

Improving Preaching (1) (1.9.1983)

by Nigel Lee

Nigel Lee emphasizes the critical role of preaching in Christianity, drawing on biblical examples and practical insights for effective ministry.

Duration: 1:18:07

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 2:1-12, Mark 3:14, Luke 4:18-19, Acts 4:18-20, Acts 4:23-31

Topics: "Preaching"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a strange incident that occurred in an old people's home in London. Two men wearing balaclava helmets entered the home with shotguns, causing fear and chaos among the elderly residents. The speaker emphasizes the importance of consistently preaching God's truth from His word, even to those who may have little knowledge of the Bible. He shares his experiences of seeing crowds gather and people being moved by the preaching of God's word, both in university settings and on the streets. The speaker encourages preachers to seek those moments when God steps in and communicates to the hearts of the listeners.

Transcript

There are many, many books on today's topic, a very few of which I have read. I want to simply begin by mentioning one or two that I've found helpful. By a man called Campbell Morgan, of course inevitably most of his books are in English, and I don't know of any of them being translated.

Campbell Morgan wrote a book simply called Preaching. Campbell Morgan was, for two periods of his life, minister at Westminster Chapel in London, one of the most influential large churches in London, and he wrote a book simply called Preaching. I found that very valuable, simple, short, it's not as long as some of the others.

Then Martin Lloyd-Jones gave some lectures and then wrote them up and produced a book only a couple of years, I think, before he died, not long, anyway before the Lord took him home, a book called Preaching and Preachers. Now Campbell Morgan was originally from a Methodist background and Martin Lloyd-Jones from a Welsh, Calvinistic background. Both of them had a very high view of the authority and place of the pulpit among God's people.

And then Donald Coggan, a one-time Archbishop of Canterbury, an Anglican scholar, theological college principal, bishop, pastor, leader among the Anglicans around the world, he wrote a book called Stewards

of Grace, which is a characteristic title. His ministry was always marked with flashes of insight and great touches of God's grace. And then from many years ago, A. P. Gibbs wrote a book, *The Preacher and His Preaching*.

And it's not a book that is tremendously well-known or popular, it came from a background among brethren assemblies, but that too has many good... ..and *His Preaching* by A. P. Gibbs. John Stott's book, *I Believe in Preaching*, in this valuable *I Believe* series that's been going now for the last few years, John Stott includes at the back of this an incredible bibliography. He claims himself to have read dozens and dozens, I think it's something around 140 books on preaching.

And the book is littered with quotations, evidence of the honesty of his claim, and that too is very good. It's Anglican, it's designed for people who would have a regular pastoral ministry in a particular group of people. All these books, perhaps their situation doesn't exactly fit ours, but for many of them we can glean valuable help and tips from men who've come before us.

And then there's a book that I suspect may now be out of print, called *The Gagging of God* by Gavin Reed. And that is a book against preaching altogether. But it's a book written by a very lively evangelist in England, it's called *The Gagging of God* by Gavin Reed.

And he's talking about the way in which modern preaching actually shuts God up. And that we need to find new ways of communicating that buttress the spoken word. Now my plan is roughly as follows, but I am willing to be guided by you.

I was thinking of talking this morning, this first session, on the importance of preaching. And then this afternoon in the first session after lunch, you are going to work. We are going to pool our ideas on the characteristics of Jesus as a preacher.

And I'm going to write up on the blackboard the things that you suggest, the scriptures that you bring to bear as evidence of the points that you want to make. And then if we have time, we might do a little bit of organising, so that if you had to preach on the characteristics of Jesus as a preacher, we would work on our moulding clay together with me at the chalk. And then this afternoon, the second session, the after coffee session, we're going to talk about how to prepare a message.

That may for some of you be the key thing. And I will share with you the things that I feel important. And then we've got Don Hammond's experience to draw on.

I've preached across Western Canada with Bert, his experience. Peter has preached in something like 60 or 80 countries. He may have something to suggest.

Some of you have been with the Logos. Some of you have actually preached in Eastern Europe. There's actually a lot of experience here.

And I will kick off, set the ball rolling, but please feel free to interrupt me, to question, to put another point of view, to argue. I like that. Don't at all feel that I'm beyond argument.

I rise to that. And let's please understand from the beginning that I'm going to lead a seminar. I'm not simply going to preach.

That, I hope, will be this afternoon. And then tomorrow, we'll kick off in the morning with considering the life of the preacher. Because very often, what people remember is not simply the outline points of the message, but the man himself.

It's the impact of the man's spirit on the hearts and the minds of the people sitting in the congregation. And therefore, if we stray away from considering that, I have not been faithful to the topic. Then Friday afternoon, we might think of some of the pitfalls that we should be careful to avoid.

I have a number. I'm sure you've got others. And then I have at the end what I've put down on my little plan sheet as miscellaneous scraps.

I want to talk about the wife that you marry, or the husband that some of you may, may marry, may want to scrap, and other related topics that I haven't been able to see their way into my scheme, but I feel that they're worth at least thinking about. Now, do you want to raise anything else that we should, that I've missed out, that don't fall within those divisions? Yes, Peter. Right.

I'll touch on that right away in this first session. The whole question of who should preach and the question of gifts. Yes.

Good. Anything else that you're really hoping to get talked through? Because I want to try and lead you so that we all together serve one another. Although inevitably, I'm going to do quite a bit of the talking, I'm afraid.

Is that the only thing that you want to ask? Pop up as we go. Yep. I'm, you mean training college? Or are you talking about how to prepare a series of messages? And a better preacher? Yes, I hope that.

Let's leave that question. If you're unsatisfied by the time we are into tomorrow, you don't think that we're covering that, then bring it up again. Because I hope that many of the things that we say will, will touch on that.

Noel. Thank you. The relationship between expository preaching and worship.

Roger. Well, if you've got some thoughts on that, I shall call on you. By way of introduction, I think one should say that everyone who has ever written or talked on this subject, it seems to me, begins by saying that preaching is the most urgent need in the church today.

They all seem to start out this way. For instance, John Stott says, preaching is indispensable to Christianity. Christianity is in its very essence a religion of the word of God.

Martin Lloyd-Jones says the most urgent need in the Christian church today is true preaching. And about a hundred years ago, a man with rather flowery ornate 19th century language, describing the preacher, said this, his throne is his pulpit. He stands in Christ's stead.

His message is the word of God. Around him are immortal souls. The saviour unseen is beside him.

The Holy Spirit broods over the congregation. Angels gaze upon the scene. And heaven and hell await the issue.

What associations, and what vast responsibility. I'm going to give up already. But Matthew Simpson, in those remarks, is trying to get us to see how incredibly important it is that preaching be faithful and godly,

and honouring to God and his word.

I suppose it is the case that whatever is our spiritual gift, we always tend to think that that is the most important thing that's needed. The man who's got the gift of serving thinks that if only more people were servants. The person who has the gift of prophecy, or administration, the problems they see in the Christian church, or in OM, are always in terms of their own gift.

We always think if we're an administrator, that the place is chaos and just needs a touch of our administration. Or if we're preachers, we sit in the meetings thinking, oh this is, this is, this is thin gruel, this is, this is poor stuff, if only there were proper preaching. Whereas the person who has the gift of serving, will very often wander around thinking how dirty the place is, how people ought to start cleaning it up, how other people need so much ministry, it's just the way we are built.

It's one of the key indications to begin to nibble at Peter's subject, that a particular gift is ours. When you arrive in OM, what do you think the major need is? Because that may be a hint as to the nature of your own gift. Some people feel terribly frustrated at the awfulness of the worship.

They only wish that we worshipped God better. Maybe it's because their own gift would tend to lead them that way. The problem with preachers is that they're always preaching, and always hogging the microphone, and therefore always proclaiming that the main need is for the Word of God to be preached.

So I tend to think that it perhaps is. But if some of you here are not preachers, I would entirely understand if you wanted to disagree with me. But certainly we cannot deny that in our day, with the kind of problems that we face, there is a great need for God's Word to be digested, filtered through the personality of gifted godly men and women, and then proclaimed to his people.

Let me think with you of four reasons why preaching is so important. And the first is quite simply the example of Jesus. Example of Christ.

It was the primary purpose of his itinerant ministry. Let me show you that from scripture. Turn to Mark's gospel, chapter 1 and verse 14.

Now after that John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, and saying that time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe in the gospel. He came and immediately exploded on the scene and began to preach.

Turn to Luke chapter 4 and verse 18. I'm going to give you quite a lot of scripture during this first session. The Lord has come to Nazareth where he was brought up.

And as was his habit he went into the synagogue and as was the custom among the Jews, he stood to read. There was given unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened it and he began to read these words.

It was the stunning beginning of his ministry. Six hundred years before these prophecies have been given, Jesus stands up in his home community and says that prophecy those years ago is beginning its fulfillment now. At this precise moment the spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach.

To preach good tidings to the poor. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives and to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind and to set at liberty those that are bruised and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and so on. In Mark's gospel chapter 2 we see an interesting illustration of this.

A paralyzed man is brought to Christ. Christ is sitting preaching in the house with the Pharisees. There's a scuffling and a scratching above.

Bits of plaster start to fall. Daylight suddenly comes through the ceiling. Tiles are ripped up.

There's a hole big enough for a man to be lowered through. And he's a paralyzed man. He's been brought by his friends.

As people sat around the group, what was it they would have felt was the man's obvious need. The reason why he'd been brought to Jesus. Well obviously his paralysis.

Jesus didn't deal with his paralysis first. Can you imagine the man, centuries later, in heaven, so grateful that Jesus didn't heal him first. But he dealt with his sin first.

Because if that man had been healed first, he might well have stood up and been grateful and looked around the group and then darted outside to test his newfound legs and gone home and he'd have spent the rest of eternity in hell. Because his sin was not forgiven. Jesus went to the root of his heart need, which was his sin.

And preaching does that. Jesus gave the disciples around a demonstration that his priority was preaching. And his healing ministry was because of the compassion of his heart.

It was because he wanted to buttress what he was going to say and illustrate what he was saying. He was responding as the creator to the fall in man. But his primary purpose was to destroy the works of the devil.

To preach. Turn to Mark 1 38 39. Mark 1 38 and 39.

Jesus saith unto them, let us go on elsewhere into the next towns. He's got an enormous following already. But he's going on.

Let us go into the next towns that I may preach there also. For to this end came I forth and he went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee preaching and casting out devils. They were bringing him from all over the area.

The poor and the blind and the lame. And Jesus said I'm going to leave them. I'm going on to preach.

The son of God at work. In Luke's gospel chapter 4 and verse 43. Jesus said unto them I must preach the good tidings of the kingdom of God to the other cities also.

For therefore was I sent the father and the son in communion within the trinity. There had been an agreement and Christ had placed himself willingly under the authority of the father. As the son that he was going to go under orders to preach.

The example of Christ is quite clear. And Christ in his own testimony standing before Pilate in John 18 and verse 37. Pilate has said unto him are you then a king? Jesus answered you say that I'm a king.

You've said it. To this end have I been born and to this end am I coming to the world that I should bear witness unto the truth. And everyone that is of the truth hears my voice.

So with a world to regain. With men and women to see redeemed. With the father's will to be done.

Christ has come to preach. Day after day to preach the word of his father. That's the first thing to notice.

If we are to follow in the footsteps of Christ we must have a high view of preaching. Secondly Christ produced a race of preachers. The people that followed him became preachers.

They had that same sense of priority from the very beginning. Think of the apostles. In Acts chapter 6. The church is expanding.

There are now hundreds of people. Little cell groups springing up all over the place. They're trying to teach the kids.

They're coping with the economic upheavals that it's meaning. There are now widows and poor people in the church. They've got social problems.

And you know the way it is at a conference. The person who appears in public very often is the person that you think you can go to with your problems. The man who appears behind the microphone is the person you think immediately can deal with your problems.

So if you've got problems of broken shoelaces or problems of kids or problems of the washing up not getting done in time or problems of your wife having got stuck in the lift between the third and the fourth floor and she's been there a day or two and nothing seems to be happening about it. You immediately go to the person who seems to be the public preacher teacher and you think that they can solve the thing. This is why here in the conference we've set up the apple desk you see to deal with wives stuck in lifts and dirty plates and so on like that.

So that others amongst us can be free for the ministry of the word and of prayer. Turn to act six and just see how the apostles put it. Because they've got Christ's sense of priorities.

There's a multiplying of the disciples. There's a grumbling in the church. There's a racial tension.

Some widows are feeling neglected in the daily allotment of of whatever was needed. And the twelve called the crowd together and said look it's not right that we should forsake the word of God to serve tables. Verse four we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the service of the word of God.

That's what it means in the original. I'm called either to serve tables or to serve the word of God. I cannot serve both.

And they said no we're going to serve the word of God. It was in fact what Christ had called them to. In Mark chapter three and verse 14.

He had called some disciples. One to be with him. Two that they should be sent out to preach.

And three to have authority to cast out devils, demons. An order of priorities quite clear from the beginning. To be with Christ.

To go and preach. To have authority over evil spirits. You remember when the apostles had been preaching in Acts chapter four.

And there was trouble. And the leaders had been called in. They'd been threatened.

And you must not carry on doing this. And they'd stood and said look what are we going to do. We must obey God rather than men.

Evangelism was going on. It was meeting opposition. They gathered the church together.

What did they pray? They've already been beaten. They've already been threatened with imprisonment. There's a distinct possibility that the wrath of the whole nation will fall upon them and it will lead to death.

Jews stirred up in anger like a hornet's nest. So they pray to God not for a quiet time. Not for a sort of way around the problem.

But that they may have boldness to preach. Because that's what God has called them to. Acts chapter four verses 29 to 31.

So it was the heartbeat of men. The apostle Paul had the same thing. 1 Corinthians 1 verse 17.

He said I didn't come to baptize. I'm thankful that I baptize none of you. Save perhaps Crispus, Gaius, Stephanus, one or two people of you.

I can't hardly remember. Because it wasn't my ministry. I came to preach.

Men and women are transformed through the foolishness of the preaching of the cross. And when we come to the last words that we believe Paul penned. Scribbled down when he knew that sentence of death was already passed upon him.

Paul was executed we believe sometime in the late 60s. It was around about 68 maybe that Nero died. He died in the June of 68 I believe.

Perhaps he wrote the second epistle to Timothy from the prison the closing autumn. He's asking for extra clothes you see. Because he's cold in that jail in Rome.

And he's writing passing on the charge that Paul that he's been given by Christ. Passing it on to young Timothy. Now look he says time is coming when people don't want to hear good teaching.

They're not interested in sound doctrine. They get bored in meetings where the doctrine of the scriptures of God are being proclaimed. They they won't endure it.

They have itching ears. They want new things. What are you to do Timothy? I'm I'll be gone within maybe weeks now.

To Timothy chapter 4 preach God's word. Preach the word be instant in season and out of season. Reprove that's one ministry of the word.

Rebuke that's another. Exhort that's another. With long suffering and teaching that's your own character growth.

For the time will come when they won't endure the sound doctrine. But having itching ears will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts. What are you going to do? You just carry on preaching and teaching the word of God.

You know it is a fact that in many churches around the world people have become gradually and increasingly disinterested in scripture. And I have had the experience I remember a very clear case of it in a meeting I was in Nigeria. I don't know Don whether you ever remember something the same in Nigeria.

Um we I was there speaking in this Pax church. And it was a wild meeting. They got worked up and there was dancing and there was drums and there was a dance leader and his job was to sway and gyrate in front of the choir.

To get the choir moving in time you see. And people were really getting going and there was tambourines and and it was quite breathless and and the noise was enormous. And the minister of this church large man in flowing robes had no hope of gaining control of the congregation in in full flow without a great big bell like a school bell.

And when he wanted to say something or he wanted to lead in prayer suddenly or he used to ring this enormous bell and after a bit they would get quiet you see. And when he finally decided that well the guest preacher was here so we better let him say something. He rang his bell and people eventually sort of simmered down and shut up.

And then it was the time for preaching. Now the preaching must have been appallingly bad I presume because they weren't interested. They all went to sleep.

When you sort of open the word of God and they like that. It happens that people lose their interest in scripture because they get addicted maybe to something else. To the personality of the preacher maybe.

Or to the the musical experience that they expect. Or to the fellowship that they're enjoying. This very often happens among some of the younger people.

You know they like to come and sit beside their friends. They've got the group they can whisper. They can pass chewing gum.

They get with their friends. The fact that something is going on up at the front really isn't too important. Because they like being there.

It's entirely a social thing. The church can be like a a Derby and Joan club sometimes. I don't know whether you have these things in other parts of the world.

You know the sort of old people's little nice meeting place. And the preaching of God's word is really rather irrelevant. And it is very difficult to come into that setup and and begin to minister there.

Your early days are tough. But you will always find that as you preach God's word faithfully you will lose a few and then people will begin to come. People will begin to respond to what you are saying.

I'll come back to this later on. Paul's advice to Timothy was preach the word nonetheless whatever's happening. And then thirdly my third reason why we should highly esteem the preaching of scripture is church history.

Read church history. I'll come back to this more tomorrow when we talk about the leader and his reading the preacher and his study and so on. But it has been the history even of the pre-reformation renewal movements.

John Wycliffe in Britain, Jan Hus in Czechoslovakia if I pronounce him right, that the Dominicans, the Franciscans, these were renewal movements within Roman Catholicism in the 12th century, in the 13th century. Do you know the result every time was back to preaching? Francis of Assisi was a preacher. He was also a hippie.

He was a 12th century hippie. He was the most extraordinary man. And if things had been allowed to go their course he would have led a movement right out of the church of Rome.

But he was persuaded back in by a wily old cardinal who came down from Rome. He was a preacher. And in Britain Wycliffe was preaching God's word to people.

People became interested in preaching. The reformation in the 16th century in Europe, I mean it hasn't hit all parts of Europe yet. We've never really seen the reformation in Spain.

We've never really seen it in parts of Western Ireland yet. But the beginnings of it certainly in Germany, in Switzerland, in parts of France, up here around this area. This was a tremendously Christian evangelical area you know 400 years ago.

Up until the 1570s. Then the opposition began to come. I wish some of us could go and see the place where Tyndale was burnt at Vilefort just not far away.

He was he was an amazing man. But the reformation brought the Bible and preaching back to the to the fore. Zwingli and Calvin and these men.

You know what Luther said at one point one point some of you will love this others may not so much. He said I simply taught, I preached, I wrote God's word otherwise I did nothing. And when while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my my Philip and my Amsdorff.

These were were two German princes who became Christian and supported him. He drank beer with with Philip and Amsdorff. The word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor inflicted such damage upon it.

I did nothing. The word did it all. I like that.

The thought of preaching the word and then going having a a little refreshment somewhere. While the word does its work the revivals in the 18th and 19th century show exactly the same thing you know. The whole fabric of British society was changed through the preaching of men like Whitfield and Wesley and Harris and so on.

Unpaid unrecognized adventurers more often than not pelted with rotten eggs. Read Wesley's diaries it's so fascinating. The things that used to happen the men that used to come to his meetings with pockets loaded with with bad eggs and tomatoes and Wesley used to have a a friend who used to walk amongst the crowd unknown a sort of incognito friend and if he saw someone waiting there with with pockets full of rotten eggs he would sort of lean up against him and crush the eggs in his pocket.

So that nothing got thrown at Wesley but it all dribbled down the man's trouser legs. These men stood on I can hardly go through the villages of England and see these little stone market crosses weather-beaten places without thinking of very often Wesley. If you track down in in his diaries these men stood on these crosses and they preached God's word and they changed the face of the country and throughout the 19th century tremendous revival movements when London was expanding at the time of Spurgeon in the Metropolitan Tabernacle and Baptist churches were being built all over the now downtown suburbs of London.

There was a movement of God among people through the preaching of the word and the revivals that sprang up in Northern Ireland in 1859 and in some parts of Scotland and and so on through the preaching of God's word. You had a question? The question that's been asked is it involves a comparison between some parts of the world where it seems easy to gather a crowd to listen to preaching and Europe where if you stand in the streets and preach at any rate that people don't stop to listen? Very fair question but I think it has something to do more with the culture and the weather and the busyness of people and the things that make people embarrassed in society than the preaching necessary. You see when Wesley was preaching there was no television there was less rush in society.

Preachers still retained their role in society as the bringer of news. There was no telephone the roads were still bad no canals or railways have been built and a preacher coming in was interesting if your world was bounded by quite a narrow horizon. Now in India you go preach in the streets you can have a crowd in many places of 100 200 300 within five or 10 minutes.

I've done it five or six times a day over some years because it's it's hot weather people live in the streets and anything that's interesting that takes you away from the labors in the fields well it's it's good stand and watch and listen. Not so now in in Europe where it's often cold the weather's bad and so on but my claim would be that where you are prepared um in a a building or in a lecture theater to consistently preach the word of God in in an imaginative lively relevant prayerful way you will gather a crowd. You will gather a crowd.

I've seen this in university meetings preaching the gospel. I would go into a secular university in Britain where nowadays we're dealing with people who um are amoral post-christian society they know practically nothing about the bible but it's night after night consistently you preach God's truth from God's word holding it up before them telling them what it says asking them what they believe about what Christ says. Night after night you'll notice an interesting thing the crowd begins to build up and most of the missions that I've been involved in over the last few years will finish up at the end of only six days with the largest lecture theater in the university packed to overflowing people sitting on the windows or sitting on the floors in the aisles to listen to the preaching of God's word.

Now I've also preached out in the streets in Britain. I can remember getting back from India in 1971 and I stood with George Verwer in in Bromley high street in London and I preached my heart out for 20 minutes to two children a policeman and a cat and then and then George who'd said you go first said said come on let's not bother with this anymore I think you gave them enough of the truth let's go somewhere else and I think we went down into a pizza house and um had some pizza and did the cat come through I'm not I'm not sure um but it is true that people do gather to to hear the word of God um one of the I think the most interesting book I've read in the last uh few months has been the first volume of the life story of Martin Lloyd-Jones. It's a yellow book it's it's in hardback I've not seen it in paperback it's printed by um Banner of Truth and I can't even for the moment remember the title can somebody remind me the first 40 years the

first 40 years it is it is well the best book I've read for a long time.

Martin Lloyd-Jones um resigned from his medical career in London he was headed for the top he was already the personal assistant to um the leading physician in the 1920s Thomas Hoarder I think was his name uh he was a lecturer a professor he was um physician to royalty and Lloyd-Jones was his personal assistant gave it all up and he took over a little downtown mission in a place called Aberavon down in Wales it's a a small town adjacent to a mining area and not far from um the sandy shores of the South Wales peninsula took his wife down there began to preach a lot of the people were unemployed there was no money they were backward many couldn't read the church in that area um had really been been dead since the days of the revival the Welsh revival in 1904-1905 degenerated in a lot of

singing there was very little consistent teaching from scriptures in that revival and it was as if God took Lloyd-Jones into that area to to bring scripture to build up the foundations of what had been started he started with just a handful of people and the numbers grew and grew and grew and all he would do would be expound passages from scripture he would have a men's meeting on either a Wednesday or Saturday night no women allowed the men come together in the church to discuss to argue to debate he was digging scripture into this this congregation large numbers of of unemployed men from a terrible background totally transformed simply through the regular preaching of God's word he was getting hundreds in the meetings eventually he was um led of God to come to the Westminster chapel in

London between two and three thousand people hearing him at a service simply through the exposition of God's word you get the same now in Aberdeen um a brother by the name of Willie Still packs his church simply through the systematic exposition of scripture around Britain the country I know best and it's true also in other parts of the world the men who regularly teach God's word they will draw a crowd this last February the Reverend Dick Lucas was asked to lead a mission in Cambridge University 9,000 students quite a strong Christian union it's actually supposed to be the second strongest in the world but they only have about 400 at a Saturday night meeting Dick Lucas said I'm not going to come and preach the gospel in the way that you have been used to hearing it preached I'm not going

to take the topic of God on a Monday night and sin on a Tuesday and and the purpose of life on a Wednesday and the cross on Thursday and the resurrection on Friday and the second coming on Saturday or something I'm going to expound Mark's gospel and I'm not going to make any appeals either I'm simply going to expound Mark's gospel night after night are you willing to have me come and do that because if you're not then I won't come and they they were brave enough and so he stood up in the guild hall which holds about a thousand and he began with Mark chapter one on a Monday night and preached it through and then a bit more on Tuesday night Wednesday night and Thursday night very soon the place was packed and on the final night he said well on Saturday we're going to have an after meeting

those of you who feel you want to become Christians who want to follow the Christ that has come alive to us from Mark's gospel I want you to come back for an extra meeting between eight and nine hundred came ordinary students the Christians who were belonging to the Christian union they were not supposed to be there these were people who had been touched by the systematic exposition of God's word I've noticed in my own experience far smaller by comparison that when I hold up the gospel of John shall we say and read them what it says and take my points visibly from a scripture the modern student pays attention because he hasn't met God's words in primary school or at home I've tried in my days as a school teacher at teaching a bit of Mark in a religious instruction class I was taking they

didn't know anything about the resurrection they didn't know where Mark was didn't know whether it was old or New Testament didn't know a thing about the thing that we would take for granted the whole of the gospel story they were 15 year old 16 year old South London school boys in a good school some of them were going to go on to university and yet they were gripped and fascinated by God's words we need to let it loose and and trust God to speak now I want to urge you if you have the courage nowadays to be the men and the women who will proclaim God's word very easy to think that you have to bring all kinds of lurid illustrations exciting stories reminiscences red hot imitations of some fiery preacher that you may have heard and there's very little biblical content in what you beware

because it is scripture in the long run that changes people the impact of a man's personality alone wears off within a day or two it is God's word as God brings revelation to the heart that actually changes I wouldn't mind betting if I was that sort of a man some of you have been around our end for many years you look back over conferences uh years gone by some of the most memorable messages that you ever heard have been scripture expounding God's word faithfully preached now I don't know whether I'm touching on what Noel was was hinting at but we sometimes feel that for a meeting to have impact for God you've got to create the right atmosphere you've got to have the right sort of musical accompaniment the right sort of worship you need visual aids and drama and dancing and so on now

these things have their place but in the long run my friends lives will be changed by the preaching of God's word I've never known anyone converted by seeing someone dance beautifully I've never known anyone converted by simply seeing a drama the drama will need to be buttressed by God's word preached authoritatively now why is this let me come forthly to what I'll call the the theology of preaching we've talked about Christ our example we've talked about the apostles whom he produced the lessons of history and now the theology of preaching point number one God is a communicator in words God uses language Genesis chapter one perhaps the first activity that we see God doing is God speaking the trinity is a communicative expressive fellowship of three and language is used within the Godhead

let us make man in our own image says God God says let there be light and there was light God is a communicating being and man has been given language as one of the highest gifts that that he possesses do you know that do you honestly recognize that because you're made in the image of God language is one of the highest things that you possess now think of Genesis chapter two there's man been created but he's alone he's lonely he hasn't got anyone to talk to there's nobody to sort of help him and be a communicating friend for his heart he needs a wife says God so he brings him a hippopotamus have a look at the hippopotamus comes in no no good brings him a monkey brings him a giraffe brings him a water buffalo brings him a warthog all kinds of thing no good too dirty too noisy uh you know

giraffes too high if you feel like a good night kiss need a ladder to get up there all kinds of problems the big problem was no language now some of you some of you are married some of you are going to be married do you really let the message of Genesis 2 sink into your life because when God is speaking about language he's talking about marriage relationships and we know throughout scripture that the marriage relationship is itself to be a picture of a higher dimension of relationship between us and God in Genesis chapter 12 God proposes marriage to Abraham have you heard that in the first two or three verses of Genesis 12 God proposing marriage he says now Abraham will you be willing to come with me for the rest of your life leave your home come with me to my home he started looking for

the city that had foundations the most important thing is your communication because you have been made to speak therefore when Christ comes he comes as the word he comes to speak God is a

communicator we are made to communicate last December we had in in an old people's home that i know in London a very strange incident it was one of these old people's homes where you know the folk have got perhaps nowhere else to live and so they they gather together and there are some staff look after them and during the day they sort of sit in front of the television they brought in and they have their meals and they go to bed at night and they just plonk down well there was a thorn-off shotgun raid on this old people's home in the middle of the afternoon suddenly the French windows were thrown open

and two men in balaclava helmet burst into the room with all these old people lined up in front of the television thorn-off shotgun and said freeze you see like this and and there was absolutely no response at all so the men said again freeze and they got so frustrated because half the people sitting there hadn't even heard them in the first place perhaps they were i don't know tuned into radio two with their deaf aids or something that the men said get on the floor on your faces on the floor nobody moved so that the half that hadn't heard them probably couldn't have got on the floor anyway if they'd tried certainly couldn't have got up again and finally these two men in total disgust one of them threw down his gun and and this was announced on on the radio i know the old people's home

well my my own local church in london when i lived there used to go and do regular services there we used to get much the same sort of response in the old people's services i don't know whether you've ever been there i i can remember as a a young lad as going along with the choir from my church i was unbelievably angelic in the choir we stood there in front of these old people and we sang them christmas carols and there was an old lady in a wheelchair came in rather late she wheeled herself to the front of of the um the thing you see and she she parked herself in her wheelchair on the foot of the person that was sitting at the front beside her you see just got the wheelchair up on the foot and and the the woman said get off me foot you see but but this other lady had come in to listen she

we choir boys were absolutely helpless and laughter we were we were in the middle of silent night or something and this and this row was going on between these two ladies i have had a number of experiences in my life of trying to communicate like those two men with a shotgun and simply not getting through people either don't understand what you're saying or can't do anything about it anyway people fall asleep sometimes in meetings that's why a little bit of humor around about 12 o'clock after the night of prayer can sometimes help i've seen a man suddenly in a church who was sleeping in the evening service suddenly leap up grab his hymnbook and laugh realize that in his dreams he thought the hymn had been announced but actually the message was still proceeding on and sit down very

sheepishly preachers need to think about communication and they need to begin their thinking with god himself i've talked about genesis 1 genesis 2 genesis 3 christ comes seeking communication with those from whom he's been cut off wanting that expressive fellowship that god has made us for and to have with him you and i are made like adam to believe and to hear and to communicate god's word we're made for it what was the fall of man it arose because they would not believe the word of god they believed the word that came from another source and there is a discipline therefore in life for all mankind that they should be saved through the foolishness of preaching because god wants to reverse the very process of genesis chapter 3 those opening verses of genesis 3 where mankind fell because

they believed the wrong word god now requires that we be converted not because he's going to do miracles in the sky he's not going to lean out of heaven and shout down to us he's going to require that as fallen men and women sons of adam and eve we believe the right word by faith that's why paul when he's writing to the ephesians chapter 1 between about verses 16 and 18 is praying for these believers that they

have a continuing revelation in the knowledge of god there's a spiritual battle involved in any communication now one or two of you are really suffering from the night of prayer i can see that i can see i enormously very difficult when you've been up until late stay away spiritual battle involved and paul didn't take it for granted ever that the believers would understand what he

was talking about he prayed ephesians 1 verses 16 to 18 in 1 corinthians 2 verse 14 he said that the natural man cannot understand the things of the spirit of god they are spiritually discerned i can remember being in an evangelistic meeting in cardiff i think it was um we had a whole series and and people began to pray christians during the meetings it made a tremendous difference to the meeting if there was a group of people actually praying while the meeting was going on and one night we'd announced the title um muhammad buddha the gurus christ what's the difference now there are a lot of overseas students in in that university i don't know whether su remembers uh that particular occasion but i believe you were actually converted during that series of meetings at that very meeting oh

this is tremendous it just popped into my head i arrived um at the meeting at about a quarter past seven it was due to start at half past seven and of course with that title the room was full of muslims and buddhists and hindus and all kinds of folks like that you see waiting to hear what this infidel was going to say so when the christians arrived well there was no room for them to sit down they always come late anyway it seems to be one of the first things of adaptation to the evangelical culture you start being late for appointments meetings anyway they all arrived no room room full of muslims you see what are you going to do christians can't get in i'm going to be thrown to the lions here so the christians in a group went along to another room in the university where there were two or

three people sort of in there slumped in front of the television they'd been there a couple of days probably just sort of this is cardiff university of course you must remember and so they threw them out and they took over the room and they began to pray they began to pray they began to storm the bastions of heaven for the meeting and i sort of walked into the room very trembly and another fellow gave his testimony and then i preached and i felt like a man at the front row of a of a rugby scrum now this may not mean very much to you um people pushing behind people pushing back from in front and i was sort of like the ball in the we pray they were not determined not to budge very much but a number of people and two among them trusted the lord that night even though the atmosphere i found

electric i was praying god spoke god communicated the best talk i've ever heard in the last year or two for the conference i was invited to speak at of medical students and a man who stood up who was i think the deputy director of a hospice one of the early beginnings of the hospice movement you know where folks who are dying um go there to be cared for in their closing weeks in some cases months this man was speaking on communication with patients and their relatives it it was an incredible talk he it reduced me to tears as i sat as i watched his pictures and he was talking about the way in which in these kind of situations god the communicator comes in he steps in that is the moment the preacher is looking for you know when god the communicator the god who speaks the god who reveals

himself the god who's given us language the god who knows how to speak to the heart that's what you want those moments when you're speaking when god steps in when people are under conviction people are struck they may it may result in them being angry or surly or crying or just move to worship god has communicated the thing has suddenly reached a different dimension not just your words it's god in there and that is a spiritual battle to see that happen where he takes over he speaks he heals the broken hearts let us never be satisfied with preaching that does not reach that that level now that's something to start

with on the um importance of preaching let me take up the question of gift in preaching before lunch unless you've got some questions right now any questions it is a it is a gift

my father is brilliant at that we had um my father is a minister a vicar in england and one of these large anglican churches and one sunday morning there was a pigeon in the church during the service there's a great big high church this pigeon and there was a lady came into church with a very sort of flowery hat and and the pigeon sort of at one point got right down into this hat you see and it would sort of dive bomb people he was trying to lead the worship and the service and the most incredible thing happened i it really was quite extraordinary he was proceeding with the service as best he could they couldn't get the pigeon out and he got up in the pulpit to preach he bowed his head to pray and the pigeon sat on here just sat down you see and my father looked up and sort of smiled at

the people and said ah for a minute i thought it was an angel and then then the pigeon flew down to the the steps and hopped down one step hopped down those and i hardly i think must be an answer to the prayers of the people it walked solemnly down the aisle and the virgin at the back opened the door and it went straight out that you've got to make the best of it you've got to hope that i mean there's some things you can't do you can't cope with can you um sometimes a ready wit if people want to heckle or there's um sometimes people faint in the meeting you you have got to um perhaps make a little comment if everyone's distracted well go with them for a moment join them and lead them back again give them perhaps a brief non-panicky instruction if we had um a woman who often fainted when

she was pregnant it was one of the features of her pregnancy and she would just keel over unexpectedly and it would worry some people but of course if she just lay there for a bit she would recover and get back up and sit on her seat and a simple comment like you know she'll be all right just we've met this before and she'll be right in a minute or two um take control if it's a heckler um you will have to either answer him if if you've got a good witty response that's kind um back to him or arrange to let him ask questions afterwards but let you finish the course of the argument first sometimes if babies cry you just take them out or in some cultures nobody minds if they cry anyway you just keep talking and the pigs run through and the chickens cluck about and in more primitive

circumstances um i would say the worst thing to do is just to sort of stop and freeze and gawp because you've given up then you've somehow got to be gentle and and do the best you can and control it and if need be ask people if it's a distraction like a pigeon or a seat suddenly collapsing sometimes happens or someone falls off their seat because they've fallen asleep this has happened in all my meetings especially people always falling asleep well you just sort of make a little comment we had in one of the early meetings in the tent um the moles the moles in belgium seem to be extraordinary christian moles and they they come to the meetings and suddenly this mole came up out of the ground and the three girls went oh see make a little comment make a little joke control it get them sat

down carry on try and keep control if you can what jesus would have said i don't know we may imagine that he knew it was going to happen in the open air heckling increases and some people have even been known as christians to do a bit of heckling to increase the crowd um it's been known um the question of gift because we will lose our time martin lloyd jones said preachers are born not made well that's encouraging isn't it this is an absolute you will never teach a man to be a preacher if he is not already one so we face first the question of the calling of god ephesians 4 ephesians 4 verse 7 unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of christ the first section of ephesians has been talking about the gift of god you know the verse ephesians 2 8 the gift

of salvation by grace are you saved not of yourselves it is the gift of god god has given a gift of salvation but now here in this middle section of ephesians which i take to run from 2:11 up to 4:16 we're reading of the gift of christ the risen ascended messiah he too has gifts to give us if you want to complete the the last section of ephesians from 4:17 to the end not about god the father or christ the messiah but about man the redeemed and renewed man he too has a gift to give you can read of it in in ephesians 5:2 also in verse 25 i'll leave you to trace that down but here he's speaking of the gift of christ wherefore he saith when he ascended on high he led captivity captive and he gave gifts to men the tenth he that descended is the same also that ascended as far above all

the heavens that he might fill all things and he gave some to the apostles some prophets some evangelists and pastors teachers for the perfecting of the saint unto the work of ministry unto the building up of the body of christ and so on now those gifts of christ all require um speaking ability don't they how do i know whether i've got a preaching gift or not well how do you know whether you've got a gift for football or playing the piano well you like doing it not only do you like doing it and show a bit of skill but you you like watching other people doing it you're fascinated by the skills of other people and you sense a bit of growth as you do there are certain things i'm utterly hopeless at i will never be any good i'm not interested really in other people doing them they bore me but

i am interested in certain things and i like to watch other people growing and it's one thing to think that you've got the gift of preaching but other people need to have the gift of listening um at the same time and you need to check check what other folks think is their growth do other people appreciate your ministry one of the advantages of om is that you're thrown into um a pool of people where you get demands made upon you in many different kinds of ways and you get opportunity to exercise gifts in a number of different areas in the early days especially some of you have to learn simply to be faithful servants others of you have to take leadership responsibility some of you have to learn to speak quite early to preach and to teach some of you are going to be thrown into situations

where your team is perhaps full of of invalid people with problems you're going to have to learn to show sympathy and mercy and have the gift of that now as time goes on as you get exercise in these different areas this is one of the values of the thing you grow strong committed enthusiastic in some area or other and other people in the body can see that you've got strength in this area and if you stay with us you'll be directed into those areas of strength they don't ask me to organize travel or finance in om i'm utterly hopeless at it finance i i'm not interested in it it bores me apart from being able to spend a bit now and again the organizing of it the flow of it backwards and forwards i'm just hopeless at finance i don't think i'm really any good at showing mercy you know and just

understanding sometimes the sensitivities and the hurts of people i i don't know whether i'm any good at that i feel appalling at it some of you perhaps heard the um i don't know the story it's not a funny story the story that came originally i believe out of a bill gothard seminar of seven people sitting around a table seven different gifts the seven gifts that are mentioned that's in romans chapter 12 there's the prophet there's the um teacher the exhorter the administrator the giver the one who's just a helper i say just because i'm talking to preachers he doesn't speak very much he's a non-verbal gift and the one who shows mercy now these these seven sitting around the table the prophet you see the person who has the habit the tendency to see things as needing a strong word from god

oh just a word that will bring bring fire unction conviction flame thrower stuff the person who is a server just sees practical things that need to be done they're not a great talker at all they they are practically

motivated they like to clear up things um mend things switch things on at the right time all that the person who teaches just loves to be studied loves to be into scripture the folk who has the gift of exhorting they they want to move people they're out there like a sheepdog they're they're a mover they're often an encouraging person when they walk into a group people's spirit lifts you know the encourager is there the motivator the administrator brilliant sharp mind for seeing what needs to be done and who should do it the giver nothing pleases them more than just to give to

give financially to give hospitality to give anything they've got to give and the person who shows mercy well imagine seven people each of these seven gifts around the table they're going to have a meal the wife of the house is not among the seven bringing a tray of soup to these great spiritual elders you see and there's lots of chats and it's all very interesting and she's chatting away with someone and she puts the soup down on the edge of the not looking quite where she puts it and the whole thing falls on the floor crash this lovely meal that's been prepared there's soup everywhere broken plates and it's a social disaster you will get seven different reactions instantly from around the table the prophets they may not all come without come out with it but the prophet's reaction in his

heart will be god provides and we throw it on the floor this isn't good enough the teacher will want to sit back and explain you know if only that had been pushed just a little bit more that wouldn't happen because gravity's like this and soup is like this they'll have quite a teaching session around the table while the stuff soaks into the carpet the helper will be the first one out of their chair they're into the kitchen they're gathering up wet cloths they're coming to clean the thing up they're not saying anything they're moving the administrator will start to organize will you do this you clear up those will you put the broken bits away because we don't want to cut our fingers and immediately they're giving people jobs the exhorter will immediately want people well forget that that

was a soup we don't need soup let's go on to the next course i can smell it all that soup i've had plenty of soup before in my life let's move on move on the person who has the gift of giving will immediately think you know i could pay for a new dinner service for that person or this meal is already a disaster i got a tax rebate last week can i take you all out to the chinese restaurant and we'll we won't bother about this old meal here and the person with the gift of showing mercy their immediate reaction will be to want to go and put their arm around the person who dropped it in the first place and encourage them you see some will move to explain some will move to clear up some will move to organize some will move to comfort it's the way they are god has given them that tendency the

person who has the gift of preaching likes to to be heard to illuminate a passage to enforce truth to move people with the spoken voice and other people appreciate the way they do it turn to 1 corinthians 12 a moment 1 corinthians 12 very interesting um three verses you can see how the whole of god is involved in this now there are diversities of gifts but the same spirit there are diversities of ministrations but the same lord and there are diversities of working but the same god the spirit the lord and god the spirit gives you your gift your particular enabling to be a preacher or an administrator or whatever it is the lord who puts you in your particular place in the vineyard to appoint you to children's work or to old people's work or to pass return or to work in korea or africa he is

the one who gives you your particular ministration your area of service it is god the father who decides and governs what happens when you work the working are decided by god i have been to a place and preach the sermon and people have appreciated what has been said and perhaps have been conversions and i've gone two weeks later and preached the same sermon to another very similar group and it's come

across like a lead balloon and i say well you know have i sinned am i am i out of fellowship with my wife what's happened nothing same message same illustrations is it me no may not be maybe come on to that tomorrow but it may not be because i tell you this what happens in a meeting actually depends far more on the congregation than it does on the preacher usually it's god who decides what

they are ready for what state their hearts are at and we have to leave the fruit of the meeting with god who decides the working now all three persons of the godhead are involved in this business of us having a gift having a place to work and seeing some fruit through our ministry but let me explain another very interesting and very important thing there is a difference my friends and preachers must learn this between your gift and your character you can have a gift as a preacher and you can preach so as to move men to draw people into your church you can seem to have an outwardly successful preaching ministry but your character remains immature our gifts are given us temporarily 1 corinthians 13 the next chapter now we have gifts when we see christ face to face what we'll be left with is

our character our love not our gift of working miracles not our gift of giving ourselves to be burnt that will all be temporary when i see the lord i will no longer be quite the man i am praise god but any gift i may have in the realm of evangelism or teaching finished but my character is what remains in eternity now you know you can sometimes feel rather proud of your ministry because it seems as if people are flocking to hear you but your home life your domestic relationship your own inner walk with god can remain shriveled you can remain discourteous rude unable to relate to people unable to run your own household well and at the same time god is blessing your public ministry why is that why is that because god has given you a gift so that he might use it the temporary thing it's for

his glory he's not wasting his gifts by giving them out and you reach eternity and you've got nothing to show for it might have been a leader in om you might have have moved multitudes of people but you actually have not grown very much in your character get that difference clear because it is a necessary humbling principle that we need to to learn and this will affect and then i'll come back to you that this will affect your preparation have you ever known those of you that have preached you've got to go preach somewhere and you get down to preparation you don't know what to give what to bring them and and you seem to get a message and then finally you think well i don't know that doesn't seem to be right for them god very often will give his first message to you it's for you first

because actually you've been a bit dry recently you've not been reading your bible very consistently recently and god wants to get your attention for the good of your character so that you before you ever stand in the pulpit and try and change the characters of others are submitting to that inward discipline as a preacher of letting god deal with your own character first so watch out for the time when god actually wants to give you two messages the first one is a private one for you as you prepare now joseph you had a question i think i think it fits precisely with the thing i've just said because god is the one who gave us the gift not to waste it but he's given us the gift in order to train our character your character is more important than your gift and it always will be now this

isn't a very difficult thing for me to say look at kids we give children gifts but we give them special kinds of gifts why in order to influence their characters you know my wife comes from a long line of engineers scottish engineers the dear woman gives my son a toolbox at the age of three i i'm wanting to give him a hockey stick or a football have you noticed how parents will give you the gift of piano lessons when you're young or they'll give you certain kinds of gifts because they want to move your character in certain ways we all know this we give gifts in order to influence character and there are disciplines involved in the gifts

that we give we may think our son needs to become a little quieter a little less boisterous we give him a stamp collecting album or something we're trying

to bring influences into his life not so that he might for the rest of his of eternity collect stamps but so that his character will develop in a certain way now god will give and withhold fruit for his own sovereign purposes um but our character development is involved in but included in the development of our character is the desire that there be fruit for god's glory now there were times when paul preached when he didn't see very much evident fruit and there are times when people who have been working in the muslim world have walked in paul's footsteps in that i'm talking last october this is lionel gurney that 80 years old leader of the red sea mission team and he takes a completely philosophical attitude to the work that they've done they say look we've we worked in aden we worked

there 20 years we didn't see much fruit we were kicked out the seed is sown trusting god every farmer sows his seed and then leaves it if we have to leave it for 20 years let it be god knows the seed that's been planted we'll go to another field and we'll sow that now good for the character god very often god knows the fruit that we need i have had the experience on occasions of god um letting me know little encouragement you know sometimes i complete the message and it seems as if no one would help or bless and two years later somebody will come up you say you know you know that conference you did and i say yeah i remember that i got converted then wow isn't that tremendous god knows when we need a little encouragement the fruit is his to control but as we become one with his desire we

want ourselves to see fruit for our ministry allowing for due processes of growth in our character

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