

# 'God's Word Manifested Through Preaching'

by A.W. Tozer

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*A.W. Tozer's sermon explores the profound significance of preaching as the means through which God's Word is revealed to humanity, despite its inherent imperfections.*

**Scripture:** Titus 1:1

**Topics:** "The Power of Preaching", "Responsibility of the Preacher and Hearer"

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## Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the profound significance of preaching as the means through which God manifests His Word to humanity. He reflects on the divine condescension that allows imperfect preachers to convey a perfect message, highlighting the weighty responsibility that both preachers and hearers bear in this sacred exchange. Tozer illustrates the historical impact of preaching, from Noah to modern-day ministers, and stresses that the effectiveness of preaching lies not in the medium but in the divine authority behind it. He warns against the dangers of laziness and cowardice in ministry, urging preachers to recognize the eternal implications of their message. Ultimately, he calls for a deep awareness of the responsibility of both the messenger and the listener in the pursuit of spiritual truth.

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## Transcript

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The book of Titus, the book of Titus, Titus 1. I been reading just from the introduction, really, Paul. Paul, he says he is a servant of God, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Then he refers to the faith of God's elect and the truth which leads to godliness, and the hope of eternal life which God that cannot lie promised before the world began and made known in time. Promised in eternity and made known in time and has manifested His word now. This will be the message for the morning.

A little prepositional phrase tagged on here, it could have ended, but hath in due times manifested His Word, and put a period there and ended it, but he didn't. He added "through preaching" and then explained that this preaching was committed to Him according to the commandment of God, our Savior. So, I want to talk a little bit about this. And have prayed and hoped that it will be helpful to us all. These two great truths we dealt with last week that the plan of God to redeem mankind was rocked out in eternity. It was planned in eternity and worked out in time and delivered in time, but was made manifest, that is, proclaimed, declared in due time, then through preaching.

Now, I don't think in all my years I ever felt the weight of a thing quite like this, those two words before-through preaching. And I thought of the condescension of God that He should use these words at all, that they should be here, that there should be any reason for their being here. How remarkably sure of Himself God must be, to entrust such a perfect plan to such an imperfect medium. This perfect plan, the plan of God drawn up between the persons of the Godhead before the world was; a perfect plan to recover man from his lost condition, to reclaim him after his fall, to reinstate him after his disgraceful expulsion, and to give him eternal life, and at last, immortality.

This was not an easy thing, the laws of God being what they are, and God being who He is, and His nature being what it is. This was not an easy thing, but it was more involved here than things political. Things involved here were moral, and they had to do with the structure of the universe. They had to do with the very foundations upon which rests the heavens and the earth and all things visible and invisible, and to work out a plan to lay its blueprints, and then build according to those blueprints, and then unveil the structure. It took God to do it. It took God to do it and God did it; and He did it in a manner infinitely perfect and excellent as might be expected of God. Infinitely perfect and excellent beyond all the power of language to describe. That's the perfection of the plan. And now he makes this known, wonder of wonders, he makes this known through preaching, one of the most imperfect of mediums.

Why is preaching imperfect? Because language is involved. And wherever language is involved, there's imperfection; always there must be imperfection for the simple reason that language is fluid, it changes. Language tends to localize itself and mean in one place what it does to a particular word, and mean in one place, what it does not mean in another. I mean in one locality. And even the nations that use the same language, use different words to mean the same thing. As for instance, such a simple thing as you get into an elevator in America and into a lift in England. You ask the conductor if this is the right train in America, and you ask a guard in England I understand. That's a simple illustration only. And it doesn't affect anything very profound, but language does become profound and highly significant, tremendously so when it deals with religion and the soul of man.

And this perfect, infinitely excellent plan of God was entrusted to the imperfect medium of preaching. Preaching which uses language I say, which the speaker himself may not always understand fully, and which the hearer may not understand fully. And which the hearer having been brought up in one area or locality, may mean by a word one thing and here may mean another. And so, they make no contact. They fail to do what they say now, communicate. And then, because of the many languages all over the world, our missionaries tell us rather heartbreaking as well as humorous stories of their effort to get ideas across, efforts that simply cannot be gotten across.

I remember when my older brother was in China when he was a young fellow. He came back and told us smilingly about how he'd gone into a department store and asked to buy a cow when what he wanted was some garment or other, what a sailor might want, a handkerchief maybe. But he had had a wrong inflection, or wrong tone, and so what he asked for in a dry goods store was a cow. And that's only one of the 1000s of changes and odd angles and facets of meaning. It is not only between languages, but within languages.

And so He committed the eternal hope of mankind for recovery and reclamation and reinstatement and eternal life and immortality. He committed it to the imperfect medium of preaching. And it's imperfect because language is involved. And it's imperfect because preachers are involved. And preachers are men and hence faulty and defective. Paul recognized this in 1 Corinthians 1:21 when he said it pleased God by

the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

Paul knew very well that for one man to stand up on a raised platform and address other men and talk about things he couldn't see and refer to historical incidents which there was no proof for and to offer gifts which he could not, you could not weigh nor measure and to talk about the unseen things and demand they be seen, and unheard things, and insist they ought to be heard. He knew this was a foolish thing to do. And yet he said it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. And while we do not underrate the printed Word, we say that God hath said here in 1 Corinthians 1:21, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save people, and in Titus 1:2 that in due time He manifested His plan through preaching.

Well, what a noble army they have been. I have a great big book on the history of preaching which I have lent to brother Milton Moore. And now I'm almost sorry I did because thinking over this, I'd like to have checked just this thought over again. The great men who've stood up in the earth with all their imperfection using an imperfect, fluid medium such as language. They have moved generations and changed the course of history. Think of the man Noah way back there before the flood, who for a long, long time, probably the longest pastorate any man ever held, 120 years while the ark was in preparation.

This man was a preacher of righteousness. Where he got his text I don't know. Whether he read it or whether he memorized it or whether it was extemporaneous, I don't know. I don't know what type of preacher he was, but I know that he was a preacher of righteousness. And certainly, this old man of God back there before the flood, you say he didn't win many, and not many were saved, no, but what he did was this. No, he didn't win many back there, but he did deliver his soul and delivered God Almighty from any remote shred of accountability for those who heard him. If there is such a thing you know as God sending a man to a place and say, now, you go and preach to these people and don't expect converts. You won't get them. Don't expect results. You won't have them. But I want them to know a prophet has been among them. He told that to Ezekiel the man of God. Now there's such a thing, Noah was that kind of preacher. And in hell today, in hell today, those anti-diluvian ones are deeper and more tragically, terribly and eternally responsible because Noah preached to them.

And then there's the prophets, the old men of God, they were not students in pastor's studies, these prophets of the Old Testament. They were mostly great, rough fellows who with the exception of one or two, a priest and another one a courtier, Isaiah. But mostly they were rough fellows that God had laid His hand on as He did on a Billy Nicholson or Billy Bray in later times. And they stood up and declared the Word and declared it roughly and coarsely and they struck out, and in their striking sometimes they hit posts, and they hit people that weren't guilty, but they struck hard, these mighty prophets of God. And God loved their sermons, and He had given them the sermons to begin with, and then had them recorded so we have the prophets, major and minor, giving us the sermons that were preached. And how those sermons must have changed man. And yet God said, I raised my prophets up and sent them and stretched out My hands and you wouldn't hear. And so, God delivered Himself and the prophets delivered themselves.

And we come to the New Testament and we see first of all, Jesus, a preacher, and we see those apostles who went about preaching, and those disciples in Acts 8:4, which says that because of the persecution that had arisen about Steven, they went everywhere preaching. I don't know what kind of preaching it was, but it was effective. They went everywhere preaching that Christ had died, and now lives and is at the right hand of God. And then in post-biblical times, we have the great preachers down the years, the

silver-tongued preachers. In later times, 12, 13, 14, 1500s we have Johannes Tauler, that great German orator who went about all over Germany preaching Jesus Christ and preparing the ground for the Reformation.

In Spain, a little later we have Molinas who went about preaching that you could get to know God yourself, that you could, that you could pray in your heart and God would hear you; that you didn't have to pray through beads and forms and stated times, but anytime you lifted your heart to God through Jesus Christ, God would hear you. He later paid with his life for teaching such doctrines as that, because it made it tough for the priests. The hold the priests head on men was, that priest had to be around or you couldn't pray, or you had to pray according to His prescription. But Molinas said God will prescribe for you son, go ahead and pray. So, the Spanish Inquisition put him in prison. Shortly afterward, he died and historians think he was poisoned, but nobody can prove it. The judgment day will reveal it. But, Molinas was a preacher known all over Spain, and now known all over the world.

And there was Richard Rolle, one of my friends. God, in His great mercy, allows such things to happen in heaven, and I am not so completely overcome with a sense of my own inferiority that I'll be afraid to speak, I want to hunt up Richard Rolle. I want to hunt up the man who gave up his monastery and walked out of it, took a guitar bless you, a guitar, an instrument we kind of look down in our day, usually, I guess, because the way it's been abused. But he took a guitar and went all over England preaching, preaching the love of God in Christ Jesus the Lord. And he said, if you let the love of God come into your heart, it'll fill you with sweetness and fragrance and song. He went everywhere preaching. And I didn't know until I looked it up recently, but I could have suspected it, that before he died he got in trouble, because he wrote himself a good stiff book in which he denied that the Pope had the authority he claimed he had. And he managed to die in his bed. But think of that preacher and what he did for England.

And later on when the preachers came to England after the Reformation, they found soil, pretty-well prepared. And there was Luther, we'll skip Luther because everybody knows about him. And there was John Knox, that mighty Scotchman who preached with a burr, but who was such a frightful, such a terrible and terrifying preacher that Bloody Mary said she feared him, feared him worse than she feared the armies of Egypt. She feared his prayers, to say nothing of his sermons.

Yes, there's been a lot of them. But they are the stars of the first magnitude. Think of the thousands of little stars that barely shine, that takes a whole Milky Way of them to make a little light, but they're there and they've got some light. Thank God for every one of them. And I thank God for every one of them today in this city, big and little, poor and good that are standing up to declare the Word. For God has made His Word known through preaching. Now, that's the condescension of God.

And then, think of the mighty obligation of the preacher. Think of the weighty, enormous, crushing obligation that rests upon a man who stands to declare the Truth, anywhere, at any time. Why? Two reasons. One is that he is the messenger of the Most High God and he comes clothed with the authority of the Most High God with a message from the Most High God. No secret document ever carried in any portfolio by any ambassador, top secret though it might be from one country to another, can even compare with the seriousness and weight of the message carried by the simplest, poorest preacher that stands today to preach to a little flock. And the future of millions of moral beings lies in the hand of the preacher. It always has. You say millions? Aren't you getting a bit exaggerated? No. Suppose that a little unheard of Methodist preacher, say, up in Wisconsin that nobody will ever hear of but his own superintendent and hundreds of people who might hear him. Suppose he wins one man to God. Suppose that man wins

another. And suppose then that man wins another. The next man wins two and somebody else wins three or ten. Multiply it and see how by multiplying it runs into hundreds of thousands.

Paul saved one, two to Christ, and the man, each of those two won two more and each of those two more, won two more. All you have to do is take a pencil and sit down and figure it out, you'll see that the conversion of one person will run into hundreds of 1000s in the course of years.

So, the future of millions of moral beings lie in our hands, the hands of the man who stands up to preach the Word. The teacher who stands up before his class to declare the Word, that's a form of preaching too. Don't rule it out. It is a form of preaching. It's giving the Word, teaching the word, instructing man, exhorting men; inspiring men and women and young people. If you could only know. I wonder if we will know. If you could only know who it was way back down there, what Swede or German or Scotsman or Englishman, or maybe even some other country we're not thinking of now, that a man got up lazy one morning, head aching and said to himself, I don't think I'll pray today as much. I think I'll kind of rest and so he pattered around the house, and before long the Spirit of God began to move him, and he said, I've got to pray. And he got on his knees and began to pray. And as he prayed, the light of God came to him. He went out that night maybe and preached, or the next Sunday, and somebody is a result of his hearing God's voice and got converted. And the conversion of that person resulted in the conversion of one of your ancestors. And the conversion of that ancestor resulted in the conversion of one of your less-remote, and so down to you, and you now are a Christian, and your home Christian, because somebody back there didn't fail God. Think of it.

But how can, how can preachers be what they are sometimes? I've said and I've gotten in trouble for saying, but I kind of thrive on it. I don't mind it too much anymore. But I say that if a man is lazy, the best place in the world to indulge his talents is the ministry, because nobody checks up on him. He can sleep until noon. And if he gets a phone call at 10 o'clock, he can get up and try to sound alert. But, how can a man from whose head God has laid His hands ever be lazy when you consider the condescension of God; that He made His perfect plan, made through the imperfect medium of preaching. And with the mighty obligation that lies on the man of God, how can he be lazy? How can you be careless, and yet men are? How can he be cowardly? And how can it be covetous?

When George Fox came to England, he had one category for all ministers. He called them priests. And he had one place to put them, as far down in the pit as he could shove them; putting his hand on their bald head and push it. And I read his writings years ago, and I thought, oh, George has been rough on people. But George knew to whom he was speaking. He knew. He saw them. He saw them stand up drunk and had to have choirboys to hold them up so they could deliver their sermon. He saw how careless and utterly worldly they were, and how they cared for the pulpit, only as a man cares for a bench in a factory, as a means of making a living. So, I'm not going to be too hard on George. He may have pushed a fellow in the face that didn't have it coming, but that was just an accident mostly. They had it coming.

Well, think how could a man be cowardly when he considers that God has given him the message to deliver however poor he might be and however few might hear him, he's given a message. And when you think that message carries with it such tremendous obligation from God, how can a man be cowardly and back up and say I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you, and back out on his message, back out on the Truth. Now, if he is honestly wrong, he ought to apologize. The preacher is not above apology. And of course, as a Christian man he ought to apologize if he's hurt anybody. But never be afraid.

And then, the covetous man. I don't understand the covetous man, the man who allows the offer of the board, so much money, so long, determine whether he will preach or not. I don't understand it, but how terrible it is. Listen to this, I want to read it to you. Son of man, I've made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel. Therefore, hear the word of My mouth and give them warning from Me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. And again, send a man, when a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block for him, he shall die because thou hast not given him warning. He shall die in his sins, but his blood will I require at thine hand. Think how terrible this is. And yet, we can dare to think these holy thoughts and mingle them with money and popularity and what people think and what they'll say.

Well then, next is the overwhelming responsibility of the hearer. The condescension of God that He should make His Word known through preaching and the mighty obligation that lays on the preacher; and the overwhelming responsibility it lays upon the hearer. What puts the hearer under such obligation? The source of the message for one thing. God said this, the Most High God, son of man, I said this, go tell them I said this, the God in whose hand you're held, and the God out of whose hand you'll tumble into hell, or in whose hand you'll rise to heaven. Son of man, go tell them I saith. Think of this message itself, a message of the eternal deliverance with approaching death and judgment. This is the terrible, wonderful, glorious, all inspiring message which the simplest, humblest preacher; that he gets up and humbly gives a little interpretation of John 3:16. Maybe he's never gone any further than that. Maybe that's as far as he's gone, but he does his best with the elementary things of the gospel. But he's God's man anyhow. And it puts the preacher, he puts the hearer under obligation.

Remember one thing my brethren, nobody's done with a sermon even when the benediction has been pronounced. Nobody. Nobody's finished with a sermon when the preacher said, and now lastly, amen. Nobody. Nobody's finished with the sermon. They here may sleep and some do. And they hear me scorn and some do. The hearer may resist, and some do and reject, and others do. But he will face his responsibility, certainly, surely, in that Great Day. He'll face his responsibility. Do you realize you're children of eternity? Do you realize that you're not born to die once down here? You're forever. You will rise again in heaven or hell, and you'll face up to things.

I don't know how they do it now; and if this doesn't conform to what you younger men know about the services. Why, you'll believe that I'm accurate anyhow, because I remember this very well. They did it with that first World War. They took young rookies in around 21. I think they didn't take in at that time, take anybody in under 21. And the young men went in at 21 and I saw them. There they would come out of the woods, out of the factories, out of the coal mines, out of the offices.

I remember washing dishes alongside of a professor of chemistry and university. And I was, I don't know what. But there he was, we were washing dishes together, he and I back and forth. Well, they took them, all sorts. And some of them of course, being Americans, when some sergeant told them what to do, they said, you and who else? America, you know, that's American. And then they'd be taken in and they would say, now, line up here and they would all line up. And then an officer with some kind of affairs here on his shoulder to give it the punch, would stand up and read what they called the Articles of War.

The Articles of War, I don't remember, I think I couldn't recite a phrase of it, but what it meant in essence was this, your country is now at war with an enemy. And whatever you do from here on will be considered

as having been done in time of war. And any crime you commit in the Army of the United States, under war conditions, is stepped up in its intensity and its degree of guilt and the punishment that much the greater, Articles of War. And when a young fellow who wasn't used to being pushed around, fought back. They said, have you heard the Articles of War? If he said no, they said, all right, come on, they took him over and let him read the Articles of War. If he'd heard it, he went to the guardhouse. It depends on whether we have or haven't heard.

So, there's an awful lot that this illustrates. Let me read again from this same chapter. Listen to this. Yet, son of man, if thou warn the wicked, and he turns not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul. He's heard the Articles of War. He knows how serious it is now. He's not an innocent Dani in the valley there stark naked. He's now a man who's been in some major illuminated. He knows how serious the charge of God is. And he shall die in his iniquity. And over here, nevertheless, if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live because he's warned. Also, thou hast delivered thy soul.

There you have the two sides of the same mighty coin. The preacher with his obligation to tell and the hearer with his obligation to hear. Think of the overwhelming responsibility of the hearer. Not the hearer of Billy Graham, or Paul Reese, or Robert G. Lee, or any of the great preachers, but the obligation to hear the simplest preacher that preaches today and Chicago United mission, or Pacific Garden, or any hall, storefront hall down the avenue. The simplest man who gets up under the anointing of God and dares to tell the whole truth, he lays an overwhelming obligation upon the hearer to do something about it.

So I say, God have mercy on us all. God have mercy on a preacher who fails. God have mercy on that son of man, that prophet called of God who thinks more of his home and his car and his salary and his comforts than he does of the souls of men. God have mercy on that cowardly man who edits out the offensive things out of the doctrine for fear some hierarchy will rebuke him or he'll get a reputation for not being sound.

Any of you young men who are going to be preachers, let me tell, you can live down reputations that have killed some people if you'll just want to do it. They'll say first, you don't believe in eternal security, therefore, it's too bad for you. Later on, they'll forget that. Or they won't know whether you do or not. Or, they'll say that you don't believe in dispensationalism, and they'll give you the cold shoulder for a while. And the Holy Ghost comes on you and you get blessed and you bless people and the people begin to demand you. And then those that are trying to stand in your way, they can't stand in your way anymore. And so, they accept you, pat your back and say, well, I don't see it quite with you, but okay. You don't have to be afraid in America. Now, there are some places that I suppose it would be dangerous to stand for all the Truth, but certainly not in the United States. We've got enough of the blood of our Puritan ancestors in us yet and enough of the blood of the rebel in us that we don't have to be afraid.

Well, God have mercy on us preachers, and the preachers who fail. I think of the time I've wasted and the time I've used wrongly. I'm not looking forward to the coming of Christ with as much hilarity as some people do. I've heard sermons preached by men cold as ice, but they were trying to show with what great joy they'd meet Him. I hope they do. But I don't look forward to His coming personally with anything like assurance. When I consider as a man called of God when I was 17 years old, and I've had all these years and how much of it I've wasted. And what a poor wretch of a preacher I am compared with; what I could have been if I had obeyed God.

Son of man, says the Holy Ghost, I'll require his blood at your hands. And then, God have mercy on the hearers who ignore, who take for granted, who like a skillful batter have learned to hit every offering the pitcher makes. They're used to him now. They know every curve. And they can hit him every time. And after you have preached to people long enough, they either get right with God and get blessed, or else they learn all your curves. And they stand up there and bat them back to you. Nothing gets passed. God help such hearers who ignore, who toss every offering back to you and who refuse to be affected by it.

I can't get over this statement I quoted the other day about my brother here who said some people won't let you help them, this terrible thing. Some people just won't let you help them and no matter who comes, they won't let you help them. Son of Man preach to them. Either they will or they won't, but whether they will or they won't, you're free. And if they will, then they'll be delivered. If they won't, then they shall die in their sin. How terrible, both for the man who speaks and the man who hears. God help us all. You teachers help us all. It's more than standing up before a few squirming people. It's holding holy things in our hands. And we'll all have to give account in the day of Jesus Christ. God help us all. Amen.

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