



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

## MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Volume 16 Issue 43

November 12, 2017

### A Theology of Preaching, Part 3

The power behind a godly pulpit is not the result of “persuasive words of wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:4) and thus a powerful pulpit is NOT determined by the gifts of the speaker or how moved a person might be in listening. Rather the power behind a powerful pulpit is the faithful preaching of the word of God!

Jeremiah 23:28-29, “The prophet who has a dream may relate *his* dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have *in common* with grain?’ declares the Lord. ‘Is not My word like fire?’ declares the Lord, ‘and like a hammer which shatters a rock?’”

1 Timothy 4:13, "Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching."

Paul wrote this to a young pastor at the advent of his ministry. When it came to the pulpit, what was Timothy to do? Read the word, explain it, and then exhort it! From this we can conclude in walking away from a sermon if you don't have a better understanding of God's word- what it says and what it means- then you just heard a bad sermon. Indeed! The goal of every sermon must be the proclamation and so the explanation of God's word.

This truly is what we are after. As Christians when it comes to the pulpit, we are NOT to be thrill seekers, BUT truth seekers! That having been said, what is The Telos (or goal) of a faithful pulpit, its ultimate end? You might think we just addressed that... yet in reality we did not; preaching the word of God is the initial goal of a faithful pulpit; this is the call of the preacher! Yet when it comes to its ultimate goal- Its Telos (how God will use the preaching of His word)- the Ezekiel 33 gives us that.

It should be noted that the text before us is NOT exhaustive. There are other Teloi when it comes to God's intent for His word- of which I'll reference two of them as we proceed. First a faithful pulpit will be used by God to attack moralism.

Ezekiel 33:23-25a, "Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Son of man, they who live in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying, "Abraham was *only* one, yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession." Therefore, say to them, "Thus says the Lord God..."'"

Once again to understand the importance of the calling that God placed on Ezekiel here; we need to be on the same theological page. Accordingly, we must understand the preeminence of Christ in Scripture.

It is easy to think of the Bible as just a book containing religious statements and "sacred" history which is NOT very relevant to our lives. It is composed of 66 books all of which have a purpose for sure, yet to see how they all fit together requires a training that very few seem to be interested in. However, this is not how a Christian is to think. Christ told the Jews of His day something that every Christian needs to consider important.

John 5:39, "You search the Scriptures [that is, the OT], because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me."

This is an astounding summation of what the entire Old Testament is about, Christ! Everything! Consider, Christ with the disciples on the road to Emmaus following His crucifixion:

Luke 24:27, "And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

Once again, the focus here is the Old Testament. These two disciples in their sorrow and sadness were like so many today, thinking that the word of God was an assembly of unrelated passages and books such that what just happened had no bearing on them. This is why they were so sad! Yet when Christ approached them, He opened their eyes to a most amazing reality: Everything written in the Bible is about Christ, His cross, His redemption, and so His glory! Consider the Old Testament ceremonial system:

Colossians 2:16-17, "Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day [these were Old Testament holy days and elements prescribed by the ceremonial law. And what were they?]- things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."

It was God's intention to prefigure Christ in everything He required of God's people when it came to their worship, their living, their culture, and their society! Everything in the Old Testament from the civil laws which were given to govern the people of God as a nation to the ceremonial laws which directed and dictated the worship of God's people, *EVERYTHING* was written to foreshadow Christ, to speak of Christ, and so to explain and proclaim Him! And so it is today! Christ is the substance of everything we enjoy in salvation! Speaking of the redemption God grants the believer, Paul wrote:

Colossians 3:11b, "...Christ is all, and in all."

That means Christ is the essence of Christianity and the author of salvation, the sacrifice, the teacher, the substance, and the curriculum. Christ is what everything in this book is about... and so everything that makes salvation, salvation!

Philippians 1:21a: Paul said, "For me to live is Christ..."

Accordingly, and not surprisingly, the Kingdom of God is NOT about making much of you and me... it is about making much of Christ and His grace!

Ephesians 1:5-6a, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace..."

Why were you saved? To make much of Christ and His grace! Accordingly, Paul wrote, speaking of Christ:

Romans 11:36, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen."

This is the grand theme behind every providence of God! This is the center around which everything in your life revolves (whether you realize it or not)! It is NOT about your happiness, comfort, or convenience, BUT the glory and honor of Christ!

Colossians 1:18, “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.”

We see this same focus and theme when it comes to Scripture! Speaking of the word of God, Paul wrote this to the Corinthian church.

2 Corinthians 1:20, “For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.”

From all of this we see a Telos of a faithful pulpit: Glorifying Christ. See our tendency as sinners is to think that this world revolves around ourselves. Yet Scripture tells us that it revolves around Christ! As that is the case, the second Telos is seen in that God also will use the pulpit to call for us to abandoned self-trust and replace it with Christ-trust (cf. John 20:30-31)!

**How God Uses the Faithful Preaching of His Word**

<b>Telos</b>	<b>Teaching</b>	<b>Sinful Inclination</b>	<b>Question</b>
To Glorify Christ	Col. 3:11; Rom. 11:36; 2 Cor. 1:20	To Worship/Give Deference to Self	How does this text encourage me to worship Christ?
To Strengthen or Engender Faith	Jn. 20:30-31	To Trust Self	How does this text encourage me to rely upon Christ?
To Attack Moralism	Ezk. 33:23-26	To Relate to God on the Basis of our Deeds	How does this text encourage me to related to God by Grace?
To Exalt God	Ezk. 33:27-29	To Bring God Down to our Level	How does this text encourage me to related to make much of God?

In light of this, what thirdly do you suppose constitutes the Telos of a faithful Pulpit? It most certainly will be to “...destroy every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5b)!

Ezekiel 33:23-26, “Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, ‘Son of man, they who live in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying, “Abraham was *only* one, yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession.” Therefore, say to them, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘You eat *meat* with the blood *in it*, lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood. Should you then possess the land? You rely on your sword, you commit abominations, and each of you defiles his neighbor’s wife. Should you then possess the land?’””

First, we are speaking here of the remnant, those who remained after the three Babylonian Exiles (cf. v. 24a)! For the most part they would have been the lowest of the low, and so the

uneducated, poor, weak, and outcast of Israelite society. This group of exiles are described to us in 2 Kings.

2 Kings 25:11-12, "Then the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon and the rest of the multitude, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away into exile. But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen."

The remnant hadn't learned very much from all the death and destruction of the previous twenty years. Think of it. We know that those in the exile at this time came to their senses and woke from their spiritual lethargy. After realizing that God had not forsaken them but that they had forsaken God, those Jews in exile became spiritual green berets who made much of God's word, much of devotion, much of the service of the Lord. Yet those who remained behind, nothing in their thinking changed (cf. Ezekiel 11:15). The focus of their life remained set on themselves such that they did what pleased them- just as those who were taken in the three exiles!

- When it came to their diet, they ate meat with the blood still in it, v. 25a.<sup>1</sup>
- They continued to worship and serve the perverse gods of the Canaanites<sup>2</sup> and so had no problem with the treachery of murder<sup>3</sup>, v. 25b.
- In relating to one another, they consistently took matters into their own hand and so ruled by the sword, v. 26a (note well, the assassination of Gedaliah, 2 Kings 25:25; Jeremiah 41:1-3).<sup>4</sup>
- When it came to their worship, they engaged in all sorts of deranged sexual acts<sup>5</sup>, even taking their neighbor's wife and laying with them, v. 26b.

They were not sobered by any of these things, because they used to law of God to produce moralism!

Ezekiel 33:23-24a, "Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Son of man, they who live in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying, "Abraham was *only* one, yet he possessed the land..."'"

It was well understood in Judaism at this time that Abraham possessed the land because of his merit (this is why Paul had to go to such lengths in Romans to demonstrate that it was on account of God's grace). And so, God owed him the land! Well guess what?

Ezekiel 33:24b, "...so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession."

That these outcasts remained in the land testified to their moral superiority! If Abraham on account of his moral superiority merited the land, what will God do for the thousands of sons of Abraham whose moral superiority merited the land?

What was God's response to this thinking? What was Ezekiel's charge as a preacher here? It

was to preach His word for sure, but in the process, it was to pronounce God's judgment on all such thinking and living.

Ezekiel 33:25-26, "Therefore, say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "You eat *meat* with the blood *in it*, lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood. Should you then possess the land? You rely on your sword, you commit abominations, and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife. Should you then possess the land?"'"

These are rhetorical questions requiring a negative response. God was NOT going to bless them! RATHER as long as they clung to Abraham, works-righteousness, and NOT the Lord, God was going to continue to discipline them! From this we see that the telos of a faithful pulpit will always be a pronouncement of God's displeasure on all such thinking! Recall the message that John gave the religious leaders that came out to see him:

Matthew 3:9, "And do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."-

Such was the exhortation John gave the moralists of his day! We see it in Paul's preaching to the Jews of his day. Paul gave this shocking exhortation:

Galatians 4:21, "Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman."

Paul essentially is saying to the Jews of his day who prided themselves that they were Abraham's offspring via circumcision, "*You are Abraham's offspring, for sure! BUT don't forget, Abraham had two sons of which you are of Ishmael! (v. 25<sup>6</sup>)*"

A godly pulpit will always attack moralism; which has two expressions:

- That God somehow is indebted to you on account of your conduct (what we see in Ezekiel 33:23-26)!
- That you are the object of God's displeasure because of your sin, inconsistency, compromise, and failure to maintain godly disciplines (the focus of Job)!

This is the telos of a godly pulpit! Accordingly, it is our calling to allow the pulpit to challenge us! SEE THE CHART- fill it out!

### How God Uses the Faithful Preaching of His Word

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Consider another element when it comes to the telos of a godly pulpit; it always exalts God.

Ezekiel 33:27-28, “Thus you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “As I live, surely those who are in the waste places will fall by the sword, and whoever is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who are in the strongholds and in the caves will die of pestilence. And I shall make the land a desolation and a waste, and the pride of her power will cease; and the mountains of Israel will be desolate, so that no one will pass through.””

Upon a first reading, this passage seems rather heavy. The remnant left in Judah fell into the error of the thinking that (1) they were better than those who left and (2) therefore God owed them and so most certainly would bless them. God’s apparent response was rather brutal:

*“You think you’ve got it made because you weren’t taken in the exile? You didn’t! I am going to make your life miserable. No matter where you go or where you hide, I will hunt you down like a dog and kill you!”*

Is that God’s message here? No! Ezekiel 33 reflects the promise God made to His people at the genesis of the nation. Recall when God established the nation at the time of Moses, He gave this warning:

Leviticus 26:21-25a, “If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins. And I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which shall bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and reduce your number so that your roads lie deserted. And if by these things you are not turned to Me, but act with hostility against Me, then I will act with hostility against you; and I, even I, will strike you seven times for your sins. I will also bring upon you a sword which will execute vengeance for the covenant...”

Following the announcement of exile, this is what God said would happen. The text before us is NOT a reflection of a vindictive or capricious God who seems to have gotten up on the wrong

side of the bed. RATHER, it is an announcement that the promise God made to His people when He formed them into a nation was now going to be fulfilled! The point? When the promises God made to His people come to pass:

Ezekiel 33:29, “Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I make the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations which they have committed.”

The word for “Lord” here is יהוה (*Yhvh*), a term which references the essence of who God is- that is His transcendency, His greatness, His self-sufficiency, His otherness! In other words, the message God wanted Ezekiel to preach here was a declaration of the faithfulness of God and so His glory, honor, and greatness as He upholds his promises.

This secondly is the telos of a faithful pulpit! The proclamation of the greatness of God! How important this is!

One of our greatest problems as sinners is that we tend to bring God down to our own level.

Psalm 50:21, “These things you have done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was just like you...”

Sadly, this is the lens through which we view God and interpret His providences.

- Like a man, if a city is destroyed it has to be because God lost His cool!
- If it was NOT a lack of control BUT somehow a matter of justice, then why didn't God destroy the thousands of other cities that look and act the same? *So God is capricious!*

This is one of many ways we bring God down to our own level! Taking the perspective of man, we examine and reexamine life and strive to discover some horizontal meaning to it all- a meaning which preserves the dignity and importance of man AND which ultimately blames God for everything we don't like! Yet based on the text before us, why did God bring upon those who remained in Judah such difficulties? Because they were in Covenant Rebellion and He is faithful to His promises! In fact, if He didn't prove faithful to what He promised we would accuse Him of being untrustworthy, unfaithful, and so sinful. To the contrary, to prove faithful to His promises is to demonstrate that He indeed is the Lord and so the Sovereign ruler of the universe!

It was this that Ezekiel was charged when it came to the proclaiming the word of God. Yes, he must preach the word. But why? So that God, and God alone might receive the glory, honor, dominion, and power!

When it comes to the pulpit, this must always be The Telos/end! Recall Paul's words about preaching:

2 Corinthians 4:5, “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and



ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake."

Christ's Lordship is at the heart of every pulpit! The purpose of this holy desk is to lift the eyes of God's people from themselves and their surroundings to behold the greatness of the glory of God!

- He is the sovereign ruler over all of creation.
- The nations are as a drop from a bucket (Isaiah 40:15).
- The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord... He turns it wherever He wishes (Proverbs 21:1).
- From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever (Romans 11:36)!

Recall, Isaiah's description of a solid pulpit:

Isaiah 52:7, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, *and* says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!...' - this is what we want to walk away with from a sermon:

- God is the great I Am who reigns supreme over all of His creation!
- Nothing is going on in your life that is NOT according to His good and sovereign will.
- In Christ, you are men and women of destiny who will arrive at your heavenly home! God will see you through!

In contrast, consider what happens when the focus of our preaching is NOT the exaltation of God, BUT something else? Speaking of the false prophets Jeremiah wrote:

Jeremiah 23:25-27, "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, 'I had a dream, I had a dream!' How long? Is there *anything* in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, even *these* prophets of the deception of their own heart, who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal?"

Over the course of our study of the prophets, I have referenced on multiple times the dangers and pitfalls of Baalism. Well get this! The same practical affect that Baalism has on a people will occur if a pulpit forsakes preaching the Greatness of God, "...My people [will] forget My name [character]."

And so truly, that which we want when leaving a service of worship is NOT for God's people say, "What a sermon! What a song set! What a service!" BUT, "What a God!" This is the focus a godly pulpit, the glorious proclamation that God is:

- Big!
- Awesome!

- One who can be trusted!
- One who will never let you down!
- One who holds all things in His hands such there are no mistakes! All is according to His sovereign will!

Such was the point of the message Ezekiel was to preach to God’s people, “That they may know that I am the Lord!” May God grant us the grace to desire nothing less from this or any pulpit!

## Works Cited

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- D. G. Watt, T. H. (1890). *The Preacher's Compleat Homiletical Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 25*. London: Richard D. Dickinson.

### Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> D. I. Block wrote of this, “Tradition dates this taboo back to the time of Noah (Gen. 9:4–6), but it was built into Israel’s constitution (Leviticus 17:10–16; 19:26), and recognized as operative by later generations (1 Sam. 14:32–34). The Council of Jerusalem determined that the taboo remained in force for Christians as well (Acts 15:20). Ezekiel had dealt with the problem earlier in 24:7.” (Block, 1998, p. 261)

<sup>2</sup> D. I. Block continued, “On *nāsā’ ênayim ’el-gillûlîm*, ‘to raise the eyes to dung pellets,’ see 18:6, 12, 15 (linked with social ills of all sorts, including violence, oppression, and the defilement of menstruant women), and 20:24.” (*Ibid.*, p. 261)

<sup>3</sup> Block continued, “On *šāpak dām*, ‘to pour out blood,’ as a euphemism for murder see ch. 22, where Ezekiel had associated the crime with all sorts of abominable deeds.” (*Ibid.*, 261)

<sup>4</sup> Block continued, “The idiom *’āmad ’al-ḥereb*, ‘to stand on one’s sword,’ occurs nowhere else. Specific evidence of the lawlessness in the land is provided by the assassination of Gedaliah (Jeremiah 41) and the need for another deportation by Nebuchadrezzar in 582/581 (Jeremiah 52:30).” (*Ibid.*, 261)

<sup>5</sup> D. G. Watt, T. H. Leale, and G. Barlow wrote, “The abomination is adultery. The feminine form of the verb is surprising.” (D. G. Watt, 1890, p. 344)

<sup>6</sup> Moralism- relating to God on the basis of your conduct- always enslaves its adherents. To those in the churches of Galatia that were returning to moralism/works-righteousness, Paul reminded them, “For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.’” (Galatians 3:10)