

(Sermon Preparation) Lecture 01

by Alan Redpath

The sermon emphasizes the importance of truth and personality in witnessing, and the need for authenticity, genuineness, and obedience in communicating the message of the Lord.

Duration: 42:47

Scripture: Matthew 5:14, Matthew 6:33, John 8:12, 1 Corinthians 11:23, Philippians 2:15

Topics: "Sermon Preparation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of remembering that the gospel of Christ is primarily addressed to individuals and its ultimate goal is the salvation of multitudes. The church has various agencies to help lead people to Christ, but its primary purpose is to nurture the individual. The preacher warns against forgetting this and reproducing the same mistake in oneself. The sermon also touches on the importance of personal transformation and being a light in the world, as well as the significance of being trained for the job of preaching and reflecting the glory of God into the darkness of the world.

Transcript

We ask you to do just that, and that you'll teach us more about the love and aim of Jesus, and how to serve and glorify him in our lives. In his dear name we pray. Amen.

Teaching from parables this morning, and we're sharing together some things about ministry, witnessing, preaching, whatever you care to call it. And I love to think of this series because I have to think back over about 45 years of ministry. Some of the things that God has been trying to teach me and show me.

And if you get anything out of it, well, I'll be thankful. But I want to make the principle of witness or preaching, if I use that word, I'm not thinking especially of a pulpit in a congregation, for preaching is essentially one to one. But I want to make the privilege of preaching, of witnessing, just shine in your heart, and thrill you, as it has done me.

And we're going to talk first of all this morning about some of the principles of witness. Some of the principles of witnessing, which are very few really, but they're very clear. And the application of them is absolutely endless.

I can just bear witness to the sheer joy of preaching Christ. The sheer thrill of it. It's what opportunities there are of satisfying relationships with other people.

A deep understanding of people. A personal growth in spiritual character. The thrill of seeing other people grow.

It's a task that never grows old and never grows stale. And the funny thing is that at every age of life, whatever you're in, there are always further opportunities of ministry. You become, first of all, you're a brother to people, and then you're a father, and then you're a grandfather, a great-grandfather.

There's always something fresh, some fresh opportunity of ministering to people. It's a great thrill. I'm biased, of course, and I'm all in favor, heavily in favor, of pastoral ministry.

Of a ministry that sticks at one place and sees it through till God shifts you somewhere else. Because that way you see people grow, and you face disappointments, and you face all the attacks of the enemy. You keep at it at the same place.

And if you stay long enough, what a thrill to see another generation grow up to know and love the Lord Jesus. But first, let me define preaching, or ministry, or testimony, or whatever you call it. It's the communication, that's a long word, but you can spell it now.

The communication of truth through people, through men to men, or women. More for ladies preaching. If you think that's unsound, you can have a word with me about it after.

For ladies to one man on the mission field, what on earth would we do without them? There are two essential elements to preaching, to ministry. One is truth, and the other is personality. One is truth, and the other is personality.

Neither can be omitted if it's going to be preaching. The most authoritative statement of the word of God that's put over in any other way than through the personality of one person to another is not preach truth. I'll repeat that.

The most authoritative, that's an awful long word also, the most authoritative statement of the word and the will of God that's communicated in any other way than through the personality of one man or one woman to another is not preached truth. It's got to come through personality. Now God could have done it in other ways.

He could have written his word on the sky. He could have spoken it in thunder and lightning. But he chose to do it differently.

1 Corinthians 1.21 It pleased the Lord through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. Another translation, perhaps a better one of that statement is it pleased the Lord through the preaching of foolishness. The cross was foolishness.

It pleased the Lord to do it that way, through preaching. And if it isn't coming through personality, it's not preaching. On the other hand, if we speak that which isn't the truth, if we entertain or use our powers of persuasion, put on pressure to get people to listen to us, that's not preaching.

The first, that is not preaching through personality. The first lacks the personality of the preacher. The second method lacks truth.

Again, preaching or witnessing is bringing of truth through personality. And it must have both, truth and personality. That's how the Lord Jesus chose to extend the knowledge of himself in the world.

He deliberately chose that. He could have chosen many other ways, but he didn't. He communicated truth to others.

To a few, he sent them out to proclaim it to other people. You see that in the Twelve Disciples, in the Seventy, and at Pentecost. That was his method.

Reaching men through men. With a fire of the Spirit burning in their hearts. That had opened the whole being to God and to people.

That's what the Holy Spirit does. Just let me repeat that. The fire of the Spirit of God burning in our hearts opens our whole being to God and to people.

Those disciples or apostles were like glass. Just like a piece of glass. They can take in truth on one side and let it out on the other.

Take in truth on one side, let it out on the other. John 8.12, Matthew 5.14, Philippians 2.15. John 8.12, I am the light of the world. Matthew 5.14, you are the light of the world.

Philippians 2.15, you live in a wicked generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world. He's the light, we're the light. Take in truth, put it through.

Let it through, let it out. The story I told you, I'm not going to tell you again. You can put down your notes, look at notes, look at notes.

The story the old man told us, more than once probably. But walking in the jungle in Africa, remember it, with my daughter. With Meryl here, didn't I tell you? Walking with my daughter in the jungle, I didn't tell you.

I did, didn't I? In a lovely moonlight night, beautiful night, full moon, stars shining. You know, makes you want to hold hands. Full moon.

And she said to me, Daddy, isn't the moon shining brightly? And I said to her, it's terrific. And then I said, how stupid can we be? She said, what on earth do you mean? Well, I said, you know the moon can't shine. It's only a lump of lackluster material, it's got no capacity to shine.

But it keeps itself in orbit in relation to the sun, and it turns its face heavenward and it catches the glow and the warmth of the sun and it reflects it into the darkness of the world. That's a Christian. That's exciting.

You're in orbit in relation to the sun, S-O-N, and turning your face heavenward, you catch the glory, you catch the thrill, you catch the wonder, and reflect it into the darkness of the world. That's a Christian. No ten years in a seminary will never substitute for that.

Never. Right? Why should Jesus choose that way? Why should he choose that way? Because the truth of Christianity is first and foremost personal. The truth of Christianity is first and foremost personal.

You can tell the gospel in doctrine, but it's best known in life. Scottish people have a great phrase. They say, it's better felt than telt.

It's better felt than telt. In other words, it's better feeling it than just telling it out. Got it? Christianity is Jesus.

He says, I am the truth. And truth can only be perfectly expressed in his person. John 20, 21.

As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you. So, truth through personality is our definition of ministry. Now listen.

It must come through the person. Through him. Not merely from his lips.

Not merely from his mind. And out through his pen. It's got to come through him.

Through his character. Through his affections and love. Through his whole moral being.

It's got to come genuinely through him. Now you see, that's the difference between two pictures of the word of God. And you can tell it in a second, without being critical.

You can tell. In one case, the gospel, the truth, is coming over them. Flavoured with their littleness.

Flavoured with their superficiality. And somehow belittled, just because they're little people. But the gospel comes through another.

And you receive it because it comes with Holy Spirit conviction. Ever heard somebody preach about the Holy Spirit who hasn't got the Holy Spirit himself? It's deadly. The man's just a printing machine.

Or a trumpet. But he has the Holy Spirit in his heart. He's a messenger.

Haggai 1.13. The Lord's messenger in the Lord's message. Haggai 1.13. You recall preachers you've heard like that. Who stir you to the depths.

It's not them. It's the Spirit of God in them. How my life has been blessed by men like that.

F.B. Meyer. Denzel Young. Great man he was.

Sure I told you about going to Westminster Central Hall and listen to him. When I was backsliding miles away from God. But I couldn't help going.

Somehow the Spirit of God just drew me there. Westminster Central Hall, that's the headquarters of Methodism in London. Three thousand people in those days attended it.

Now I think it's less than two hundred. Place was packed. You know he had a long black coat and a black collar.

Black tie and long hippie hair right over his shoulders. And you know he read every word he preached. Oh yes.

All the time. It was fantastic. And he preached for more than an hour.

And everybody was spellbound. And we all waited, waited for the event which occurred every five minutes. He just looked up.

And when he looked up you saw the glory. And I said, and I was wretchedly miserable. And awfully unhappy.

And making, blowing it completely the Christian life. I was about twenty-five at the time. I said, Lord, that man's got what I need.

And you, of course you know. We all know. Boy.

I went up and down California on behalf of, well I better not tell you who. For three months, preaching in a different church every Sunday. And asked to go to the Christian Education Department.

And sat in at nine-thirty on a college age group. About an average of fifty attending it, fifty or more. And I listened.

And they were being taught from a blackboard. Taught all the doctrines and all the dispensations. And everything was sound.

And absolutely correct. Tremendous. But you know what? They could hardly wait for the end of the hour.

Panting to get out in every case. Bored stiff. Absolutely bored stiff.

And I thought, oh God. What on earth is going to happen when those fellows leave. When those fellows and girls leave this college age group.

They're not going to go into that church. They wouldn't be such fools. The church was sound enough.

But there was no life. You seek to be the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message. And let the chips fall within it.

And one of the most searching points in giving testimony in a ministry is this. If you're conscious of variation in transmission. By that I mean that sometimes you're all wide open to God.

And eager to go. But other times you'd rather do anything than preach. Something seems to clog your transparency.

You know what I mean. Blocks it. And you'll know the difference.

And the people you're speaking to will know it too. Therefore how tremendously important it is to be trained for the job. This is just the beginning.

I mean capably. Because training for the job is nothing less than the making of a man of God. Some people, somebody asked me one day.

How long does it take you to prepare a sermon? I said on an average about five years. You may have a lot sort of bottled up. Gradually coming to life.

Gradually growing but not ready for the fire to get out. And therefore they're held in. Takes a long time.

And how long does it take to train for the ministry? Not three years at the seminary. Not three years at college. Not three years at anywhere.

But a lifetime of the making of a man of God. It's not merely acquiring platform technique. But the making of a whole man until I'm capable of receiving and transmitting Jesus.

A lifetime. Now you'll think perhaps I'm doing a very serious reflection upon the idea of theological training. Oh no, not a bit of it.

No, I'm not underestimating the necessity of good reading and wide reading. But that won't make your picture. Read either before you leave Capony.

Or get it. Get it second hand. The Memoirs of Robert Murray M'Cheyne.

I thought somebody would say that. You're bound to ask that. I couldn't help it.

M.C. I'm not so sure I don't know. M.C. Mac. C. Capital C. H. E.Y. N.E. The Memoirs of Robert Murray M'Cheyne.

Do you know he died when he was 28? He's a minister in Dundee, Scotland. And the memory and the fragrance of his ministry is with people yet. He just revolutionized.

And that explains what I mean. But you see, you can't explain it. You've got to experience it.

And see in your own life the miracle. So that nothing can ever be a substitute in testimony or witness or preaching. I'm using those three words, you know, meaning the same thing.

Nothing can ever be a substitute for communicating truth through personality. Radio doesn't do it. Literature won't do it.

Let somebody really speak truth through himself. Coming through his whole personality. And let people listen.

They may not agree, but they'll listen. Nobody will be neutral. One day I hope, ooh, I'd like to come.

Invite me sometime to come to your church where you're a pastor. You and your wife, hopefully. And invite me there.

Invite me there. And let me come and see you at the job. I'd be absolutely thrilled.

Oh yes, excuse me. The making of a man of God. And the authority in such a life is not your own.

It's from the Lord. It's revealing Christ. And every time you get up under your pulpit, you're making an attack on hell.

That's the thrilling thing. Before you begin preaching, you say, Lord, bind the devil. Claim victory by the blood of Jesus.

And you let yourself loose. The greatest definition I've heard of homiletics is from a black preacher in the States. Who said his homiletics were, read yourself full.

Think yourself clear. Pray yourself hot. Then let yourself loose.

Oh boy, you can't beat that. You really can't. That's real homiletics.

You want me to repeat it all? I've forgotten now. I'm hopeless. Hold it a minute.

I think I'm going to reverse gear. Oh yes. Here it comes.

Ready for it. Oh, I'm so excited. Read yourself full.

Think yourself clear. Pray yourself hot. And let yourself loose.

That's authority coming from heaven. An assault upon hell. Every time you're witnessing to somebody, that's what you're doing really.

If it's only one person in this to whom you give out a contract, it's an attack on hell. And you're most unpopular with it ever. But it becomes that.

Becomes that. Because in your life you have with, now I underline these next two words, strict firmness. Strict firmness.

You have given the best hours of every day, every week to meditate upon his word. You have given the best hours of every day, every week to meditate on his word. You remember me saying to you that the price of Christian leadership is not publicity but obscurity.

Not publicity but obscurity. And therefore when you stand to witness to a crowd or a one person, you know that as you're doing so, you have something to say from heaven. 1 Corinthians 11.23 That which I have received from the Lord I deliver it unto you.

You're not the origin of it, you're simply a channel. Now just let me say a few words about truth and about personality. They're really tied in to two New Testament words.

1 John 1.5 Message and witness. That's the fundamental idea of all testimony. A message given for transmission.

Two words, a message and witness. 1 John 1.5 But a message which we cannot transmit till it's become part of our experience. Got it? Message we can't transmit till it's become part of our experience and we can give our own testimony to its spiritual power, its realness.

If you keep the word message before you, as you prepare, you'll be kept from trying to be clever, trying to be original, trying to be different. You'll be kept from that. If you keep the word witness before you, you'll be saved from unreality.

From saying some things that aren't real to you. Of course, you're bound to speak in public sometimes of things you've never experienced. Death, for instance.

Heaven. Maybe suffering. Nevertheless, remember this.

A violinist will be remembered for his skill. And we'll never forget our good friend here. Can't remember his name.

It's you I'm speaking about. A violinist will always be remembered for his skill. And a singer will be always remembered for his or her voice.

We'll never forget Sandra, who sang last time. Tremendous voice she had. What a terrific voice.

But a messenger will be forgotten in his message. And you've got to be prepared for that. John 1.37 The two disciples heard him speak, that's John the Baptist, and they followed Jesus.

John 1.37 Two disciples heard John speak and they followed Jesus. John forgotten. Remember, a messenger is never telling anything new.

Never telling anything new. It's the same message which the church has told for two thousand years. And you're backed by multitudes of people who have told it before you.

And multitudes of people are telling it all around you. What assurance that gives as you're preparing a message. And your mind goes for a moment to the whole body of Christ worldwide and how you begin to love them.

People you've never seen. People of different colors, different races. They're all saying the same thing in a different way, of course.

They're all doing the same job. Tremendous. The worst form of heresy.

The worst form of heresy. Is not preaching error. Not preaching error.

But it's some self-willed, self-opinionated man who thinks he's discovered something new. A new truth. And in order to declare it, he severs himself from the church.

And forms his own group. Independent, fundamentalist, Bible-believing community. Because he's discovered something new.

Alas, alas, says Vence Havner. When the tide is out, every little shrimp has its own puddle. Boy, that's saying something.

And then, but oh, when the tide comes in. And I have a feeling we're living in days when the tide is coming in. There are two perils in the preaching of truth.

I'll just mention these quickly. One is criticism. And the other is mechanism.

That's M-E-K, no it isn't. It's M-E-C-H-A-N-I-S-M. But I don't know why.

But that's our English language. One is criticism and the other is mechanism. I'll explain them.

By criticism, I mean the peril of discussing a verse in the Bible from the outside. Repeat. Two perils.

One is criticism and the other is mechanism. Oh. Oh, wait a minute now.

Oh yes, by criticism. Yeah, I've got it now. It's coming now.

Ready? Come on, go into top gear now. Oh, we're getting late. By criticism, I mean the peril of discussing a verse or a portion of the Bible from the outside and not putting ourselves within its power.

In other words, to study it in order that I may understand it but forgetting about obeying it. Got that? To study it in order that I may understand it but forgetting about obeying it. To take it to pieces by examining it rather than letting it tear me apart by sheer authority.

Got that? Oh, that's the difference in the study of the Word of God. Oh, what a difference that is. I'll repeat, quickly.

The peril of discussing a text or a verse or a passage from the outside and never putting myself within its power. I study it in order that I can understand it rather than obey it. I study it to take it apart, to take it to pieces, to examine it rather than let it tear me apart by sheer authority.

That's what the Bible does. Because Christian living is not going through the Bible, it's the Bible going through you. There's a mighty big difference.

If I consider it simply as a problem for discussion, without letting it into my heart, then I'll preach about Christ instead of preaching him. I'll preach about him, but I won't preach him. You and I aren't here to discuss a problem, but to announce a message, to proclaim a saviour, to discuss Christianity and society and politics.

Well, that's merely good, but to proclaim Christ in order that men may get saved, that's much better. The peril of criticism. Get me? If you don't quite get me, have a word with me later.

Finally, mechanism is the peril of forgetting that the gospel is primarily for individuals, and its ultimate goal is the salvation of multitudes. mechanism. The peril of forgetting that the gospel of Christ is primarily addressed to individuals, and its ultimate goal is the salvation of multitudes.

All successful preaching is talking to people one by one. The Church has many agencies to help to lead people to Christ, but primarily it's for the nature of the individual. Forget that you're in grave danger of reproducing it in yourself.

When you see something wrong in another church or another Christian, look for it in yourself, first of all. Well, so much for the truth. Now, personality.

Personality. Want to say something about that? But we'll say it at seven o'clock this evening. Okay? Immense fires of relief.

Goodbye, hallelujah, and K.O.K.D. See you later.

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