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The Power and Necessity of Preaching

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Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear radio friends,

Today I am going to speak to you on the power and the necessity of preaching. I have a passion for this subject. But it is not the passion of an artist for his art or an athlete for his sport. I am not passionate about this simply because I do it, but because this is so important for your souls.

Perhaps you ask, “Why does anyone need preaching? Why does it matter?” Perhaps you think it is not all that important. Or maybe, out of weariness of hearing it or, if you are a preacher, weariness of doing it, you wonder whether it is all that important.

Today I want to explain what preaching is and why it is so important and necessary, not just for the church, but for you as an individual.

To begin with, we should see that the church and ministers need to preach because this is what God commands. In II Timothy 4:2 Paul writes to Timothy, a young pastor, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” This is the calling of the minister, and this is what the church needs—because God commands it.

Recently an author who wrote a book about preaching, in which he issues a call to the church to return to preaching, said this in his introduction: “Preaching is being replaced with performance; exposition with entertainment; doctrine with drama; theology with theatrics.” He is right. What the church needs today is a return to preaching.

And the church needs it because you need it. You need it for your soul. Paul says about preaching in Romans 1:15, 16: “I am ready to preach the gospel.... For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for [and here is the important part] it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” In another place Paul says of his work, “I came not to baptize but to preach. Christ sent me to preach.” This is the primary calling of the pastor. This is the church’s duty. And this is what the child of God needs above all else.

And that is what I want to emphasize in this message—that the minister should do this, that this is the work of the church, but especially that you, every one of you as individuals, need, more than anything else in the world, the preaching of the gospel.

First, what is preaching?

The New Testament Scriptures use two words to describe to us what preaching is. The first word is the word from which we get the word “evangelize.” It means simply this: in preaching, one brings good news. You think of Isaiah 52:7: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publish salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” This is what the preaching of the gospel is. And how beautiful, what a wonderful thing, is a messenger who brings the gospel, because the

gospel is good news. It is good news for sinners. It is God's provision of the way of reconciliation, in the way of salvation and the way of deliverance for sinners. And this is what we need. What wonderful news.

In Isaiah 61:1, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." This is what the gospel is. It is liberty for captives. It is the opening of prison doors. It is that which sets sinners free from the clutches of Satan and the power of sin. It heals. What good news.

And, of course, preaching is good news because the content of the gospel is Christ and salvation. When Paul speaks of what he preached in Corinth, he says to the Corinthian church: "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." This was his purpose when he went to Corinth: to preach the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ; the good news of the cross; to bring sinners there; not to preach himself; not to preach a gospel of extra-ordinary gifts that the Spirit might give to some and not to others; but to preach Christ. This is the good news of the gospel. That is the one word.

The other word used in the New Testament, which probably is the more important one to describe preaching, in the Greek is the word *kerux*. It has the idea of being a herald or an ambassador, or one who announces something. And that not only teaches us what the content of the gospel is, but it also teaches us, and more so, about the character of the gospel and the character of preaching.

A herald or an ambassador was someone who was commissioned by a king or a ruler to bring a specific message to the people. A herald used the king's own words. He was not allowed to add anything to the words of the king. He was not allowed to take anything away from the words of the king. He was not allowed to add his own interpretation to the words of the king. But he brought the king's words. He said, "This is what the king has said. Thus saith the king." And that is the idea of the preaching of the gospel.

The apostle Paul recognizes this about his calling to be a preacher when he says in II Corinthians 5:20, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us." Notice what Paul is saying there. Not only is he a herald or an ambassador. But also this, when he in the preaching beseeches the people, God is doing that by him. God spoke through his preaching. Paul brought the words of God and not his own words to the Corinthians.

And the apostle Paul was so committed to this that he was willing to go to prison for it. Before he would open his mouth as a preacher of the gospel with his own words, he was willing to die. He says, "I am an ambassador in bonds that therein I may speak boldly." That is a preacher.

This word is the word that Paul uses in II Timothy 4 when he says to Timothy, "Preach the word," or, "be an ambassador for Christ." He is saying, "Herald the gospel." In another place he tells Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth." He says, "You come with the word and the authority of Jesus Christ. Don't be afraid to speak."

Now as we apply this idea of heralding to preaching, it teaches us first that anyone who preaches the gospel must be commissioned. He must be sent by the King of kings, Jesus Christ, to preach the gospel. No one has the right to appoint himself as a preacher. Even Christ did not

do that. He came as the One sent by the Father, not to bring His own words, but only to bring what the Father had revealed to Him.

So also in the church and in the world today. If a person preaches on his own, his message has no official weight. Christ calls and Christ sends preachers of the gospel through the church. In Romans 10: “How shall they preach except they be sent?”

In the second place, it means this, that the one who preaches must speak only the revealed word of God. He must be faithful in his preaching to what God has given in the Bible. Paul says to Timothy, “Preach the word.” Not just “preach,” but “preach the word.” And in the previous chapter the apostle Paul has just explained to Timothy what that word is. That word is the Scriptures, which are given by the inspiration of God and which are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. He is saying to Timothy, “This is the content of your preaching. Preach the Word of God. Don’t bring your own words.”

This is the temptation for a minister—to bring his own ideas, his own sentiments, into the preaching of the gospel. But he must not do that. He must take the Word of God and exposit and exegete and explain what is in the Scriptures and lay that before the people. He may not bring his own words. He may not take away from the words of Scripture. He may not let his preaching be influenced by public opinion or tradition or what people think. But as an ambassador he must say, “Thus saith the Lord.”

Now, in one sense, that makes preaching very simple. A minister does not have to come up with his own creative ideas. He must labor with the word of God and bring that in his preaching—nothing else, nothing more and nothing less. He stands accountable not to his audience but to God. He must say what the Bible says. In I Corinthians 2:4 Paul says, “My preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom,” but he was one who brought the Word of the Holy Spirit revealed in the Scriptures. So that makes preaching a very straight-forward thing. The minister must explain the Word of God and nothing else.

But at the same time, that makes preaching a very difficult task. It does that because the natural man does not want to hear the Word of God. You can think of examples of that in the Scriptures. This was the cause of the despair of the prophet Elijah. He says in I Kings 19:10, “I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” Elijah is discouraged. He has spoken God’s word, and it seems that nobody is receiving it. Instead, all the other prophets have been put to death and now his life is threatened as well.

You see, it is not an easy thing to preach God’s Word faithfully. People do not want to hear it. The Word of God is offensive. You remember, in the New Testament, that Paul and the apostles were persecuted and imprisoned and martyred because they preached. Paul says to Timothy: “Watch thou in all things; endure afflictions.” This is what will happen, he says to Timothy, when you preach the Word of God.

So that is preaching. And where you find that preaching that is faithful to the Word of God, which comes from a man called by God through the church, you must receive that preaching as the authoritative word of a herald of the King of kings, Jesus Christ.

Now, second, we want to look at the power of preaching. And I want first just to demonstrate the power of the word from the Scriptures. Preaching does something. In Isaiah 55:10, 11, “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” As preachers go forth sending the gospel, there will be fruit. It will be like the rain that comes down and brings the seeds and the flowers in the springtime to life. So shall My Word be. It will do something. It is powerful. It accomplishes what God sends it to do.

In Jeremiah 23:29, “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” That is the Word of God. It is powerful. It is like fire that burns. It is like a hammer that can break in pieces.

In Hebrews 4:12, 13: “The word of God is quick [that is, it is alive], and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight.” The Word of God does not just come to the outward man. It pierces, not just into the flesh, but into the heart, and it discovers the intents and the thoughts of a man. It opens him like a book before God and he is exposed. That is the Word of God. It is powerful.

Now, perhaps you say, “Well, those texts that you just referred to, all speak about the Bible, the power of the written Word of God, but not about preaching. The Scriptures are powerful and the Scriptures are enough.” Then you say, “I don’t need preaching.” It is true that the Bible is powerful. Luther said, “The Bible is alive. It speaks to me. It has feet—it runs after me. It has hands—it lays hold of me. For the Word of God is living!” And it is. Someone asked Luther once, “How do you defend the Bible?” And Luther said, “Defend the Bible? That’s like being asked to defend a lion. I don’t defend a lion. I turn it loose.” The Scriptures, and no one denies it, are powerful.

But God never intended the word of the Scriptures just to stay on paper. God never intended that they would just be read personally. God intended that His Word would be preached, that there would be men who would dig into the Scriptures. Because of their depth, the Scriptures must be opened up and explained. God intends His Word to be preached and explained. And it is the preaching of the Word that is powerful.

That is what Paul recognizes when he says of preaching in Romans 1: “I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome...for it is the power of God unto salvation.” He wanted to preach the Word in Rome. He could have sent them Bibles. But he wanted to preach, because that is the power of God unto salvation.

What does preaching do? Very simply, it saves sinners by working faith in them. That is what preaching does. Romans 10 makes that very plain: “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him...whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” Preaching causes them to call and to believe and to be saved. The preaching saves sinners. And it does this by uncovering the sinner before God. In Hebrews 4: “It penetrates into the depths of my heart. It opens me up like a book before God.” And one of two things will be the result. Either I will see myself before God in my sin and I will say, “I don’t like

this God and I don't like this gospel and I don't want to hear the preaching," and I will run from it. God's Word is a double-edged sword and it will harden sinners. Or it will open me up before God and bring me to my knees in humility before the cross, and I will see that Christ is the only way of salvation. That is what preaching does. It is powerful and it convicts.

And that is what we should want in our preaching. The preacher is not just giving a lecture. The preaching is not something just to address my mind or my emotions. But it addresses the whole man. It should sometimes make me squirm in my seat and make me feel uncomfortable in my sin. It should convict me. It should reprove me. It should rebuke me. It should admonish me. And we should want preaching like that because that will bring us to the cross of Christ in repentance.

Now what is it that gives preaching this power? There are really two things. The one is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit awakens faith in my heart by the preaching of the gospel. But second, preaching has this power because God Himself and Jesus Christ speak through the preaching. In II Corinthians 5:20 Paul says, "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us." When the minister is faithful to the Word of God, when he brings God's Word, saying, "Thus saith the Lord," that gives power to the preaching.

In the preaching you do not hear the voice of a man. You do not come to hear just a preacher. But you come to hear God in Christ speaking to you. It is Christ's voice that calls a sinner to see himself and calls him to faith and repentance. Only Christ can do that. No man's voice and no man's opinions can do that. And that is great consolation for you and for me. We do not have to go to hear men and their opinions, but the Word of God in the preaching. And for the preacher, he does not have to depend on himself and his own ideas and what he might say. So long as he speaks the Word of God, God will use the preaching powerfully.

Now I want to finish by emphasizing the necessity of the preaching of the gospel. I think that after all that has been said about preaching, it is self-evident that preaching is necessary. If preaching is the means to faith, if preaching is the power of God to salvation, if preaching is the voice of Christ, if preaching is what God uses to show us ourselves and to bring us to repentance and the cross—then the churches need the pulpit, and individuals need the preaching of the gospel more than anything else in the world. It does not matter what they think about the music. It does not matter how hot or how cold it is in church. It does not matter if there are 2 or 200 or 2,000 in the congregation. It is what comes from the pulpit that matters. I need the Word of God. The churches need to proclaim the Word of God. There needs to be preaching. This is an urgent call to churches to return to the preaching of the gospel and an urgent call to every individual to attend a church where the Word of God is faithfully preached.

This has to do not just with the honor of God and the Word of God. This has to do with the salvation of souls—of your soul.

Dear listener, I hope you understand this. Your soul, and the salvation of your soul, is tied to the means that God has appointed—the preaching of the gospel. The Holy Spirit works faith through the preaching of the gospel. Do you not care about your soul?

Perhaps you say, "Well, I know I'm a Christian. I know the Bible. I know that God loves me and I think that that is enough." But it is not enough. That is the lie of the devil. God has appointed the preaching as the way that Christ will speak to your soul to save you. You need the

preaching of the gospel. We all do. This is not just a word for those who do not go to church where there is good preaching. This is a word for everyone. Does the preaching speak to you? Does it rebuke you? Does it bring you to repentance? Does it pierce to the dividing of your soul and expose you before God so that you put your faith not in yourself, but in Christ for salvation. You should not listen to sermons just so you can say, "I hope that so-and-so heard that." You should listen because you need the preaching yourself.

This is Christ's appointed means to work faith. If you do not hear the preaching for yourself, your faith will die and your faith will grow cold. The preaching must speak to every one.

May God give us a passion for preaching and a heart for it and an ear for it and a love for it—for the sake of our souls.

Let us pray.

Father, we give thanks for the means to faith and salvation and especially for the preaching of the gospel. Give us a heart for it so that it is maintained here in the earth and so that through it we may be saved and Christ Thy Son glorified. For His sake, we pray, Amen.