

(Titus - Part 5): His Word Manifested Through Preaching

by A.W. Tozer

God's perfect plan to redeem humanity was made known through the imperfect medium of preaching, which carries a tremendous obligation for the preacher and a corresponding responsibility for the hearer.

Duration: 37:12

Scripture: Ezekiel 2:7, Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, John 8:24, Acts 8:4, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Titus 1:2

Topics: "Titus"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the imperfection of preaching due to the involvement of language. He explains that language is fluid and can have different meanings in different places, making it an imperfect medium for conveying God's message. However, despite its imperfections, preaching is a powerful tool because it is the means through which God chooses to make His plan known. The preacher highlights the weight and seriousness of the message carried by even the simplest preacher, as it holds the future of millions of moral beings in its hands.

Transcript

The book of Titus, the book of Titus, Titus 1, we've been reading just from the introduction really. Paul, Paul, he says he is a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. Then he refers to the faith God's elect and the truth which is after godliness, 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, could have ended, but hath in due times manifested his word. 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 I've prayed and hoped that it'll be helpful to us all. These two great truths we dealt with last week, that the plan of God to redeem mankind was wrought out in eternity, 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 impress 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.

For there 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 media. 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 a word, a particular word mean in one place, what it does not mean in another, 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 change in a train in America, and you ask the 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 the religion and the soul of a 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, in which the hearer may not understand fully, in which the hearer, having been brought up in one area or locality, may mean by a word one thing and the hearer may mean another, and so they make no contact.

They fail to do what they say now, communicate. 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.

And what he wanted was some garment or other, which a sailor might want, a handkerchief maybe, but he'd had a wrong inflection, a wrong tone, and so what he asked for in a dry goods store was a cow. And

that's only one of the thousands of changes and odd angles and facets of meaning, not only between languages but within languages. And so he committed, he committed this, 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 in or 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 has 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've lent to Brother Milton Moore and now I'm almost sorry I did because thinking over this, I'd like to check 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 pastor any man ever held, 120 years while the ark was preparing, this man was a preacher of righteousness.

Where he got his texts, 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. Noah didn't win many back there, but he did deliver his soul and deliver God Almighty from any remote shred of accountability for those who hurt him.

If there is such a thing, you know, as God sending a man in to a place and saying, 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.

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 antediluvians 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 studies. These prophets of the Old Testament, they were mostly great rough fellows who, with the exception of one or two, one 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 a Billy Bray in later times. And they stood up and declared the word, declared it roughly and coarsely. And they

struck out and in their striking sometimes, they hit popes 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 Stephen, 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 in post-biblical times, we have the great preachers down the years, the silver-tongued preachers. In later times, 12, 13, 14, 1500, we have John Towler, 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 Molinus who went about preaching that you could get to know God yourself, 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 had on men was that priests had to be around or you couldn't pray or you had to pray according to his prescription.

But Molinus 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 Molinus was a preacher known all over Spain and now known all over the world. And there was Richard Rowe, 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 Rowe.

I want to hunt up the man who gave up his monastery and walked out of it, took a guitar, bless you. A guitar, the instrument we kind of look down on 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 in whatever we're 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 the bloody Mary said she feared him, feared him worse than she feared the armies of Egypt, feared his prayers to say nothing of his sermons. Now, yes, there's been a lot of them.

But they are, 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 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 the day to preach to a little flock. And the future of millions of moral beings lies in the hand of the preacher, 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. Next man wins two and somebody else wins three or ten. Multiply it and see how by multiplying it runs into hundreds of thousands.

All saved, one two to Christ and to man. Each of those two, one two more. And each of those two more, one two more.

All you have to do is take a pencil and sit down, figure it out and you'll see that the conversion of one person will run into hundreds of thousands. 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. 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 man, inspiring man 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 for a long 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. And he went out that night maybe and preached on the next Sunday.

And somebody as a result of his hearing God's voice 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 lesser remote.

So down to you and you now are a Christian. You're home Christian because somebody back there didn't fail God. Think of it.

But how can preachers be what they are sometimes? I've said and I've got 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 in the ministry.

Because nobody checks up on him. He can sleep till noon. And if he gets a call, phone call at 10 o'clock, he can get up and try to sound alert.

But how can a man upon 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 he be careless? And yet men are, how can he be cowardly? And how can he 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.

I read his writings years ago, and I thought, oh, George has been rough on people. But George knew whom he was speaking. He knew.

He saw him. He saw him stand up drunk, and he had to have choir boys to hold him 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. And mostly, they had it coming.

Well, think of the choir. 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 that message carries with it such tremendous obligation from God, how can a man be cowardly? Back up and say, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you.

Back out on his message. Back out on the truth. Now, if he's honestly wrong, he ought to apologize.

Preacher's not above apology. And of course, as a Christian man, ought to apologize if he's hurt anybody. But never be afraid.

Then the covetous man. I don't understand the covetous man. Man who allows the offer of the board so much money for so long determine whether he'll 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 under the house of Israel. Therefore, hear the word in 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, Son of 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, condescension of God that he should make his word known through preaching and the mighty obligation that lies on the preacher and the overwhelming responsibility it lays upon the hearer.

What puts the hearer under such obligation? 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 said. Think of this message itself, a message of eternal, eternal deliverance with approaching death and judgment.

This is the terrible, wonderful, glorious, awe-inspiring message which the simplest, humblest preacher that 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, it puts the hearer under obligation. Remember one thing, my brethren, nobody's done with a sermon when the benediction's pronounced.

Nobody, nobody's finished with a sermon when the preacher said, and now lastly, amen. Nobody, nobody's finished with a sermon. The hearer may sleep, and some do.

And the hearer may scorn, and some do. The hearer may resist, and some do, and reject, and others do. But he'll 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 at that time take anybody in under 21. And a young man 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 in 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'd all line up. And then an officer with some kind of affairs here on his shoulder to give it a punch, would stand up and read what they call the Articles of War.

And the Articles of War, I don't remember, or 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, in 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? And 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. Depends on whether we have or haven't heard.

And 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 ye turn 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 donny in the valley there stark naked. He's now a man who's been in some measure 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 does not sin, he shall surely live because he's warned. Also thou has 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 in Chicago United Mission or Pacific Garden or any hall, storefront hall down the avenue. The simplest man who gets up and under the anointing of God 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 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 man.

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 you'll get a reputation for not being sound. If any of you young men are going to be preachers, let me tell you, you can live down reputations that would kill some people. You just want to do it.

They'll say first, you don't believe in eternal security. Therefore, you're too bad for you. Later on, they'll forget that or they won't know whether you do or not.

And 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 OK, you don't have to be afraid in America. Now, there are some places that I suppose it'd 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.

And I consider as a man called of God when I was 17 years old and 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. They can hit him every time.

And there are, after you've preached to people long enough, they either get used to it or get right with God and get blessed or else they learn all your curves and they stand up there and bat him back to you. Nothing gets passed. God helps 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 by a brother here who said some people won't let you help them. It's a 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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