

Unction in Preaching

by E.A. Johnston

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking the anointing of the Holy Spirit for effective preaching and transformation in the hearts of hearers.

Duration: 16:48

Scripture: Mark 5:25

Topics: "Unction"

Description

The video is a sermon transcript discussing the lack of powerful preaching in today's churches. The speaker emphasizes the need for divine anointing and the impartation of the Holy Spirit in order to effectively convey divine truths and bring about transformation in the hearts of listeners. The sermon references the preaching of George Whitfield in 1770, highlighting his reliance on God's assistance and the resulting revival of religion in the area. The speaker also shares a personal anecdote about a preacher who sought help on the topic of anointing but later lost sight of the importance of power in preaching.

Transcript

In 1770, when George Whitefield was preaching in the fields of Exeter in New England, he addressed a crowd of 4,000 who had assembled in the open air to hear him preach. As he made his way to the makeshift pulpit, he paused, clasped his hands together, and looked heavenward and commented, I will wait for the gracious assistance of God, for he will, I am certain, assist me once more to speak in his name. Minutes passed while the great Whitefield stood there in silence, waiting on the divine empowerment from on high.

George Whitefield knew full well that he had no power in the pulpit apart from the unction of the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 3 and verse 16, as it describes John the Baptist as he answers the people whether he was the Christ or not, we see him state, I indeed baptize you with water, but one mightier than I cometh, the lachet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose, he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Dear friends, there is a distinction spoken here in Scripture of a baptism of water and baptism of fire.

Men mightily used of God knew the difference in regard to this baptism with fire. Men like George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, D.O. Moody, they knew they each needed divine assistance from on high when they preached. They needed this holy fire from God, this element in preaching called unction.

A pulpit without unction is merely a platform which dispenses information with no transformation. No transformation occurs in the hearts of the people without unction. A pulpit without unction is operated by personality and human methodologies.

That kind of preaching may entertain, absorb, and inform, but it does not penetrate into the sin-laden heart of man. There may be laughter, enjoyment, and encouragement from that kind of preaching, but there is no conviction of sin and transformation of a heart from a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. Unction is the divine power which takes the word of God and makes it like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces.

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and admonished them to preach after this fashion, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, and ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you, but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high. Listen, friends, there is the answer to power in the pulpit.

We are instructed to tarry before God until we, too, are endued with power from on high. Every gospel minister and witness for Christ should seek this endowment from on high that comes in the form of unction upon the preacher. Let's look at a clear description of what unction is taken from the pen of a man mighty in prayer, E. M. Bounds.

Listen carefully to how E. M. Bounds describes what unction is in preaching. He writes, Unction is simply putting God in His own word and on His own preacher. Unction is that which distinguishes and separates preaching from all mere human addresses.

It is the divine in preaching. This unction comes to the preacher not in the study, but in the closet. It is heaven's distillation and answer to prayer.

It is the sweetest exhalation of the Holy Spirit. It impregnates, suffuses, softens, percolates, cuts and soothes. It carries the word like dynamite, like salt, like sugar, makes the word a soother, an accuser, a revealer, a searcher, makes the hearer a culprit or a saint, makes him weep like a child and live like a giant, opens his heart and his purse as gently yet as strongly as a spring opens the leaves.

This unction is not the gift of genius. It is not found in the halls of learning. No eloquence can woo it.

No industry can win it. No prelatical hands can confer it. It is the gift of God, the signet set to his own messengers.

It is heaven's own knighthood given to the chosen, true and brave ones who have sought this anointed honor through many an hour, tearful wrestling and prayer. It takes a divine endowment to break the chains of sin, to win estranged and depraved hearts to God, to repair the breaches and restore the church to her old ways of purity and power. Nothing but this holy unction can do this.

Well, how true those statements of Ian Bounds are. How absent is the mark of unction in our pulpits today. In the words of another, there may be crowds, but there's no shekinah.

Where, oh where, friends, is the man of God today with the power of God upon him in a baptism of fire? Where is the gripping preaching that captures the heart of the listener and grips him with eternity and the Christ of that eternity? Why do so few today possess this element in preaching called unction? I submit to you that few today feel they need it. They are quite content to operate their churches on present methods.

As long as the congregation is content and the church campus is growing, then why rock the boat with a preaching that may upset someone? But preachers of old knew they could not have any eternal impact upon their hearers apart from having this divine anointing upon them as they preach the gospel of the Son of God.

D.L. Moody was no great orator, and he was an uneducated man, but he sought the anointing of the Holy Ghost and it transformed his preaching to such a degree that he could preach in any major city like London, Glasgow, and Edinburgh and hold 10,000 hearers at a time for a month at a time. His preaching could literally shake the city for God. Moody knew about the anointing.

He speaks about it in his own words. I was crying all the time that God would fill me with His Spirit. Well, one day in the city of New York, oh what a day, I cannot describe it.

I seldom refer to it. It is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for 14 years.

I can only say that God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different.

I did not present any new truths, and yet hundreds were converted. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience. If you should give me all the world, it would be as the small dust of the balance.

Another preacher mightily used of God was C. H. Spurgeon. He knew the necessity of having this power from on high upon him. Spurgeon taught his students at his pastor's college the following on this holy subject of umption.

Our hope of success and our strength for continuing the service lie in our belief that the Spirit of the Lord rests upon us. To us as ministers, the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential. Without Him, our office is a mere name.

Unless we have the Spirit of the prophets resting upon us, the mantle which we wear is nothing but a rough garment to deceive. We ought to be driven forth with abhorrence from the society of honest men for daring to speak in the name of our Lord if the Spirit of God rests not upon us. If we have not the Spirit which Jesus promised, we cannot perform the commission which Jesus gave.

Spurgeon knew full well where his power in preaching lay. It came from on high from an anointing of the Holy Spirit. When I recall my homiletical mentor, the great Dr. Stephen F. Oldford, I remember his power in the pulpit.

Stephen Oldford knew the necessity of having umption from God before he entered any pulpit to preach before men. I was in a study with him one day and he looked tired. He sunk in his chair and remarked to me, Give me a few moments, brother.

Give me a few moments to gather myself. I must regather myself. I just finished preaching and virtue has left me.

That brought to my mind the time when Jesus was walking in the crowd of people and the woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of his garment. This account in the Gospel of Mark declares, And Jesus,

immediately knowing it himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned about him in the press and said, Who touched my clothes? Let me ask you, brother preacher, when you preach to others, can you say afterwards that virtue has left me? Dear brethren, we must distinguish between popularity and power. To be a popular preacher without umption is one thing.

To have power on high is altogether quite another. Allow me to illustrate. I was with Dr. Oldford on another occasion, and he was telling me the following story.

There was a popular preacher within the Southern Baptist Convention years ago, and this man was filling every big pulpit in the convention with his big personality. But Dr. Oldford told me that years ago, this man came to him privately and asked him to help him on the topic of having the anointing of the Holy Spirit. But the man never followed up on his request.

Years later, this man was a big gun, a big preacher in the SBC. One day, Stephen Oldford wrote this man a letter, and in that letter, he said, My dear brother, I see you have found popularity, but where is the power? That's the secret, friends. There's a vast distinction between popular preaching that informs and entertains and one that has power to transform the heart through conviction of sin and awaken a sinner to his lost condition before God.

Why is this element of preaching so rare today? I believe it's because the cost involved to attain it is so high. As Ian Bounds said, it is found in the closet of desperate prayer and waiting upon God. Few today want to take the time or make the sacrifice to shut themselves up with God alongside their own river, Kapor, and wait upon God until they too are entombed with power from on high.

What cost counts and what counts costs. The anointing of God on a man is not a casual occurrence, but one in which heaven must be stormed with a holy violence until the petition is given from on high. Let me ask you, friend, have you ever sought this anointing? I do not mean speaking in tongues.

I mean to have an anointed ministry, which when we preach, we grip others with eternity and the God of that eternity. Preaching that startles, awakens, convicts, converts the sinner from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and life. Preaching where the preacher has the baptism of fire spoken about in the Gospel Luke.

Oh, friends, how this would transform the pulpits in our lands today if the blessing was sought more often and gained by those who storm heaven for it. Preaching by men of God, a flame with the fire of God, preaching that stirs a congregation, preaching that transforms, preaching that alarms and awakens that grips the heart and the conscience of sinful man. One man who was used greatly during the second great awakening was the great evangelist, Asahel Nettleton.

Nettleton understood the need for unction and the power it had over his hearers. When I was conducting my research for my biography on Nettleton, I spent a great deal of time at Hartford Seminary going over his personal papers of how God had moved in revival under his anointed preaching. Here is one man's account, a pastor friend of Nettleton's, who had a pastor in Lennox, Massachusetts.

Dr. Shepherd gives this account of the effectiveness of Asahel Nettleton's preaching and how unction attended Nettleton's preaching and its effect upon his hearers. Listen to his comments. His preaching was soon attended with a divine blessing and was undoubtedly instrumental of a revival of religion in Pittsfield and several other towns in the vicinity.

You ask, what were the characteristics of his preaching and in what did its chief excellencies consist? I answer, his labors consisted principally in preaching the word. He was eminently a man of prayer that he entered the pulpit directly from the mount of communion with his maker. No one would readily doubt who was witness of his holy calm, the indescribable, the almost unearthly solemnity and earnestness of his manner.

The joy in which his heart seemed to be filled by a contemplation of the love of Jesus and given his life a ransom for sinners marked his preaching and imparted an unction and the uncommon energy to his eloquence. When he spoke of the glories of heaven, it was almost as if he had been there himself. When he made his appeals to the sinner, he made them with a directness which placed before him as in a mirror, his utterly lost state.

It seemed at times as if he was about to uncover the bottomless pit and invite the ungodly to come and listen to the groans of the damned. That kind of preaching, friends, is what we lack in our land today. We have grown accustomed to the churchianity of our day and the meager attempts to convey divine truths without the divine anointing.

Oh, friends, get along with God and shut yourself up with the ancient of days until you are endued with power from on high. It may take a week. It may take months, but lay hold of God until he imparts his Holy Spirit upon you in a baptism of fire.

Then see the transformation in your preaching and in the hearts of your hearers, all for his great glory.

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