

Preaching That Glorifies God

PHBF 6.5.2011

TEXT: 1 Peter 4:10-11

Scr. Reading: 1 Peter 4:10-11

Words for kids: preaching, words, God, history

1 Peter

[Intro comments:

One final sermon from 1 Peter

Upcoming sermon series (life of Peter, no SOS verses)

SOS VERSES (gift card)

Credit to Mark Minnick, whose sermon on this passage first set my vision for preaching many years ago]

Bedford, England, November 1660, 32-year-old metalworker was on trial for preaching without a license. The justices asked him why he would not be content to follow his calling as a tinker and simply attend church as the law required.

Young man answered he could follow his calling and preach also.

Magistrate replied that he would send the young preacher to jail.

Young man responded that he had friends who had come to post bond and secure his release.

Magistrate warned the friends that they were bound to keep this man from preaching or their bond money would be forfeit.

“Then I will break my bond. For I shall not leave speaking the word of God. I must instruct and counsel people to forsake their sins and close with Christ, lest they miserably perish. And I should think this to be a work that has no hurt in it, but is more worthy of commendation than blame.”

One of the justices responded: “How can you prove it is lawful for you to preach?”

The young preacher, John Bunyan, responded: “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God...”

Bunyan knew he had received a gift from God and God expected him to use it. He had no choice.

What was true of Bunyan is true of all Christians. Peter writes: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.” Every believer has a gift of one sort or another. Peter groups all the gifts into 2 broad categories: gifts of speaking and

gifts of service. Verse 11 furnishes us with the purpose of these gifts as we use them in the church: “in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” The purpose of all service and all speaking in the church is this: God's glory through Christ.

So what is preaching that glorifies God? That's the subject I've elected to address in this sermon. First we're going to answer that question and then draw out several implications.

WHAT IS PREACHING THAT GLORIFIES GOD?

Notice again the first clause of verse 11: “Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God.” Your translation might have the phrase “the utterances of God” (NAS) or “the very words of God” (NIV). It's a startling phrase: “oracles of God.” What does it mean? There are two cross references in the NT that use this exact phrase:

Romans 3:1-2 *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.*

What was the great privilege of the Jews? They were entrusted with “the oracles of God.” God spoke to the Jews and to no other nation. They and they alone had the words of God Himself.

Hebrews 5:12 *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,*

What is the complaint of the writer? These readers, who by this time ought to be teachers, need to learn the basic principles of God's word again. “The oracles of God” again refers to the very word of God itself.

There's a similar reference in Acts 7:38:

This [Moses] is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.

What did Moses receive as the angel spoke to him on Mt. Sinai? Words

from God Himself, called “living oracles.”

So what are the “oracles of God”? They are the very words of God Himself. Not just words *about* God. Words *from* God—the word spoken by God to us.

These cross references give us a preliminary answer to our question “What is preaching that glorifies God?” Peter says preaching that glorifies God is when the preacher speaks “as one who speaks oracles of God.” Or we could say preaching that glorifies God is when the preacher speaks the very words of God.

It’s the kind of preaching that says exactly what God says. The best kind of preaching, really the only kind of real preaching according to the Bible’s definition, is simply a reiteration of God’s own words. It doesn’t have to be smooth, dynamic, trendy, relevant, funny, personal, or even practical. What does it need? It has to ring with the sound of God’s own voice. Preaching that glorifies God has one essential quality: it says exactly what God says.

This is a strong claim, but we actually need to take it a step further. Peter takes it a step further. Whatever version you have, all the translators have smoothed out the grammar a bit. Before we smooth it out, it literally reads: “If anyone speaks, as the very words of God.” In Peter’s original, there is no connecting phrase “he should do it as.” It’s just “If anyone speaks, as very words of God.”

Do you see the difference? Peter’s not so much commending the *manner* of preaching: “Do it like this.” He’s saying something about the *nature* of preaching: “Preaching is when the speech you hear comes to you as the word of God Himself.” I appreciate how the NLT puts it:

Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you.

This is utterly stunning. **True preaching is when a man comes to you as the very word of God itself.** How can a man speak as if he were the very word of God? He is a man, a fallen, limited, foolish human being.

Answer: **He can come to you as the very words of God when he says exactly what God has said. Then it is the very word of God that is**

coming through his lips.

This means preaching must be demonstrably the very words of God. You should be able to look on your page and see God’s words right there, corresponding to what is coming out of the preacher’s mouth. Line by line and verse by verse, it should be apparent that what you are hearing is the speech of God. This is why so often I say, “Look at verse _____. Put your eyes right on it.” I want you to see that what I am saying in that moment is not made up; it is the very word of God Himself.

So many verses make the same point:

2 Cor 5:20 *We are Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.* (NIV)

Exodus 4:11-12 *Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.”*

Jonah 3:2 *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”*

Jeremiah 1:17 *But you, dress yourself for work; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them.*

Ezekiel 2:6-7 *And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions. Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. ⁷ And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house.*

John 17:7-8 *Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me...*

1 Thessalonians 2:13 *And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God...*

When a man preaches this way, coming as the very word of God Himself, God is powerfully glorified. The man is not coming on his own authority or inventing his own message or showing off his own cleverness. He’s simply a mouthpiece for God. At the end of a fabulous violin concert, no one applauds the violin. The violin is simply responding to the skill and energy of the maestro, and the master gets all the glory. In the same way, preaching that glorifies God is preaching that comes to the listeners as the very voice of God Himself.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Study

This is an utterly crucial verse for my understanding of my job week to week, especially what I do during the week when I'm not preaching. I study!

Please do not misunderstand what I have been saying about the nature of true preaching. I am not claiming that everything that comes out of a preacher's mouth is automatically the word of God, by virtue of his office as preacher. I am saying that preachers who understand their calling correctly are men who make certain through careful study that they are saying God's own words after Him. A preacher's responsibility is pretty straightforward: to elongate the text. Week after week, all I do is explain, illustrate, and apply what God has previously spoken.

The technical term for this work is "exegesis." The word literally means "to lead out." That's a preacher's job—to lead out the meaning of the text before him. The central question a preacher must ask himself each week as he prepares his sermon is not "What can I say about this text?" The right question is "What does this text say?" It's investigation, not creation; extraction, not addition.

Preparing sermons is not like preparing a speech. It's not up to the preacher to decide what to say, gathering clever quotes and interesting stories along with a few motivating clarifying principles for life.

Preachers do not – they must not – invent their own message! They have a prescribed word that has been entrusted to them. They speak under God's authority, carrying His message. Some preachers are a bit afraid of the Bible, fearing that if they go too deep they will spoil their sermon. No! The Bible gives me my sermon! **Without God's own words in the Bible, I have nothing else to say! If God has not spoken, how dare any man presume to speak to God's people?**

Preaching that glorifies God requires study.

2. Authority

Preaching that glorifies God has inherent authority. Why? Because it is God's word, not the preacher's.

This is why preaching is not a dialogue. If the preacher were speaking for himself, that might be appropriate. Who is any one of us to demand that the rest give us liberty to talk while everyone else sits silent? But the preacher is not giving his own ideas. He is giving the very words of God, which is why nobody else gets to stand and speak his opinion.

This is also why the Scriptures forbid women to preach: because preaching is an expression of the authority of God Himself. Proper preaching has inherent authority because proper preaching comes to us as the very word of God. No one may object. Everyone must submit and obey.

This is one of the primary distinctions between preaching and teaching. Preaching comes to us with the implicit opening line: "Thus says the Lord." As such, preaching is inherently humbling, both for the preacher and the listeners. It's humbling for the preacher because it shows the sufficiency of God as the author of every worthy sermon. It's humbling for the listeners because it puts God in authority and us in subjection.

3. Centrality

When you understand preaching as God truly designed it to be, it helps you to see why preaching is so important to the life of the church. No matter how devoted we are to personal Bible reading or group Bible study, if we don't have preaching at the center of our life together we will languish.

Listen to these verses which convey the centrality of preaching:

Matthew 3:1 *In those days John the Baptist came preaching...*

Luke 4:18 [Jesus:] *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has... sent me to preach..."*

Matthew 4:17 *From that time Jesus began to preach...*

Mark 1:38 *And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may*

preach there also, for that is why I came out."

Mark 3:14 *And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach...*

Acts 8:5 *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.*

Acts 10:42 *And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.*

Acts 28:30 *Paul lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching...*

Romans 10:14 *But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*

1 Corinthians 1:21-23 *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified...*

2 Timothy 4:2 *Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

Preaching that glorifies God is central in the life of His church.

4. History

A preacher is a herald, a town crier, a newsie. The Greek word was originally a generic term for proclaiming or announcing. A "preacher" in the first century was not someone who hollered for 45 minutes at a religious gathering. He was a herald, one who brought an official pronouncement, a person with important news.

A preacher does not bring advice or argument; he brings news, an announcement. His primary job is not to tell us what we should do; he tells us what Jesus has done. This is what I mean by "history"—proclaiming the good news that Jesus Christ has rescued us from wrath and opened the door to paradise. Preaching that glorifies God proclaims the facts of history—Jesus died for our sins. It gives us the indicatives of what Jesus did before it orders us with the imperatives of what we must do. Preaching that glorifies God is all about Jesus, His glory, His sufficiency, His work. It proclaims week after week, loud and clear, "It is finished."

See, friends, preaching the Bible is not actually the sum of my ministry.

Preaching is the means, not the end. The end, or purpose, of all preaching is to explain and exult in the gospel. My prayer is never, "Lord, please help me to preach the Bible today," but rather "Lord, please help me to preach the Bible today in such a way that people see and savor Jesus Christ in all His glory and sufficiency."

"The main objective of preaching is to expound Scripture so faithfully and relevantly that Jesus Christ is perceived in all his adequacy to meet human need." ~ John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 325

When we hear preaching like this, our souls are deeply satisfied and God is powerfully glorified.

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