

Preaching - a Sacred Responsibility - Part 1

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prioritizing the word of God above worship and the dangers of elevating worship above the word of God.

Duration: 51:09

Scripture: Psalm 46:10, Proverbs 18:21, Isaiah 55:11, Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 14:1, Ephesians 4:29, James 3:1

Topics: "Preaching"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of the condition of the hearers in receiving the word of God. He criticizes the indifference and lack of reverence in the congregation, attributing it to their late-night activities and reliance on the preacher to deliver a spiritual experience. The speaker calls for the church to recognize its prophetic call and to correct preachers who have become too professional in their delivery. He also highlights the significance of silence and stillness in knowing and experiencing God.

Transcript

So, prophetic proclamation is something that deserves our attention in a way what Daniel spoke to Nebuchadnezzar was a proclamation. It doesn't matter whether it comes to one or to many, there must be certain distinctives that characterize both the speaking and the man, if it's to have the kind of consequence whether it's for kings or nations or individuals. So, I have before me an article by another German, remarkable, it was more than a coincidence and he's the author of one of my favorite commentaries on the Psalms, Hans-Joachim Krauss, in an address that he gave in a visit to America, but it's about the church in Germany.

It was given in the early 1960s while the war and the post-war time was yet fresh in his experience and he expresses a certain discouragement about the condition of the church in Germany as not having benefited from having passed through the great crisis that the World War II and the Holocaust was, and yet he makes remarks that are applicable for the church worldwide and especially the church of the last days. So, I feel it might be a springboard, the Lord might take us into areas that will please him as we review this statement that he makes. And the first of it is the fact that with the authority of preaching declines, the attempt to make worship liturgical increases, the word liturgical we can put in brackets and put another word in its place, but I think the heart of what is said here is a really unusual insight that where the word of God is in declension, the issue of worship experiences some kind of elevation, maybe not of a good kind, rather than being a compliment to the word as I have so often increasingly experienced it, it becomes an

obstruction and that worship teams and worship leaders have become a kind of vested interest in themselves.

There's a whole new prominence given to worship that is totally new in my experience as a believer and so it may bear out what he said in the 1960s, he's seeing it in the context of the German state church, not the charismatic setting, but the point is interesting and worth considering that somehow there's a relationship between the word of God and the phenomenon of worship and that where the word of God declines, worship somehow is elevated, maybe in a way that is beyond God's own intention and becomes the focus of the church rather than the word. It's interesting that when Shelley became pastor of that church in Scottsdale, it was originally an Anglican charismatic work where the altar was the centerpiece, for that tradition celebrates the Lord's table over and against the word of God. One of the first things that Shelley did was to push the table on the platform back to the wall and to bring the lectern or the pulpit forward.

So he gave a new prominence to the word of God over as against the ceremonial issue of communion, not that that's not valid and important because we have been celebrating that ourselves, but the word of God is first and foremost. What shall we say is taking place in our present charismatic generation, but that the word of God is being pushed back to the wall and experience or worship is being elevated. It's interesting that if this is in any way indicative that the Lord used me to bring a word of apostolic vision to a fellowship in Great Britain, it changed everything for them.

It radically upturned everything and set them on a new course. It was exciting. When I came the next time to visit, the whole thing had gone into a downspin because they had all run off to the laughing phenomenon then current both in Toronto and had been brought to England.

Well, I had no chance to assess the laughing phenomenon myself. I was horrified with other members of Ben Israel. We saw a tape of one of its leading proponents ridiculing the word of God and taking a special delight in bringing to the microphone ministers who were drunk, so-called with the spirit and could hardly put two words together with, it sounded more like gibberish and they were so intoxicated, but what they were saying with one voice is we've been preachers for many years and our word has never been effective and there's more now to be gained by this experience than the, than the preaching of the word has ever obtained.

I saw the word of God being denigrated in favor of experience and though the author of this article is writing long before this event, I think he's touching the critical thing that needs to be brought to our attention, that the word of God will come into eclipse if something else even from God is elevated above it because God has exalted his word even above his name. How then shall we exalt anything, let alone make it competitive to the word? On another occasion, Reggie was with me, the word was quickening, I should speak on the millennium. I had never ever spoken on the millennium and you can imagine what it will take for the first time to bring forth some sense to communicate, some sense of what that ultimate glory will be toward which all things are tending, but before I could speak I had to sit through the worship time and the time that worship time was finished, I was so stripped and done in that I was incapable to introduce an experimental word never before spoken.

I knew it was, it would be a total and patent collapse even to attempt it and so I just brought forth something of another or lesser kind. I could not speak this holy thing that was pulsating in my spirit because the worship's time had thoroughly grounded and I even looked at that worship leader and he was

looking at me, am I imagining things, am I some kind of psychotic who imagines, but the way I interpreted his look was, I'll show you who's really running the show, I'll show you where the action really lies, you're just the guy who's carrying the word but I'm the worship leader. So there is a, I think I'm not exaggerating some of the tendencies that have taken place and that this German sensitive brother is already seeing the conjunction between the decline of preaching and the elevation of worship, he calls it liturgical, an increase, but we can use other words to describe it in the light of our present experience.

He goes on to talk about the charismatic gifts of the congregation that the, in the early church, the leadership in the church encouraged and employed such gifts to bring the congregation itself to action and that we need to regain this basic aspect for the presiding task of leadership in the church, whereas in German Christianity the pastor's office becomes hierarchical and everything kind of rests with that direction that is inimical and imposed to the moving of the spirit as gifts through the congregation. I'm reading, I'm taking off from his statements to fit in with my own thoughts that would be appropriate for us, and that the office holder sits as the sole director of the worship performance. Well, Paul was with me in Oakland, California when the service was stopped, and the people cried out, let him continue, let him continue.

The woman passed, I couldn't understand what had hit her. Well, first when Paul spoke before me, she kept needling me, you should have him to stop. I said, why, what is, he's speaking something precious and fresh.

No, you should, but she let him go on, then when I went on, I had hardly spoken 10 minutes, the woman came alongside me and called the entire service to a halt. I was speaking on the subject of worship. The Lord had given me the message that very morning on my knees, and before 10 minutes of it had elapsed, I was being stopped.

Great cries came up through the congregation, let him continue, and then a whole controversy ensued that we had set conspiratorial Ben Israel disposed members in the congregation to cry out like that. And you know that the controversy has not yet been resolved, but one thing I remember from that day, it's a very musically minded congregation with a complete orchestra, dancers, the whole works, but there was a telephone on the platform next to this sister, and she was picking up the phone and giving out directions from the command post about worship and about this and about that, and this is exactly what this brother is fingering, where the head of the congregation becomes managerial and directs from the platform those things that ought to be the spontaneous expression of God through the congregation. One more example, then I'll shut up on this subject.

Some of you here were at the occasion when we had one of the earliest prophetic schools at Bemidji State University, and I had invited a worship team from another city in Minnesota to provide the worship, and these guys, and especially its leader, became very presumptuous and went far beyond worship. He began involving himself with the congregation and facing and confronting, and there came a point where I came to the microphone at the beginning of the session, and I said, I'm calling this worship team to a halt, and people laughed. They thought, oh, what a joke.

I said, no, I'm really doing it. And that was the end of their participation. And then I said, let's give the Lord, I forgot, something like, let's give the Lord praise.

And out of the congregation came one swelling chorus after another of all of the ancient time-tested hymns of the faith, How Great Thou Art. It sounded like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, and we had never

rehearsed once. It was glorious, as if God was saying, yes, it was right for you to cut that short and to disapprove that.

They had gone beyond my intention, and now to show you that, I'm going to bless this congregation that has never sung a cappella before together, and make it sound like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. It was heavenly. It was transporting.

So this issue of worship, and the issue of the word, and the role of leadership and the conduct of the church and of its services is something that this man is already sensitive to in the early 60s for Germany, and perhaps it's much more acutely the issue for us in our generation. And then he says, our churches learn nothing from the catastrophe of the last war. What layman has the nerve to mount the dizzying heights of the pulpit or enter that sacrosanct atmosphere? What he's saying is that the church has gone back again into its stodgy solemnity.

If you have ever been to a state church, a Lutheran, Reformed, Protestant church in state church countries like Germany, it's absolutely dead. Parishes that have thousands of people enrolled, because the pastor or the priest also issues the birth certificates and the death certificates, they play a civil function. They have gained their education in state universities.

They receive their salary not from the church, but from the state. Everyone pays a state tax for the church, whether you attend or not. And you bring your children for their sprinkling, and that's the last time that you need bring them until it's time to be buried.

And so they have empty cathedrals with a little handful of a few old women and some man sonorously carrying on with no one to hear him. And so what this brother is saying is we've learned nothing from the catastrophe of the last war. Maybe what we need to learn, that the catastrophe of the last war is altogether profoundly connected with the church in that condition.

For a church in that condition can in no way affect the nation, and will certainly allow to set in motion spirits of another kind that will take over the state and make it an engine of death. The church is not a little supplement. The church is God's vital factor from heaven to affect the society in which it is placed.

But what he's saying is that this false religious solemnity prohibits anyone from thinking that they should mount the dizzying heights of the pulpit or enter that sacrosanct atmosphere. It's for the professional to do, not some man who has a burden and who wants to give the word of the Lord. Loss of vital participation by the congregation is the price paid for religious solemnity.

We only need to find the equivalent to this statement. Our problem is not solemnity. You know what our problem is? It begins with an S. It begins with an L. Laziness.

Lightness. Oh, I know. Solemnity is a fixed religious posture that German Christians would think appropriate to the sacrosanct aura of the church and of God.

Our problem is not that we don't come out of a tradition like that. Our problem is lightness. It's the other side of the same coin.

Both falsity in a solemn religious expression and an atmosphere that's like a graveyard, like a burial center, is as offensive to God as the lightness that characterizes our gatherings. And in the great event of Judah's deliverance in 2 Chronicles 20, when three uncircumcised armies were ready to pounce upon a

defenseless nation, King Jehoshaphat called the people for a fast. They came with their women and their children.

And out of that crisis of need, the Spirit of God spoke to the prophet Jehoshaphat, the battle is not yours but mine. Go ye out against them tomorrow. And the people fell on their face when they heard that prophecy.

It was the word of the Lord. And the next day they went forth. But not before the king went to the people and asked, who are the sweet singers of Israel? They were not professionals, but they were among the people.

What was he asking for? People who can praise God in the beauty of his holiness in the face of uttermost crisis that seems like sure devastation. You don't come to that kind of faith and praise except out of an uncommon relationship that is more than musicality. See what I mean? And we have not been that insistent, nor that jealous.

Now music has a great power. And no one has warned us of that power as Watchman Nee in his book, *The Latent Power of the Soul*, telling us that the last day's deception will come to us in the form of music. And that's in 1926, before the use of amplifiers and things.

If he could see what we have now, where you don't only hear the music, you feel it. That the decibels are so raised that you can feel the very shaking of it. That's power.

And that power needs to be questioned. The most authentic and moving worship experiences of my life have not come in such context, but have come at one of the buildings down at the lakefront in the early years. We were just sitting around as the dusk was coming upon us, and one brother was strumming on a guitar, John McDonald, and we were just singing softly in the spirit, and we were just transported.

My deepest worship experiences have come with quiet and with saints with whom I have relationship and where we're praising God out of an experience of his redemption that we have enjoyed together through trial. To substitute for that, a worship that can come through musicality, and to bring onto the platform newly saved converts who happen to play guitars. As I have observed in an Assemblies of God church in Houston, where they were cracking gum and winking to one another and carrying on looking at the girls while they were playing all of these worship courses, and actually dominating the service, and the pastor was captive to their stronghold, because he did not raise a question about their primacy.

After all, they're newly saved, they're young people, it will turn off the congregation. And I realized the whole church was captive to a bunch of young punks, newly saved, if saved at all, because they know how to play the guitar and plug in the amplifier. So if you can call that, maybe I'm giving an exaggerated answer, that there are more authentic and pure expressions, but let it not come by our mastery of instruments, but out of his mastery of our life.

Let not the skill exceed the spiritual qualification, or be a substitute for it. Let there be skillful players, but let them first be worshipers. Let them be people who know God and have a history with him, and have something to express that comes through their music, rather than those who are just skillful.

It's an enormously sensitive question. We know that the first use of the word is in Genesis, the book of beginnings, when Abraham takes Isaac up as a sacrifice on the mount, the lad and I will go up yonder and worship, not play choruses. So we need to be reminded, because the first use of anything in the scripture

is almost invariably a definitive statement, and we have lost this sense.

I have often suggested in the preaching of Acts 13, the first apostolic sending, and when he found them worshipping together, the Holy Ghost said, separate unto me, I said, what would you think that he found them, not in the midst of their choruses, but he found them in the midst of their silence? Can you be in silence with other saints, that it constitutes a worship yet more sacred, more ethereal, and more profound than if we had actually lifted our voices? It's not in competition with that, but it may be that in silence, and the ability to bear a silence together, not twiddling our thumbs, waiting for the monotony to be broken, because as we see in modern services, it's first this, then that, then the speaker comes to the microphone like a sprinter out of the blocks, that there should be one moment of silence that people might be bored. So maybe to worship God in silence, and together in silence, may be the supreme and ultimate expression. So it's something to consider.

Well, you see, our generation of kids, they can't do the homework unless there's a radio on, TV on, or have earphones, and now it's come right into the public place, buses, trolleys, airplanes, airports, you're continually being bombarded by sound, as if if it were absent, we would crumble in boredom. I love silence. I'm a strange duck.

And I think until we consider silence exquisite, we will not rightly appreciate sound, or speaking. And the drums, there's a brother here who plays drums, I said, I just come from a fellowship where the drummer was so superb, I had to compliment him, he played a solo on the drums that was a worship, but what made it so precious was not just the continual rum-a-dum-dum, but a bang, a hit, a cymbal, silence. And then he'd start up again, like a staccato, and then stop and silence it.

It was such an interfusion of silence and percussion that it took your breath away. So may God restore the dimension of silence, the respect for silence, which we will be able to esteem and to perform if we are not bored, if we know God, and know that he's a still, small voice, and who says to us, be still, and know that I am God. And many of us have not that knowledge because it comes from God in response to our obedience to be still.

And so long as we're moving with our mouths and with our instruments, he's not going to give us this ultimate knowledge of himself. Be still and know. We don't know how to stop and when to stop, and Paul's going to demonstrate that right now in knowing when to stop after he makes a significant comment.

That brings us right into the subject for today for which everything until now was preliminary, which is the preaching, the sermon, bringing the word of God. So the same brother says the sermon is the central point that influences all parts of worship. So that kind of relates to what Paul is saying.

Rhetoric and emotional appeals become mechanical tricks if they are used consciously. Maybe we would add not only rhetoric and emotional appeals, but humor even. Inger has often asked me why I can't be more funny like other speakers.

So anything wrong with humor? Not in itself, but if it's used consciously as a device to win attention or acceptance, it's a manipulative device, a mechanical trick if it's used consciously to that end. It is strange, Father, he writes on God's altar. Confident speech is no proof of the spirit and power of the gospel.

What he means is self-confident speech, bumptious, self-assertive, high-blown, slamming the pulpit to underline the importance of your statements. If your statements are important and are God-given, even a

conversational tone will carry them with uttermost authority and conviction. You don't have to raise the decibels to obtain the authority.

It's implicit in the word if it's God's. So he says, the passing decades have forged fetters from which the church can hardly escape. We've come into such a framework of hearing preaching of a certain kind that we think it's almost normative, if not definitive, so that the issue of the preached word needs to come into re-examination.

If we are to be the prophetic bearers of the word to kings, to rulers, to men, to nations, it's got to have, it's got to be a pure word. So we're not just talking about preaching as performance. We're talking about any proclamation of the word that will have weight and conviction has got to be free of our devices, self-conscious devices, because the sermon is the central point that influences all parts of the worship.

It influences everything. So what makes, therefore, the real issue of a real word? He says, it's the vital interrelation to the content that is decisive for the message, and nothing else is. I'll repeat that.

I'm using this for a springboard because not many are writing on a subject like this. The vital interrelation to the content. What does that mean? You can preach a word that's perfectly correct and biblically and doctrinally sound, but what is your relationship to that word and to that content? Are you preaching it because you have clever insight and because it makes a nice set piece and will be impressive? What is your own inner relationship to that word? How much is it the statement of the deeps of your own conviction and passion over the truth that is being communicated? Or is it just something into which you have only a casual, yes, you approve it, it's true, you commend it, but it's not a word that is at the heart of your own life? So I like the way he's saying it here.

The vital interrelation to the content is decisive for the message. So you can tell when you hear someone, however correct, what resonates with that word. Is the man just a promulgator? Is he an able commentator giving us a correct word? Of course, that will be forgotten.

But the word that becomes an event for us issues with a different timber, a different quality that's penetrating. Even long after we forget the content, the reality that was communicated with the content remains and has performed or is continuing to perform its work. So the relationship of the man to the word, the passion, the identification, the fire, what did Jeremiah say? Your word is fire in my bones.

And if it's not that for Jeremiah, it will not be a hammer upon the rock for the hearer. It's got to be the one for the speaker if it's to be the other for the hearer. And we have been too accustomed to men who are not passionately involved in their own message, for the fact of the matter is it's not their message.

It's not their personal message. It's something that the concordance and the familiarity with the text or an ability has given them to proclaim, but it goes up like a vapor, vapor has no lasting influence. So we need to be jealous for the vital inner relation to the content.

And that's no small thing. And that's why the dealings of God with proclaimers of the word and with prophetic men is the most searching and the most demanding. It says, let not many of you desire to be teachers, whether you have the higher accountability, what shall we say about not let many of you desire to be prophets? There the accountability is yet even greater.

And Paul and Adrian were at my first speaking on the subject of Israel after a 14-month sabbatical silence that came in Sacramento, California in that season of death that you probably don't even know about

when the Lord required the entire Ben Israel community to be dissolved. And that not one last soul could remain on those grounds. And the one who thought that he could, the Lord said, if you don't leave, I'll kill you.

And without explanation, this property, the whole ministry, marriage, everything was put into death. And in that season of death, the Lord also had a particular requirement for me. I was forbidden to speak publicly.

No explanation. And in fact, I had no source of livelihood. What's an old crock like me going to do when he's suddenly thrust out of community and has no skill, no trade, no profession? I couldn't even get a job as a dishwasher.

The fact that I had written books or accounted for nothing in a world that does not applaud those things. It was a humiliation unto death. And in that time, the Lord sent me to a Lutheran seminary to compound the death.

But in the time of the seminary, the Lord began to quicken and open the revelation of the mystery of Israel for the church in the last days. And when that thought came to me, wow, what the Lord is revealing to me, not because of my professors, but the inadvertent things that come by being in a seminary environment, the library, the books, that this needs to come to the attention of the church. At that moment, the phone rang and a pastor from Sacramento saying, you don't know me, Art, but we're praying here in Sacramento that you should come and speak to us, a seminar on Israel and the church in the last days.

And exactly that phrase, it was as if the Lord snapped his fingers to say, your sabbatical season is over. Now you tell me why I was required to desist from all speaking before that speaking. Is the Lord wanting to clear the decks? Is he wanting to say that this subject that you are now going to be bearing at Sacramento and from thence to other places in the world is of such moment and such consequence, it requires a preliminary and preparation of uttermost silence from even my other subjects, which I have communicated to you and have blessed my people.

You're not allowed to speak anything in preparation for this. It's holy, holy, holy. And in order to speak it, I had to have a certain vital interrelation to that content.

And that interrelation continues and abounds to this very day. So I appreciate what this man is saying and seeing because you know how it is when you hear something, you read something, what you knew in your spirit crystallizes and comes into your consciousness, and yes, that's right, amen. But this is not just information for me.

It's information for all who are called to be proclaimers of the word, especially in the last days because that word is going to be resisted. The world is not wanting to hear it. Even the church would rather interpret the tabernacle of David as meaning worship than government because if we understand that it's government, the issue ahead for us in the promulgation of that where if it's worship, the issue ahead for us is enjoyment.

These things are unconscious. Our word is going to be gainset and contended against. And if it's only an abstract and academic word, however correct, it will fall limply to the ground with a thud.

We have to bear some relationship to the word. And so I'm speaking this not only to men who have calling, I'm speaking this to the church that has a calling for the whole church per se as church is a prophetic entity in the world. And though we won't all be speaking, we'll all be lending ourselves to that speaking that

issues from us very much like Peter on the day of Pentecost, rising with the 11 and speaking that message that brought thousands into the kingdom.

11 men could not speak at one time. One was the appointed spokesman, but he could not speak with authority of a penetrating kind to turn Israel on its ear with one word and sweep thousands into the kingdom unless there was an agreement, a jointedness, he rose with the 11. I don't think they all got up at the same time, but they bore him up.

They were with him in that word. And the man at the gate beautiful who was born lame, seeing Peter and John, fixing his eyes on them, Peter said to him, silver and gold have we none, but that which we do have in the name of Jesus we give you. He was the spokesman, but the phenomenon that was being expressed was the unity between these brothers.

So I'm saying this for the church, the church itself per se as the church has a prophetic call. It needs to celebrate, respect, give reverence to the phenomenon of the proclamation of the word. And we need therefore in that love and jealousy for the word to bring correction to our preachers.

And as I have warned congregations many times, if you don't tell your pastor that his voice is becoming professional, how will you know? Right, exactly. Something happens when men lose their conversational tone and begin to slip into some kind of mannerism of oratory that they think is more impressive, but they're losing reality and they don't even know it. It's a process, but who's telling them? Only that one who's jealous for the authenticity of the word to say, brother, I don't know, but these last few weeks, there's something that doesn't quite ring true when I hear you and your voice sounds to me more and more professional as if you're trying to affect a certain kind of tone.

I loved it better when you were just natural and relaxed that the word had much more penetration. Oh, thank you, I didn't realize that I was slipping into that. I'll see to my condition before the Lord.

So we're in something together. The preacher is not some professional. The called man with a sacred responsibility.

The word of God is not merchandise. The issue is not his reputation, nor the entertainment, nor the satisfaction of his ears, but the transaction of God with men where the issue is both time and eternity and is once and for all and will not be given again. You don't want to miss it ever, ever, because it will not come again.

So when you stand up as I did in Salmon, Idaho before a thousand or more people on a Sunday morning, and it was my turn, what do I speak? And how do I speak it? For all that was represented before me on that one occasion. To miss it is to miss it once and for all. So to have that word, to know that what God has wanted to open your mouth and to speak with this identification with the word that makes it a living word and a penetrating word is no small thing.

And for that, God will bring a death to an entire community. God will enroll you in seminaries loaded with witches and fierce feminists out for your blood and will call you to long seasons of silence and to much more, for so sacred in God's sight is his own word, for he has exalted it above even his own men. And if we have not that respect and are not willing for the dealings of God to make us the bearers of such a word, we will see the decline of the word and the celebration of things over and above it, which is the way this brother's statement begins.

When the authority of preaching declines, the attempts to make worship liturgical increase, somehow it's an automatic reflex action. If the word comes into decline, something else is going to be celebrated above it, even given of God. So the personal being of the living God emerges from the true word, speaks to man and creates the encounter which occurs in a preaching that has authority.

What a statement. God himself, the living God, the person of God emerges through the word that speaks to man and creates the encounter. There's a creative something, a happening when the true word is going forth before men.

God, the creator, is expressing himself and giving not only a content and an information of a subject that might be significant, as for example, the subject today is preaching itself, but in the subject, he himself is being communicated. And I believe that when Paul says, when Paul speaks about preaching Christ, he's not meaning that every word must literally be about Christ or use the name of Christ, where some of us want to load up our proclamations with the name of Jesus as if just the multiplication of his name is going to invest our message with a greater blessing. But you can speak a word and not even mention Christ, and yet it can be so Christ-filled as to communicate dimensions of him, even without the explicit mention of his name, for his name is what he is.

And when what he is is being communicated through the word, his name is being communicated even when it's not sounded. Are we preaching Christ, no matter what the subject? Are we communicating God? For how is the knowledge of God to be brought to his people if the sacred heart of the congregation and its holy time together is the word? If we don't receive it in the word, where then shall we receive it? Worship can bring us into a mood and a sense of God, but the distinctive communication of God as God, as he in fact is in himself and not as we thought him to be is going to come through the proclamation of the word that is his word and brought truly by a man who is identified in himself with that word, the vital interrelation. The personal being of the living God emerges from the true word, speaks to man, and creates the encounter which occurs in a preaching that has authority.

What's the encounter? The encounter is a challenge, some kind of confrontation, some kind of requirement, so that I'm fond of saying, if it's the word of God, it will always require something from the hearer. The word of God is never something to be enjoyed for itself, although it's a great enjoyment and a great delight, it will invariably require something from the hearer. It's the process by which we're brought from faith to faith Tom was sharing with me yesterday, in a time of crisis and disillusionment of his own life, someone gave him a sack of old tapes and he reached into the sack and he grabbed one that said, the two Judaism's by Art Katz and he put that tape on, it was bye bye baby.

Everything from that point on was changed, everything was affected, everything was brought into new consideration because it was the word of the Lord and it was communicated in the cassette. And so every word ought to have that capability, that capacity and the issue is the man who's proclaiming. So it is the function and task of the whole congregation, here he brings it into the context, to pray and to plead God that this will take place.

Lord, give us a word that constitutes an encounter, that brings confrontation, that makes requirement, we want to be changed, we recognize how inept we are, our inadequacy, we want to move from faith to faith and from word to word, bring us such a word, let it be a hard word for a fact if it's going to accomplish that, how should it be other than a hard word? Give us the capacity to bear it when we're pricked with it, but to know that it's uttermost love. Save us from near sermonizing, save us from homilies, save us from, what's

the word? Postured preaching that is a nice biblical word, but it's abstract in general and is not pointed to us and makes no requirement of us and feels that, well, we've heard a biblical word, let's go home, we've had a service. The church is the very nexus and the womb for the word.

The church draws the word out of God's heart and any true preacher will experience from time to time, occasionally the frustration and the better word, the anguish when the word of God comes back into his teeth for it's not being received and not being heard. There are people who don't want to hear and do not want to be brought further than where they presently are. And you have to bear the humiliation of the word coming back because it's bouncing rather than being received or the anointing being removed.

And of course, the first one you're going to accuse is yourself, some failure in yourself and Satan will be there at your elbow to make sure you get the point. But the real problem, unbeknownst to yourself, is the condition of the hearers. They were up late Saturday night watching the Late Late Show or doing what they will and trusting that George is gonna do it tomorrow morning because after all, he's a paid professional and all we have to do is bring out slouched bodies that are half duped with insufficient sleep and the corruption of what we have given ourselves and trust that the spiritual roulette will take place of a kind that something will penetrate our torpor and our indifference.

A congregation like that is devastating for the word of God. When God's people will come with avid intent and the faith to believe that they're going to hear not the word of man but the word of God through man, they'll get what they believe. And so I've had the privilege of occasions to know the difference.

And one of the most recent is the Philippines that I had bypassed for many years thinking the Philippines, those little brown people, how cute, coconuts, what else do they do, rice? But it's finally the Lord opened the door and I had never had an audience like this. To speak less than two hours is to cheat them. And after the two hour message, then questions and answers for three hours in intense heat and humidity.

And when I came back to my little room where my back was covered with flea bites or bedbugs, my ankles were swollen from standing under concrete that long. But the tapes of those speakings and questions and answers spread throughout the whole of that province so that they had never seen such a demand for and request for the tapes and their circulation that the Assemblies of God pastor whose church and facility we use finally put an end to the multiplication, the duplication of the tapes because they drew out God's heart. And you know what? We're not going to succeed corporately in a congregation for that if we have no facility with each other.

How are we drawing out the heart of each other when we have conversational fellowship? Are we ships passing in the night and just the superficial, how you doing brother, and some little pert thing that comes up? Or do we have a facility to draw the riches out of a brother? I often just stand there and see, want to see what this guy's going to say to me, what he's going to ask. What value is he going to receive from a man who's in his 70s and has a 37 year history in God? What are the riches that God has bestowed over that time that are dormant and waiting in that vessel to be drawn out and to be drawn upon? A lot depends on our capacity and our ability and our desire to realize and to draw that out. And if we don't lack it in a one-upon-one, how shall we have it on a Sunday? So the congregation, its own attitude is critical as well as what he says here, their prayer, to plead with God that a real word will take place that will constitute an event.

If it's the word of God, how can it be other than an event, a happening? Something has happened. We have heard from God. He has given us the now present truth as it is in Christ Jesus, not in some general

abstract way, but in a very particular way for us, mediated for us in our congregation, where we are in our circumstance, that he knows perfectly because he has a vessel abandoned to him who will speak it.

Now, once you taste this, you're spoiled, but the church has not tasted it. So I'm commending it that we should pray for the proclaimers of the word of God who will be the bearers of such words. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he quotes, wrote, "It is not for us to foretell the day, "but the day will come when men are called "to speak God's word in such a way "as to transform and renew the word." I would almost say to transform and renew the world, or the church, there will be a new language, perhaps completely unreligious.

I suspect it will be completely unreligious. There will be a new language, perhaps completely unreligious. I suspect it will be completely unreligious.

It'll be fresh, it'll be divinely original. Maybe the reason that we love Eugene Peterson so much, who has given us his rendering of the scriptures, is that he speaks it in the colloquial American English, where Jesus will say, cool it. You know, instead of the, fear not, cool it.

It just hits you between the eyes, and you are staggered to hear a word in a new way that brings a penetrating depth of it in the way that the familiar words have lost their ability. And so I'm not saying that we should invent novel ways, but our mouths should be available to God for however he would bring his word forth, and that it would be arresting. And Bonhoeffer says that the day will come when men who are called to speak God's word will speak it in such a way as to transform and renew the word.

They'll save it from becoming cliches. They'll save it from becoming truism. You know what a truism is? From the word truth.

It was true originally, but it has become so worn, so faded, so repeatedly used that it has lost its currency and its cogency. It becomes a truism rather than truth itself. The day will come, I can hardly wait.

There will be a new language, perhaps completely unreligious, but which liberates and redeems like the words of Jesus so that men are shocked by it and are brought into conviction by its power. We need to pray for our preachers. Just as confessions of a preacher, I know when to stop and call a moratorium and take a long vacation.

What do they call that? A sabbatical. When I begin to hear myself as if I'm now imitating myself. And that I'm calling on the memory of past speakings rather than the fresh word.

And it's time to quit when you hear yourself like that. When you're imitating yourself, you're a jaded vessel and you need to cease and go back to the source and be replenished in God before you speak again. And so pray for men like myself who are required to much speaking, to keep their integrity and that to know when they begin to find themselves imitating themselves or affecting something or calling for an illustration that they know was effectual in some past use so that it can be employed now.

Many, many traps, many things for which we need to be watchful if we esteem the integrity of the word as the word of God that performs a work in them that believe. That's the way Paul ends it in 1 Thessalonians. But he might've said, in them that believe that.

Believe what? That this is not the word of man, but the word of God. If you believe that it's the word of God and it is the word of God and it has obtained your belief, it performs a work in you. God's word performs a

work.

And you don't have to be conscious of that work or see the evidence of it. It may take time before it finds expression, but the work is performed with the word that is given. What a remarkable phenomenon that God's word can perform a work.

And what do we read in Romans 10? How should they believe in him of whom they've not heard? Speaking about the Jewish people. How should they call upon him except they believe? And how shall they believe except one preach? And how shall one preach except one be sent? For faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God. So that apostolic proclamation constitutes an event, a work.

Where in the hearing of it, even those who were outside the faith and hostile to the faith have something created in them that in the act of hearing the sent word that creates the faith to believe what is spoken. And the Jewish people unbeknownst to themselves are waiting for this phenomenon. But what is it itself waiting for? A church that will send.

How shall they preach except they be sent? Who sends them? The Lord. But out of what context? Out of an environment in which they have been formed and their integrity has been attended and the word of God shaped in them and passing through the furnace of the earth seven times that they might be sent. Because the first time that the word is spoken it's going to be a spluttering mess, awkward, choked, incomplete.

You're feeling your way through a new word. Where are you going to speak like that if not in your own congregation? Where you know that you're going to be loved even if the word comes out like a dud and does not succeed and it's awkward. We don't have a context like that to flap our wings and for the word to pass through the furnace of the earth seven times, how shall the Lord send it into the earth? So both the sent man and his word have got to be framed and formed in the context of an apostolic environment.

So the issue in the last analysis is not just the individual but the environment out of which he is issued. And it will not be that environment unless it itself esteems the word and is willing to suffer the inconvenience of a word that comes in fits and spurts and is not altogether an aesthetic masterpiece where you're going to give him a standing ovation. But the man knows he's loved.

And if there's some mixture of flesh and spirit someone is going to say I loved it but when you got to this point I felt that you fell back into yourself and you're speaking humanly rather than, whatever it takes. May God give us that kind of environment conducive to the formation of men who can be sent and in the proclamation of their word faith can come to believe by those who up till that point have been not only indifferent but hostile to that faith namely the people of Israel who are the acid test always of the veracity and the truth of the church and its expression. And know a phony when they hear one.

Okay. Lord, thank you for bringing us this far. We're in the midst of the Jordan, Lord and the water is cascading and pulsating ready to break in and flood us.

Bring us through onto the other side and into the land. And we thank you that this is on your heart this morning critically important and rarely if ever examined by the church bring us to a new maturity, a new appreciation a new esteem for the word and those who bear it that they might receive the benefit of our prayer and intercession. In Jesus name we pray.

Amen. Okay. See you.

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