

Conditions for Powerful Preaching

by Ian Murray

The conditions for powerful preaching are a commitment to sound learning and hard study, a true understanding of the means by which men become the children of God, and preaching as dying men to dying men.

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Scripture: Revelation 1:16

Topics: "Effective Preaching", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of reading and understanding the word of God. He encourages spending a significant amount of time each day reading useful books to develop a taste for reading. The speaker also discusses the need for a true understanding of salvation and the power of preaching. He highlights the importance of ministers delivering the word with passion and dependence on God. The sermon concludes with a reminder that preaching should not be judged by its length, but rather by its impact on the congregation's spiritual hunger.

Transcript

I want to speak this morning on the conditions for powerful preaching. And I'd like to preface what I have to say by a word on the origin of these conferences. As you know, in the late 1950s there were various brethren in different parts of the world who were able to begin printing Reformed literature.

And in the work of the Banner of Truth Trust, which shared in that ministry, it was always an expectation and a belief that books were not an end in themselves, that books were not the most important thing, but the most important thing was the divine institution of the preaching of the living Word of God, the spoken Word. And after a few years, when these books had been reissued through letters and through other means, men spoke together of the possibility of meeting, and thus a conference was held in England in 1962, and it was supported from the beginning by men on both sides of the Atlantic. And that conference has continued, and again it has continued by the help and the mutual strength of brethren on this side of the Atlantic and of our own.

And this conference too, as you know, is giving its attention to the work of preaching. We believe that other means are helps, but that the great need of our hour is the recovery of the true powerful preaching of the Word of God. Perhaps I could take a few moments to give a few reasons why we have reason to think that preaching is in a state of crisis today, generally, in the churches.

There was a book published, I think it was in 1973, by George Dollar on the history of fundamentalism, and in that book, speaking about the conditions on this side of the Atlantic, he spoke about an ebb tide of pulpit oratory. And he declared, when one looks at the American pulpit, the outlook is frightening. The pulpit has become more of a public relations desk, and a place to explain and educate.

And one of the few great reform preachers of this century, Herman Hoeksema of Grand Rapids, who died in 1965, he said, the nature and the importance of preaching is very little understood. Today, everybody preaches, except those perhaps whose specific calling it is. A few reasons then to believe that preaching is in a state of crisis.

Firstly, and briefly, we're all familiar with the fact that in former times, it was the conviction of the church that there was nothing more vital than the strength of the pulpit. That conviction has become greatly weakened. There's a widespread doubt about the urgency and even the relevance of preaching in this modern world.

And secondly, and I think this supports what I've just said, it is not an encouraging feature that too often the leaders of the church today, of the evangelical churches, are not actually men who are in the pastoral ministry and who are wholly engaged in the preaching of the Word. Now, of course, there are other functions in which ministers may engage, but I believe it has been true, I believe it has been true, that in the ages of the greatest spiritual prosperity, the leaders of the church have been those who were in pastoral ministry for the greater part, who gave themselves in the first instance to preaching itself. That is not nearly so common today.

And then thirdly, it must surely be said that the state of preaching and its weakness is connected with our theological institutions. And unfortunately, not only with our liberal theological institutions. Now, of course, we believe that no seminary can produce preachers.

That is not the purpose of seminaries. The purpose of seminaries, I'm sure we would all confess, is to train and nurture and develop the gifts which God has already given to men. But having said that, the problem so generally is that seminaries do not sufficiently examine whether men are actually called and gifted to preach before they begin their training.

And the result is that a man may be orthodox, he may receive the necessary credentials for the ministry, but he may in fact never be actually qualified to preach in the most fundamental sense. And that is, of course, connected with another problem. The problem that while it is good that men and women also should be given biblical instruction, religious instruction, when seminaries merge that instruction with the preparation of men for the specific pastoral office, then, almost invariably, they become more educational institutions than schools of the prophets.

The training of men for the ministry is a distinct work and it is not the same as instructing others who may in turn be teachers of Bible and so on. And then, as Hucsmann said, there is something wrong with preaching when everybody preaches. When the idea of preaching has been so cheapened that the notion is abroad that a man may be engaged in a thousand and one things during the week and at the weekend, as we say in England, do a little preaching.

The preaching of the Word of God, as we were reminded last night, is a calling and an office. How shall they preach except they be sent, just as prophets and apostles were sent, so pastors and teachers equally, although in a different way, are called and set apart for the gospel ministry. The New Testament's

warning is, be not many teachers, my brethren.

It is not the work of all men to preach the Word of God. And the loss of that vision has resulted greatly in the cheapening of the holy office of the ministry. And then a final proof and perhaps a more practical one and certainly, I'm afraid, a very true one of the weakness of our preaching today.

The final proof is the general lack of expectation and hunger that too often is found even in orthodox churches for the preaching of the Word of God. That is to say that people indeed attend upon the worship of God and they listen to sermons, but do they listen with that degree of expectation which has characterized the church in other ages? I think it is true that when preaching is doing its real work, that is understood in some measure in congregations. And it is shown by the expectancy of the people.

They do not come to hear because it is their habit, far less do they come to hear to be entertained, but they come to hear because they have become aware of what Jacob felt when he said, how dreadful is this place. They meet with God. They believe that something is happening for them and to them by God's blessing and help.

And therefore, my brethren, when people complain that preaching is too long or too dull, in the first instance we should not suspect the people, but we should question whether there is something wrong with the preaching. People do not complain when a feast is too long. And we need to remember that the tradition of long preaching which we sometimes quote, that tradition did not begin with preachers deciding that long sermons were good for the people.

That is not how it began. It began because such was the thirst and hunger of congregations that preachers were drawn out. People were aware that God was meeting with Lawrence Chatterton, the master of Emanuel College, Cambridge, in the heyday of English Puritanism.

He was preaching on one occasion and discovered that he had fulfilled two hours. The hourglass had turned. And he broke off and he said to his hearers, I will no longer trespass upon your patience.

Upon this we read, the whole congregation cried out, for God's sake, go on, go on. Now, this is what happened in the time of the Reformation. And it is to that period that I want us to turn this morning.

And with some reference to the Puritans also. The recovery of preaching. A day when people thirsted for the Word of God.

Now I believe that the Reformation brought the greatest transformation in preaching that has been seen since the Apostolic Age. Before the Reformation, the great, splendid, medieval church had almost everything except pulpits. That was the one thing they lacked.

And of course, in lacking that, they virtually had nothing. There were wandering friars who went about telling fabulous anecdotes to the people. There were those, as you know, who went about and preached papal indulgences.

But the pastoral office as such had virtually disappeared. John Calvin writes, we maintain that for several centuries, the church was so torn and dismantled that it was destitute of true pastors. John Hooper, one of the English martyrs who was a Cistercian monk before his conversion, in the year 1546 he said, he that had sought in all the churches in England above 16 years ago should not have found one Bible but in every church abomination and idolatry.

And again he says, darkness and ignorance occupied the minds of all men so that few knew the true way to eternal salvation. And Hugh Latimer, another of the martyrs of the 16th century, he says in one place how he wishes that God would grant to men some vision of hell. And I verily believe a man might look as far as he could see in hell, as far as from Calais to Dover, I warrant you, and he would see nothing but ministers who did not preach.

And even when the Reformation began, the number of true preachers was very small. In England, Paul Faggius, who was a continental reformer who came to England in 1549, he said, the labourers are few. It is thought that there are scarcely ten preachers in the whole kingdom of England who can do anything with effect.

And others spoke similarly. And then across Europe there came this great transformation, slowly but surely. It had begun, of course, earlier in Germany.

And as Luther saw the effects of preaching on the hunger of the people, he came to that point where he counseled all pastors that preaching should now take place not only on the Lord's Day, but on Wednesdays and on Fridays as well. And in Geneva, you may remember, there were services every afternoon, three days a week, at five o'clock in the great cathedral of St. Peter's. And in 1549, those afternoon services had become so blessed that they became daily, the daily preaching of the Word of God.

And that preaching was not imposed on an unwilling people. It was preaching that was lively and soul-stirring and awakening. John Calvin said, sermons should be like trumpets which sound to the very depths of the heart.

And this was the vision which in England with the Puritans, in Scotland with John Knox, and elsewhere, this vision was revived. Now, I want to concentrate this morning on reasons why preaching revived in the 16th century. And in a sentence, it revived because the conditions necessary for powerful preaching revived.

It did not revive because of the unique charisma of certain eloquent speakers. That was not the cause. The cause was the restoration of the conditions for powerful preaching.

The silence and the corruption of the medieval church was not accidental. It existed because the reasons for powerful preaching were not present. And wherever these reasons, these causes are recovered, then preaching also will be revived.

The first reason then, the first condition for powerful preaching. The first condition for powerful preaching is the presence in the Christian ministry of a commitment to sound learning and to hard study. Now, I put that first because I think the Reformation, in a sense, teaches us that almost in the first place.

The pervasive characteristic of the church before the Reformation was mental indolence. It was no sin to be ignorant, either for priests or for people. From the year 1408, the very Bible had been forbidden in the language of the people in Britain.

There was a mental stupor upon the church and upon the nations. And that stupor was broken up in God's providence by the Renaissance. And that came to its high-water mark, of course, in 1516 with the publication of Erasmus' Greek New Testament.

It was the breaking up of this state of mind. And yet, when Erasmus had even gone that far, you may recall how he lamented the reaction of the church. He says, Oh, the strange vicissitudes of human affairs! Hitherto, the heat of learning was among such as professed religion.

Now, while they for the most part give up themselves to eating and luxury and money, the love of learning is gone from them to the secular princes, the court and the nobility. The feasts of priests and divines are drowned in too much wine and filled with jests and flow with frightful slanders. Erasmus' complaint, the intellectual darkness of the church.

Well, Erasmus did not know that a new age was dawning in which men were to read the Scriptures as they had not been read for a thousand years. They were, of course, opponents of the Reformation who were learned men. But I'm sure it is true that as far as biblical and linguistic knowledge of the Scriptures was concerned, men like Luther and Calvin and Tyndale were in a category of their own.

It was Zwingli who said of Luther that no man had so read the Scriptures for a thousand years. And Luther himself says, looking back on his life, when I was young, I read the Bible over and over and over again and was so perfectly acquainted with it that I could in an instant have pointed to any verse that might have been mentioned. So there came this great change in the churches of the Reformation, intellectual sloth was a sin.

The ecclesiastical ordinances of Geneva of 1541 that were drawn up for the use of pastors, these ordinances said negligence in studying and especially in the reading of the Holy Scriptures, this is a sin, a vice which has to be rebuked in pastors. Now of course, we know something perhaps if we've read the biographies of these men, of the hours at which they arose in the morning. And we remember that they lived in a different culture.

But what we perhaps are inclined to forget is that that attention to their study was bound up with their view of the preaching of the Word of God. Hugh Latimer who was burnt to death in 1555, the man who on the high street in Oxford a few minutes before he was burned turned to Nicholas Ridley and said, play the man Master Ridley, we shall by God's grace this day light such a candle as shall never be put out. He was an old man when he died.

And it is said of him by someone who knew him, he was a sore bruised man of about 67 years of age. He took great pains in preaching. And about 2 o'clock in the morning he was at his book most diligently, Hugh Latimer.

And men like William Gouge who were typical Puritan pastors in their studies in the summer at 4 o'clock, in the winter at 5, it was no uncommon thing for them to know the whole Greek Testament by heart. They were mighty in the Scriptures. Just this week I was reminded as a friend showed me the life of the great Benjamin Morgan Palmer who ministered here in the South, Columbia and then in New Orleans.

Perhaps the greatest preacher of the latter part of the last century. The very same characteristics. Sometimes up to 13 hours a day in his study.

They gave themselves to the Word of God. The first then condition of powerful preaching is this commitment to hard study. Now of course, knowledge alone does not bring power.

But in our day when church is looking for ways of influence and success, it has to be asserted that there never has been a school of powerful preaching that has not emphasized the necessity of this study and

close attention to the Word of God. It bled the church to death before the Reformation almost that it was so neglected. Now I must hasten on.

I have just one quotation from John Wesley standing out of the 16th century and jumping into the 18th. John Wesley was once meeting with a group of his ministers, pastors and he exhorted them and indeed rebuked them with talking too much and reading, he said, only too casually. And then he went on.

We must, absolutely must, cure this evil or give up the whole work. But how, he says. One, spend all the morning or at least five hours in 24 in reading the most useful books and that regularly and constantly.

But I have no taste for reading. Contract a taste for it by use, he says or go back to your former work. But different men have different tastes.

Therefore, he says, therefore some may read less than others but none should read less than this. So John Wesley. A second condition then moving on.

A second condition for powerful preaching is a true understanding of the means by which men become the children of God. In other words, a true understanding of the way of salvation. In the pre-reformation church it was believed that men and women become Christians simply by belonging to the church.

That made them Christians. The sacraments worked *ex opere operato*. If they were in the church, through the church, through the priesthood they received everything.

There was no personal, no individual response necessary in order to be saved. And so if there was any preaching at all it was mere moralizing. It was assumed that the people were already Christians.

And therefore under that system the idea of preaching as dying men to dying men that was unthinkable. And it's noticeable that when the reformation did begin that the Catholic powers were the most hostile to it. One Bishop Stephen Gardner in England he said, for the people went to heaven before without them, that is without sermons and he trusted they should follow after to heaven though they had no sermons or homilies.

So the medieval church that believed that salvation is in Christ but that salvation comes to man they did not say it but in effect in a material way in the receiving of the sacrament. The mind was bypassed. The conscience was bypassed.

There was no need for any pulpits. And when preaching began it began with the rediscovery of the truth that salvation is by the obedience of faith and that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And as soon as that was re-understood immediately the work of preaching was restored.

Preaching is to make Christ known. And preaching is to make Christ known because where men do not know Christ they do not have the words of eternal life. Hugh Latimer again, when the word of God is preached and opened he says, then cometh our new birth.

John Barlow, one of the early Puritans, he says, Was not England in the days of our forefathers a chaos of confusion overspread with the locusts which came out of the bottomless pit? How many it is to be feared perished for want of knowledge and went to their long homes not leaving the least sign of salvation behind them. But you who have better learned Christ bless God for all things but especially for the gospel for who can number the dust of the righteous or tell the tenth part of believers in our English Israel and what but

the gospel preached has brought this great work to pass. So these men, the reformers and the Puritans who followed believed that preaching the gospel has to do immediately with man's need of salvation.

And therefore, as we heard last night that the preaching office is the most awesome office in the world. We are accountable to men's souls. There is no place more solemn than the pulpit.

The preacher has an unparalleled responsibility. God says to him if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way that wicked man shall die in his iniquity but his blood will I require at thine hand. Thomas Brooks, a Puritan says a man were better to have the blood of all the world upon him than the blood of one soul.

The blood of souls cries loudest and wounds deepest. The lowest and darkest place in hell will be the place for those upon whose clothes the blood of souls will be found at last. And the motto that should be written upon preachers' study doors and on their walls and on all the books they look on and on the beds they lie on on the seats they sit on should be this the blood of souls.

The blood of souls. When Martin Luther understood this he spoke about the intolerable burden of preaching God's Word. The preaching of God's Word is an intolerable task.

Yet, he says also, he cannot stop preaching. And because he groans and weeps for men One of Luther's great letters to Cardinal Albrecht in 1517 he says to the Cardinal poor souls believe that when they have bought indulgent letters then they are assured of their salvation. The souls committed to your care excellent father are thus directed to death.

Therefore I can no longer be silent. What a horror! What a danger for a bishop to permit the loud noise of indulgences among his people while the gospel is silenced. So, fervent and powerful preaching was restored in the second place because of a recovery of the understanding salvation by faith in Christ crucified.

I move on then to my third and last condition for powerful preaching and we'll take just a little longer with this point. We have spoken of the need of the gospel in the pulpit and the need of sound learning in pastors but even these two things do not secure the presence of spiritual power. The Apostle Paul adds another dimension when he asks the question how shall they preach except they be sent.

The messenger is essential but the speaker alone can do nothing effective. True preaching, the New Testament tells us has to do immediately with the activity of God himself and it is only powerful work to the extent in which God is in it. So, I give as a third condition for powerful preaching the necessity that the preacher's calling and work be rightly understood.

The Reformers did not define a preacher as a man who acts on Christ's behalf and who speaks about Christ. That was not their definition of preaching. Much more than that was involved.

The God-sent preacher, they said is the instrument by whom Christ himself acts and in whom Christ himself speaks. The preacher is not speaking about Christ as an absent person but a God-sent preacher is one in whom Christ himself speaks and is present. So, the second Helvetic confession one of the great Reform confessions says that Christ is not an idle spectator in the work of his ministers.

It is Christ who builds the church. The pastoral office is supremely his. He gives pastors and teachers.

He sends them and he so enables them that the authority with which they speak is his own authority. You remember those tremendous words in Revelation chapter 1 when the Apostle John says speaking of the glory of Jesus Christ that he holds his messengers, his servants, his preachers as stars in his right hand but it is out of his mouth that the word goes as a two-edged sword. Paul says that speaking of the work of preaching whom we preach, Christ whom we preach warning every man, teaching every man striving according to his working which worketh in me mightily.

The question then is what is this power and authority which belongs to preaching? And no doubt to this question we shall seek during these days often to return. Now in part the answer is that the power is the authority of the word of God but that is not the whole answer. It is not a sufficient answer and it is not a sufficient answer for two good reasons.

The first is that if the scriptures alone were the power then the testimony of every Christian to the Bible would be of equal influence provided it was equally biblical. Indeed there would be no need of preaching at all if people had Bibles. If we could simply put the word of God into their hands then the preaching office could be laid aside.

Reading the scriptures would be equal to preaching but the New Testament doesn't teach that. The New Testament teaches that there is a distinct power above the actual word itself. The apostle draws the distinction of course when he says for gospel came to you not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance.

Not the word only but also. Calvin says should God leave preachers with their work that is just with the spoken word this work is dead and useless and devoid of power if the Lord does not make it effective by His Spirit. And further we can say that if the power of preaching consisted simply in the presentation of Scripture then all preaching would be equally effective provided it was equally scriptural and we know that is not true.

But we know that there is a great difference in the influence which accompanies the preaching of the Word of God. In other words we must not apply to the Word of God the error which the Catholics apply to the sacraments and assume that biblical sermons work *ex operae operata* that provided they are biblical and orthodox then they will be much used. That is not true.

And it is not true because the power that is necessary to preaching is in the hands of Him who sends His servants. The power is given by Christ with the Word indeed and not without the Word but it remains in His hands and it is by means of that grace and power that preaching becomes that instrument in which as I tried to say Christ Himself speaks. I will He says draw all men unto Me.

The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. My sheep hear My voice and they hear His voice and the dead are quickened by preaching which is in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Jeremiah Burroughs one of the Westminster divines commenting on Matthew 28, 18 and 19 he says when Christ sends forth His disciples to preach He makes this preface All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth go therefore and teach as if He should say I have received all power in heaven and earth through the power I received I send you to preach and I will be with you to the end of the world.

So Burroughs says the concern of ministers should be that Christ should preach in them and likewise the concern of gospel hearers they should not say come let us go and hear such a man preach oh no let us go hear Christ preach. It concerns you that hear not to come to hear this man or that man but come to hear

Jesus Christ the Puritan view of preaching. Preachers are workers together with Him and it is God's power alone that gives preaching its saving effect.

Now it was this vision of the true work of preaching that inspired the vision and boldness of the reformers and the Puritans in their preaching. Let me give you one example at least. In the month of June in 1559 in the city of St. Andrews in Scotland which was the great citadel of Catholic power in that month on one Sunday John Knox came to St. Andrews and declared his intention of preaching in the parish church.

He was told that if he did he would be met with a round of shot. He was offered an escort and protection. He refused it.

And when that Sunday came in June 1559 he preached in that pulpit in St. Andrews. You have seen many of you the picture which represents it. Knox in the pulpit and the Duchess of Argyll sitting in front of him the Augustinian canons on one side the Bishop himself is there.

It's a great picture by Sir David Wilkie. The actual thing did happen. But what happened also was this that not only was no shot fired at Knox but so awed were the congregation by the preaching of that word that it is said that as many as twelve of the Augustinian canons became confessors of the truth of Christ.

And says one of the historians the fear of God so fell upon the provost and the magistrates who were present that they agreed at once to the removing of all monuments of idolatry in the very sight of the great dignities of the church. The English ambassador once said of Knox the voice of one man is able in one hour to put more life in us than five hundred trumpets blowing continually in our ears. But that's not how Knox explained it.

Listen to how John Knox explained it. He says the cause was this God gave His Holy Spirit to simple men in great abundance. Or again he says I did distribute the bread of life as of Christ I received it.

Of this I am assured that the blessing of Christ so multiplied the portion received of His hands that during the banquet the bread never failed. In other words the conquest was Christ. Knox was not preaching about an absent Christ.

He was the instrument in which Christ Himself was speaking to the hearts of men. Now that runs right through all the reformers and puritans. I could quote you many examples of it but there is no time to do it.

One perhaps from William Perkins in his great book The Art of Prophesying. Perkins says the demonstration of the Spirit is when as the ministers of the Word do in the time of preaching so behave themselves that even the ignorant and the unbelievers may judge that it is not so much He that speaketh but the Spirit of God in Him and by Him. That surely is what we have in the book of Acts.

Men filled with the Holy Ghost and so speaking as we were reminded last night so speaking that a great multitude both of Jews and Greeks believed. I would like to give you one quick word from the great Thomas Hooker. How much I wish his writings were in print and they are exceedingly rare.

Thomas Hooker the founder of Connecticut, first preacher of Connecticut. He is speaking in his book The Application of Redemption on powerful preaching. He is talking about the kind of preaching for which they looked and prayed.

And he says having spoken of the absence of such preaching too commonly he says such as been ministers may here see the reason of that little success and that little good we do in the vineyard of the Lord. Our pains prosper not. Our preaching prevails not with the hearts of men.

Not one mountain is leveled. Not one crooked place is squared. Not one poor soul prepared for Christ.

After many months and quarters and years prevailing in the work of the ministry the time was when Satan fell like lightning suddenly and speedily when the disciples of Christ as sons of thunder delivered the gospel in the power and demonstration of the Spirit. But now he says Satan stands up in his full strength. He takes up his stand and he maintains his hold in the hearts of men.

What is the reason? God is as merciful as ever. His word and ordinances are as effectual as ever. I need not inquire where is the Lord God of Elijah.

No brethren, I must rather ask where is the spirit and power of Elijah? We want power and spirit and then no wonder we do not. Nay, upon these terms in reason we shall never prepare a soul for the Lord. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit and it is as sharp as it ever was.

But our hands are weak and our hearts are feeble and we have no courage nor power to deliver the blow. Ministers, he says, do not deliver the word with a heavenly, hearty, violent affection. They do not speak out of the abundance of their hearts and so on.

Well, our time is almost gone. Just a few concluding words. I want to close with just three brief characteristics of these Reformation preachers.

The first, they were men of profound dependence upon God. Ministers, they said, of all men should be humble, prayerful, serious, dependent. They had the same reasons as Paul to preach in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

John Calvin says, we must keep before our eyes the majesty of God in the Church. The vision of Isaiah in Isaiah 6 is the text upon which William Perkins talks about the work of the ministry. And he says, God sends no man into the ministry, but first He abases him and He casts him down and gives him a sight of his own misery before He honors him with a commission to preach His Word.

Men of dependence upon God. Secondly, men who sought at all times to keep their hearts under the power of the truths which they preached. Now, we've already touched largely on that and I cannot take further time with it except to give you just one quotation from a man called John Livingstone.

Some of you will have read, I'm sure, June the 21st in the year 1630 there was a sermon preached at a place called the Kirk of Shots near Glasgow as a result of which a whole wide area of Scotland was changed. More than 500 people having lasting spiritual influence from that sermon. The preacher was John Livingstone.

When Livingstone was an old man many years later this is what he says about preaching. He says, it is most probable that no gift, no pains a man takes to fit himself for preaching shall ever do good to the people or himself except a man labor and keep his heart in a spiritual condition before God. A sanctified heart avails much for right preaching.

There is sometimes somewhat in preaching that cannot be ascribed either to the matter or to the expression and cannot be described what it is or whence it is but with a sweet violence it pierces the heart and affections and it comes immediately from the Lord. And if there be any way to attain any such thing, it is by a heavenly disposition in speaking. Thirdly and finally, these preachers made much of personal communion with the Lord Jesus Christ.

They had, as I've tried to say, this exalted view of the ministry. And what saved that view from becoming an unbearable burden was their knowledge that they shared that burden with Christ Himself. They were His fellow servants.

They were not only His servants, but they were friends of the bridegroom. It was said of Rutherford when he came to speak of Christ in the pulpit, one of his hearers said, many times I thought he would have flown out of the pulpit when he came to speak of Jesus Christ. There's a beautiful sentence of Rutherford's when he was banished to imprisonment in Aberdeen, his reaction was to say, Christ and I are able to bear it.

That's their view of the ministry. Christ and I are able to bear it. And Rutherford in one letter, in many letters, but in this one, he takes us to the heart of the Puritan ministry when he says this, Brother, I may from new experience speak of Christ to you.

Oh, if you saw in Him what I see, a river of God's unseen joys has flown over, bank and bray, in my soul since I parted with you. I urge upon you, says Rutherford, communion with Christ. A growing communion.

There are curtains to be drawn aside in Christ that we never saw, and unfoldings of love in Christ. I despair that I shall ever win to the far end of His love. There are so many plies in it.

Therefore dig deep and sweat and labour and take pains for Christ. And set by as much time in the day for Christ as you can, for He will be one with labour. So these men were a fulfilment of God's promise.

I will send them pastors according to my own heart. And that needs to be our prayer this week. May God make us to be pastors according to God's own heart.

Amen.

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