brought joy to the whole city (v 8). Next the Holy Spirit moved him to Gaza where he preached to the Ethiopian eunuch (v 35). From Gaza the Spirit moved him to Azotus where he began another preaching mission in "all the cities, until he came to Caesarea" (v 40).

The initial spread of the church outside of Jerusalem was not due to the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles but by laymen (8:4; 11:19-20) and by Philip the deacon (8:4-40). The history of the early church is a history of preaching.

The Epistles of the Early Church. In the epistles, as revelation is given for the faith and practice of the church, preaching receives a central role. Several principles in the epistles point to the central role of preaching in the ministry.

First, in I Peter 1:10-12, NT preaching is presented as a natural extension and follow-up of the OT prophet's ministry; indeed it is a necessity in view of the OT messengers. Peter continues in II Peter 3:15-16 to equate the messages of the NT messenger (Paul) with those of the OT messengers. Paul in Titus 1:3 identifies himself and his preaching ministry as being in the line of God's successive revelations of His word. He reminds Titus of his own commission by God who "at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior."²⁸

Second, NT preaching is the fulfillment of Christ's commission (I Cor 1:17; 9:14). NT preachers are not only the successors of the OT prophets but also of Christ and the apostles. They share the same commission and are to have the same focus in their ministries.

Third, preaching is presented as essential to evangelism and salvation. Romans 10:14 asks, "How shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" The answer is found in v 15, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel" — the answer is a preacher.

Without commissioning and sending there are no preachers, and without preachers there is no proclamation. True proclamation does not take place through Scripture alone, but through its exposition, Luke 4:21. God does not send books to men; He sends messengers.²⁹

Fourth, preaching is conducted as a ministry of the Holy Spirit through the preacher (I Pet 1:12; I Cor 2:1-4). The preaching of the OT prophet was a Spirit-empowered ministry (Num 11:24-30; I Sam 10: 6, 10; Isa 59:21; Ezek 11:5). Christ's preaching was a Spirit-empowered ministry (Luke 4:14-21). The NT preacher being in the line of the OT prophets and Christ and being empowered by the Spirit is to focus his ministry in preaching.

Fifth, the content of NT preaching is Christ, His word, and His Gospel (Col 1:28; II Tim 4:2; II Cor 11:4,7). As a messenger the NT preacher like the OT prophet is not at liberty to decide on what is primary in his service or to formulate what will pervade his message. Being sent by a superior he is given a message to proclaim and a focus on which to concentrate.

The one who sends gives him the content of the message and authority. The disciples do not proclaim their own discoveries or insights. They proclaim what they have heard from another, and what they have been commissioned to tell, Mt. 10:27. A preacher is not a reporter who recounts his own experiences. He is the agent of someone higher whose will he loudly and clearly makes known to the public.³⁰

Sixth, NT preaching includes other pastoral ministries such as admonishing and teaching (Col 1:28); reproof, rebuking, and exhorting (II Tim 4:2); and edification (Col 1:28b; I Cor 15:1-2). Like spokes emanating from a hub, every aspect of a pastor's ministry is tied organically to the ministry of preaching. Like rays radiating from a source of light, every aspect of a pastor's ministry is enlightened by the preaching of God's work. Preaching cannot be disjointed from counselling or administering or educating or any ministry needed by the flock to which the pastor ministers.

Seventh, NT preaching is commanded (II Tim 4:2). The NT preacher must preach. He must be ready to preach at all times (v 2b). He must preach to meet the needs of his congregation (v 2c). He must preach with all patience and instruction (v 2d). He must preach when preaching is not popular (vv 3-4). He must preach when preaching is not wanted (I Cor 1:22). He must preach when preaching is misunderstood (II Cor 1:23-25). He may perform many labors in his ministry but the NT pastor must preach. Preaching is central to the faith and practice of a NT local church.

Conclusion

The pastor's ministry may be multi-faceted but it must have a singular focus. It must be focused on and centered in preaching.

Just as the NT pastor stands in the same line as the OT prophet, John the Baptist, Christ, the apostles and the early church, he must also have the same core in his ministry — preaching must be central.

This Bible truth has been observed by many. Henry Ward Beecher proclaimed preaching as “the highest act of the Christian ministry.”³¹ A W Blackwood called preaching “the noblest work on earth.”³² John Broadus said, “Preaching is characteristic of Christianity,”³³ and “must always be a necessity.”³⁴ Phillips Brooks pointed out that “nothing can ever take its place.”³⁵ Bob Jones declared, “preaching should certainly be the main business of a minister of the Gospel.”³⁶ G Campbell Morgan found preaching to be “the supreme work of the Christian minister.”³⁷ W M Kroll wrote, “With regard to the total life of the ministry, preaching holds the central place.”³⁸

Lloyd M Perry has warned, “The quality of preaching always declines when the conception of preaching is removed from primary to second stages.”³⁹ More correctly, in view of the Scriptural position of preaching to the ministry, when preaching is not central to the pastor’s ministry then his ministry is no longer balanced and no longer in accordance with God’s plan. Preaching must be the center of every pastor’s ministry.

Notes

¹ John Killinger, *The Centrality of Preaching in the Total Task of the Ministry* (Waco, Texas: Waco Books, 1969) 28

² For discussion on the etymology of *nabhi* see: Hobart E Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968); Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1948); Robert D Culver, “*naba*” *TWOT*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981) 2:544-545

³ All Scripture quotations are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, 39

⁵ S Herbert Bess, “The Office of the Prophet in Old Testament Times” *Grace Journal* (1960) 7

⁶ Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 192

⁷ *ro’eh* is properly a Qal participle of the verb *ra’a* which is one of the most commonly used verbs in the OT for seeing; *hozeh* is derived from the verb *haza* whose meaning is almost completely synonymous with *ra’a*.

⁸ Leon J Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979) 59

⁹ Note that apparently the writers in both the books of Samuel and in Chronicles used both terms of the same person.

¹⁰ Edward J Young, *My Servants the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1952) 61

¹¹ Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, 64

¹² Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 193

¹³ Wood, *Prophets of Israel*, 68

¹⁴ A W Blackwood, *The Fine Art of Preaching* (NY: MacMillian Co, 1937) 9

¹⁵ G Campbell Morgan, *Preaching* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1955) 11

¹⁶ Gerhard Friedrich, "kerusso" *TDNT* ed Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1965) 3:703

¹⁷ Compare verse 70 where the prophets are designated as preachers of God's word. Also note that the messages of the prophets according to verse 71 and the message of John according to verse 77 both dealt with salvation for the people of Israel.

¹⁸ R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943) 412

¹⁹ James L Boyer, "The Office of the Prophet in New Testament Times" *Grace Journal* (1960) 13

²⁰ Lenski, *The Interpretation of Matthew*, 553; see also: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973) 582

²¹ Arndt, William F and Gingrich, F Wilbur, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1957) 171

²² Alfred Plummer, *The International Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to St Luke* (NY: Chas Scribner's Sons, 1906) 140

²³ Johannes Schneider, "erchomai" *TDNT*, 2:668

²⁴ Compare John 8:42; 13:3; 16:27-30; 17:8.

²⁵ Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, "apostello" *TDNT*, 1:404

²⁶ E Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1974) 101

²⁷ Arthur S Hoyt, *The Work of Preaching* (NY: Hodder & Stoughton, 1905) 12

²⁸ Quoted from the NIV.

²⁹ Friedrich, "kerusso" *TDNT*, 3:718

³⁰ *Ibid*, 713

³¹ Henry Ward Beecher, *Yale Lectures on Preaching* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, nd) v

³² A W Blackwood, *The Preparation of Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1948) 13

³³ John A Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (NY: Geo H Doran Co, 1898) 1

³⁴ *Ibid*, 3

³⁵ Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub House, nd) 11

³⁶ Bob Jones, *How to Improve Your Preaching* (BJU Press, 1960) 9

³⁷ Morgan, *Preaching*, 11

³⁸ Woodrow M Kroll, *Prescription for Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980) 14

³⁹ Lloyd M Perry, *Biblical Preaching for Today's World* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973) 10