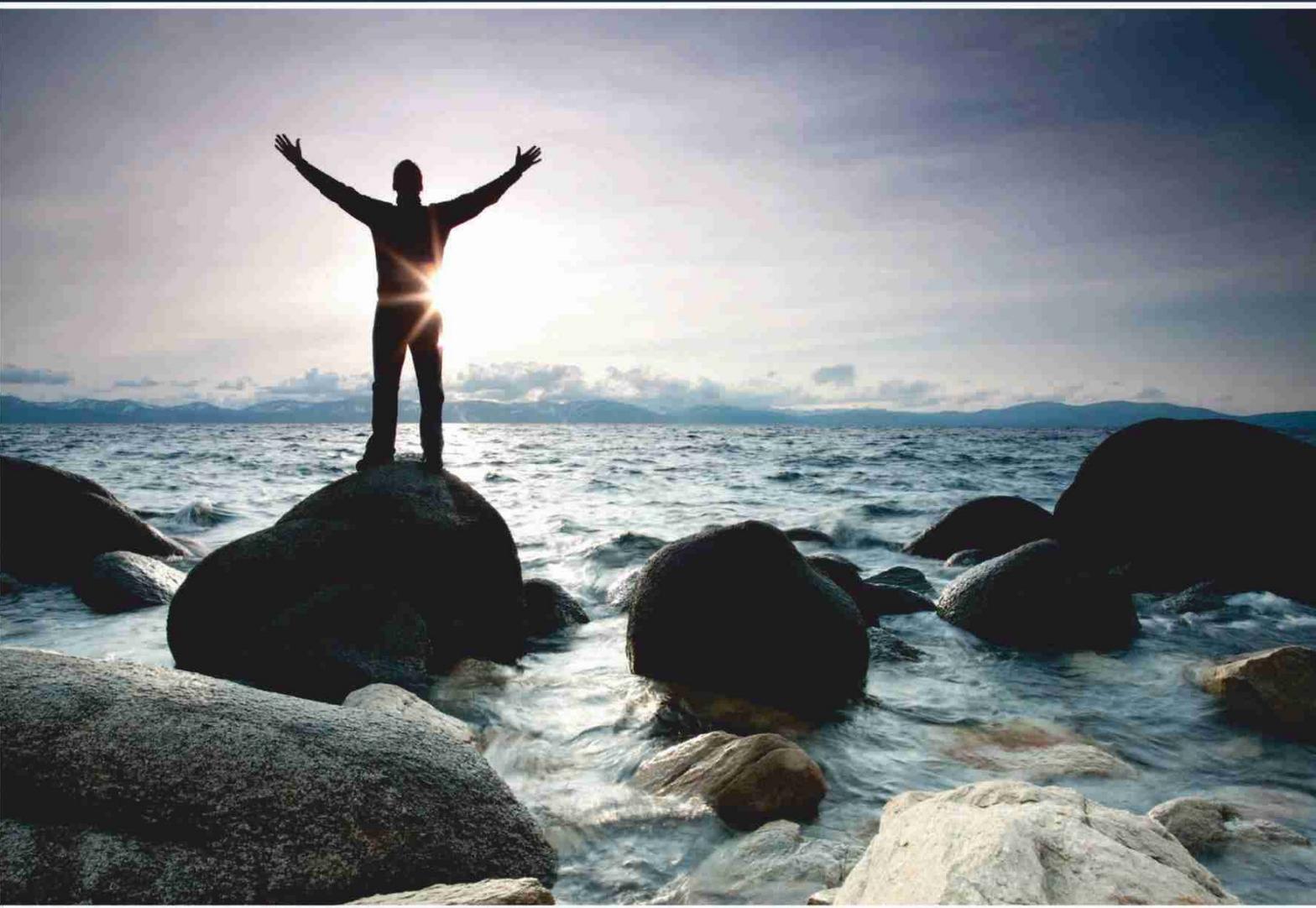


Digging for Treasure

Courage to Preach the Word



Edited by David A. Hull and Mark Reasbeck

DIGGING FOR TREASURE

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A met Publication

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Published on behalf of MET by

MOORLEYS
Print & Publishing
23 Park Road, Ilkeston, Derbyshire DE7 5DA, England
0115 932 0643 - info@moorleys.co.uk - www.moorleys.co.uk

ISBN 978 0 86071 657 0

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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In grateful memory of
JOHN STOTT
(1921 - 2011)
a courageous preacher who inspired others to find
Courage to Preach the Word

INTRODUCTION

David A. Hull

Chaplain, Shebbear College, Devon

'In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word' (2 Timothy 4:1-2a). So wrote the apostle, Paul to his good friend, the younger man, Timothy. Paul knew that if Timothy, facing great opposition, was to remain true to his divinely appointed task, he would need godly courage. The world has changed much since then in many ways, but those who would seek to preach the Word of God today still face opposition. Many people believe that preaching is outdated, that preachers have no right to speak, or have nothing to say. They couldn't be further from the truth! Throughout the course of Christian history, God has chosen to speak to his people through the preaching of his Word. We are, as John Stott explains, 'to speak what God has spoken'¹. What a privilege it is to stand before the people of God with an open Bible, seeking to explain its meaning and apply it to daily life. Yet, if preachers are to fulfil their divinely appointed task, godly courage will be needed just as much today as it ever has been. We need to find courage to preach and, when we do preach, we must have courage to preach the Word. This publication seeks to inspire preachers to seek that very courage.

In his chapter entitled, 'The Recovery of Preaching', Richard Bewes argues for the recovery of the sort of preaching which is nothing less than God's invasion into our world. He reminds us that preaching should be marked by simplicity and a sense of movement as the Word comes down from heaven to earth, particularly at this exciting time in which we now live, an age which is not only post-Christian, but also the new pre-Christian era. Bewes reminds us that the preacher's task is to address the two questions, 'What does the Bible mean?' and 'What is it saying to us?' He considers what it is that has attacked our confidence in preaching over the years and argues for the relevance and recovery of preaching in the Church today.

¹ Stott, John *'Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy'* Leicester: IVP 1973 p.106

In 'The Preparation for Preaching', John Wiltshire begins by both defining and defending the task of the expository preacher before moving on to offer some methods for expository preaching, arguing that careful and prayerful preparation is essential. It is very practical advice that considers how to choose the passage, isolating the dominant thought, arranging the material, adding an introduction and conclusion and, finally, writing down and praying over the message. No one method is perfect, however, so Wiltshire concludes by briefly identifying other methods that have proved to be helpful. He offers 'step-by-step' guides which will help any preacher to 'Preach the Word'.

Celebrating the four-hundredth anniversary of the King James Bible (KJV), Colin Reasbeck, in Chapter 3, 'Courage to Translate God's Word', explores the life and martyrdom of William Tyndale and his influence on the English translations of the Bible. He observes that the KJV has had an unsurpassed influence upon English language and literature, the arts, society and culture and reminds us of the unique treasure that we possess in the Bible. Surely, the great price that has been paid to bring us the Bible in our own language should inspire us to preach it with courage.

Perhaps the greatest courage to preach the Word can be found in remembering three things: that, like Timothy, we too have been given a charge; we too will stand before the judgement seat of Christ and we too have a glorious hope in the appearing and kingdom of Christ Jesus. Paul's encouraging words to Timothy have not lost their power. Let's give the final introductory word to Charles Wesley, himself a courageous preacher of the Word:

*A charge to keep I have:
A God to glorify;
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky;*

*To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfil; -
O may it all my powers engage
To do my Master's will.*

THE RECOVERY OF PREACHING

Richard Bewes

Church of England Minister

Mother, pay the man, and let's go home (J.G. Simpson, *Preachers*)

On the morning of August 27th, 1883, the most stupendous explosion ever recorded took place on the island of Krakatoa. Krakatoa is perhaps the nearest I can get to, as a physical parallel to the spiritual explosion caused within our world by the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead - the greatest difference being that, while Krakatoa's power was destructive, Calvary and Easter caused the greatest shock-wave of hope and confidence that the world has ever known. David Gooding has written:

The resurrection of Christ has altered the face of the universe. Not only is death *not* an irreversible process; it is not even a permanent institution.²

To be sure, following that dramatic week-end in the Middle East, there was a desperate attempt by the enemies of Jesus to halt the preaching; to launch a damage-limitation exercise involving leaked rumours, menaces, threats and bribery - but you can't stop Jesus with *money*. No, the cat was out of the bag, the story had moved on, and the Good News was about to be gossiped and preached along 58,000 miles of Roman highway.

We note that it was not the apostolic miracles, but the *preaching* that rattled the authorities. They were coughing in the exhaust of a movement that one day would stand over the grave of the mightiest empire the world had ever seen.

Of course, preaching did not begin with Jesus and the apostles. The very first divine utterance of the Bible in Genesis 1:3 - 'Let

² *True to the Faith*, Hodder and Stoughton, p.60

there be light' is deliberately linked in the New Testament with the shining out of the light of *Jesus*:

For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', made his light shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.³

On the opening page of the Scriptures, then, is given the original and primal Christological sermon, and it bursts like a volcanic eruption upon the world. All true preaching must stem from that model. Preaching is God's invasion from outside into the world; it is not a conversation, a lecture, an exercise in dialogue, a homely chat, nor even an expression of opinion. It is a confrontation. The preacher who is sent by God has the authority to look into the eyes of a Pharaoh, an emperor or a president, and speak, as God's emissary from outside, with clarity and confidence.

All this is somewhat removed from preaching as it has been represented and sometimes lampooned in recent decades. An anglican clergyman was preaching in India, by interpretation. The passage was 1 Corinthians 13. This was his opening sentence: *The beatific familiarity of this chapter, traditionally appointed for Quinquagesima, must not cause us to neglect its profundity.*

It was translated as follows: "So far the speaker has not said anything worth remembering. When he does, I'll let you know."

Whatever happened to preaching? Throughout all of church history, ever since Eutychus, who fell asleep during an interminable discourse from the apostle Paul, people have been dozing off, even under the finest preaching; and little children have been tugging at their mother's sleeves, and saying, 'Mummy, pay the man and let's go home'.

That aside, as far as we in the West have been largely concerned, the voice of prophecy since World War II has moved inexorably away from the church to the theatre. Indeed the two arenas have ironically exchanged roles to some degree. It is in much of the

³ 1 Corinthians 4:6

theatre that we have come to expect the serious treatment of important and often moral issues. By contrast it is all too often the pulpit which has attempted to titivate and amuse. The entertainers have sometimes become the prophets, and the prophets entertainers - and mediocre entertainers at that.

Other facts underline this decline. In 1900 the average English sermon lasted for thirty minutes and in Victorian times for even forty or forty-five. Today it averages just seven. That tells us quite a lot. Preaching was being heavily downgraded during the 1960s and 1970s. As far as the wider public was concerned, 'the sermon' was associated with yawning, boring irrelevance. It gave place to dance and drama, dialogue and interviews, testimonies or celebration events, and the endless singing of choruses. Today, far more emphasis is laid upon the ministry and gifts of the worship leader in a service or big celebration than upon the preaching. The main action is perceived to be in what is popularly termed 'the worship'.

On another level, the elevation of Eucharistic worship in recent years has been heavily promoted - at least in Anglicanism - and this has been at the expense of the prominence given to the preaching in those earlier 'Bible services' that were altogether better suited in our mission to a largely untaught and unregenerate generation.

It is to this issue of the relevance of preaching, and - let us emphasise, the *recovery* of preaching - that we now turn, as we consider, one after another, some simple axioms:

Preaching means: 'God says'

God says. The moment we fling those two words onto the table, the 'relevance' issue ought to be over. When it comes to true preaching, '*GOD says*'. How could the words of the Creator, the sustainer of the whole universe, ever become archaic and redundant? It is inconceivable that the Enlightenment, for example, should have taken God unawares, or that Postmodernism should catch Him unprepared!

It is only when a *human* origin is attributed to the Gospel, that God's people find themselves being urged, in every generation, to bring it into line with modern thought. Pseudo-academics, in recent extreme cases, have even come up with the fatuous argument, *We wrote the Bible; we can re-write the Bible*.

At this point, let our key Scripture sentence for Christian preachers be 1 Peter 4:11: *'If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God'*.

The apostle is not referring to a subjective inner voice, or to any idea that our own thoughts are to be received as inspired utterances. The power lies in the agency behind the miracle of the new birth, 'the living and enduring word of God'⁴. Karl Barth describes preaching as a 'movement' from Christ to the listener. He writes:

Preaching therefore proceeds downwards; it should never attempt to reach up to a summit. Has not everything been done already?⁵

Barth is saying, This is a word from above! Don't try to create it here below. Don't gild the lily; don't try and improve on God! Billy Graham has said, 'I study to be simple'. It is beyond some preachers to adhere to this wise maxim. We blunt our message by using Latin-based words rather than simple Anglo-Saxon in an attempt to sound impressive. Metaphor gets piled upon metaphor; listeners become exhausted by adjectives strung together, like cars in a traffic jam; what the preachers *think* they have gained in oratory they have actually lost in clarity and communicative edge. There is a style of preaching that goes everywhere ... and nowhere. Some sermons leave the observer, like Joab of old, aware from a distance only of a commotion and a great dust - but unable to make anything of it.

It is also a little sobering to reflect that at the precise moment when much evangelical preaching is relying upon *Powerpoint* for its

⁴ 1 Peter 1:23

⁵ *Prayer and Preaching*, SCM Press Ltd 1964, p.71

enhancement, such bodies as the BBC are abandoning it as essentially a limited *lecture* medium. It could be argued that, in some parts of the West, Powerpoint is at times in danger of killing genuine preaching by death through a thousand scattered bullet points.

For God's word is luminous of itself. In an article on 'The dying art of rhetoric', David McKie made the observation that, even on the political front, today's decline in public speaking 'may have something to do with the decline of organised religion'. He continues:

The parallels are many and inescapable. The huge crowds to whom Gladstone (spoke), and his tireless journeys to reach them, recall the great non-conformist preachers, Wesley and Whitefield ... The language of nineteenth century politicians, too, is full of allusions to religion. Often, in its cadencies and love of repetition, it has a specifically biblical ring.⁶

McKie has a point. When there is a famine of the Word of God, the result across society will be a narrowing of the boundaries of life; a reduction of civilisation's burning issues to the limited general-interest level of housing, pensions, tax relief and petrol prices. With such restricted horizons, is it surprising if political rhetoric is threadbare and pedestrian? And is it any more surprising if, as the pure Word is neglected in the pulpits, people decide that the pusillanimous words of *human* authority are simply not worth going along to hear?

This, then, affects the church. It is only as the giant themes of Creation, the Fall, Redemption and the End Times once again begin to dominate the pulpit and provide a framework for everything, that we preachers can dare to hope for a new recovery and glow in all our utterances, simply because something far bigger than speaker and congregation alike has taken over - and listeners become aware that *God* is speaking. There is no mistaking it when He does!

⁶ *Observer Review*, March 23, 1997

There is no block on God speaking into a situation like today's. In Britain theologians are fond of talking about 'The Post-Christian Era'. It is actually a little more exciting than that. We appear, in fact, to be entering upon a new 'Pre-Christian Era'. The wheel has very nearly gone full circle in Europe; we are back in Athens all over again, rubbing shoulders with a mass of new gods - but we who have read church history know very well that they are no more than old ghosts who have surfaced again from the past, and can be engaged and dealt with.

Confronted in this new Pre-Christian era by Post-modernism, Pluralism, New Age and downright blatant Atheism, we do not have to apologise for coming up boldly with what *God says*. While research into people groups undoubtedly has a value, nevertheless a great deal of time is spent by Christian organisations and churches, on passive and often ineffective 'bridge-building.'

I do not see Paul and Barnabas, faced with pagan, pluralist Europe, occupying themselves forever with building 'bridges of understanding', and saying to one another, *We must try to listen to these people; we must try to understand them*. They did their homework, sure enough. Paul could even quote their own poets to them, but then, unashamedly, they went in boldly and nothing could stop their proclamation.

In a pre-Christian era, anything and everything is believable. That presents us with a set of difficulties, but at least we are allowed to set out our stall, even if, at the end of the day, we are obliged to do as Paul did, and smash our fist through the pane of glass and announce that a day is coming when the world will be judged by God's appointed Man, the validity of whose claims are centred in his resurrection from the dead.

'If anyone speaks', comes that reminder from 1 Peter, 'he should do it as one speaking the very words of God'. Across Christian history, those who modelled preaching to us had this wonderful confidence to be declaratory. *Preaching means: 'God says.'*

Preaching means: ‘The Bible says’

There is an Old Testament text that defines our task perfectly. It is Nehemiah 8:8. Ezra the scribe, the Bible expert, is brought up to the front, with the broken walls of Jerusalem successfully restored, and he is placed on a high wooden podium. Then we read this:

They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning, so that the people could understand what was being read

That is the task exactly! *What does the Bible mean? And what is it saying to us?* This is what the preacher struggles with. As Martin Luther once put it: ‘What a great and difficult work it is, to make the Hebrew writers speak German!’⁷ Indeed, it takes skill and imagination to free the text up and preach it in a way that is faithful to the original, yet living and vivid to a new set of hearers.

One error, already alluded to, is that of trying to improve the Bible’s message by dressing it up. But the opposite error is to kill it by a dry, comma-by-comma commentary. Jean Claude, the reformed French minister of the seventeenth century (a great influence on Charles Simeon of Cambridge) was scathing of such preaching:

Preachments of this kind are exceedingly disgusting; the mind is neither elevated nor informed, nor is the heart at all moved. In matters of religion and piety, not to edify much is to destroy much; and a sermon cold and poor will do more mischief in an hour, than a hundred rich sermons can do good.⁸

John Wesley was to comment in his diary of May 15th, 1744 after a visit to Glasgow:

My spirit was moved within me at the sermons I heard, both morning and afternoon. They contained much truth, but were no more likely to awaken a single soul than an Italian opera.

⁷ *The Renaissance and the Reformation*, E.M. Tanner, Oxford and Clarendon Press 1915, p.142

⁸ *Essay on the Composition of a Sermon*, Claude, 1778, James Cornish and Sons, p.4

There must be many who have spent a life-time in reading essays aloud, and imagined that they were engaged in preaching. The Bible is a living Book, and the preacher does well, during the discipline of preparation, to ask in prayer, first, 'What is the dominant theme and message of this passage of Scripture?' - and then to ask for the animation of God's Spirit to make that message live!

The Bible says.... That is the authority, but there has been plenty to attack our confidence in this respect over recent years.

Indeed we in Britain are neatly placed in between two forms of religious existentialism: one, European, the other American; the first is negative in its expression, the second is positive - but both are equally dogmatic and intolerant of differing viewpoints.

The European form, negative in its presentation, might have as its watchword, *We can't believe that today* - the emphasis being that I, with my own subjective experience and knowledge, am the arbiter as to what is to be believed. It is very negative and intolerantly dogmatic, even to the point of being fundamentalist in its liberalism. Evangelical beliefs are being threatened to this very day by such incipient liberalism.

American religious existentialism is equally experience-based, but positive in form, albeit equally intolerant of those who differ. A typical watchword among its advocates could be, *The Lord has told me*. Here again, I, in my own subjective experience, have become the arbiter as to what God has said, and no one ought to challenge me, not even with the Bible! 'The Lord has told me ...'

Taken to their logical end, both mindsets will tend, however unintentionally, to make Christian people and their preachers sit a little more loosely on the Bible. It is not that people of the Gospel have ceased to believe in the inerrancy and power of the Scriptures, at least as a technicality, but plenty of them are entertaining a hidden suspicion that the preaching of the Bible is not quite enough on its own. They sense that it needs extra support from outside, to give it credentials and validity.

Human scholarship, of course, is valuable, provided it knows its place; the danger arises when the assumption is made that it is the findings of scholarship that imparts additional authority to the Bible; when the preacher thinks, 'This is the Gospel of God, and I feel I need to validate it'. There can come a point when the historical critical method itself subtly moves into the place of authority that the Bible should be occupying. Then the preacher has become subject to a kind of Babylonian Captivity, imagining that - provided the historical and chronological background to a text have been outlined, and the relevant scientific, geographical and archaeological background have been explained - the work is done. Imagine trying to preach that way in a village of Masai nomadic tribespeople of East Africa!

But other careless attitudes are accommodated in regard to the sermon. Statements are sometimes made which divorce the Word from the Spirit. We will hear it said, *That church can teach the Bible well, but we are the ones to provide the power.* Attitudes like this stem ultimately from a loss of confidence in the sufficiency and power of Bible preaching. If emotion, experience or 'power' move into the place that the Scriptures should be occupying, there will immediately be a loss of spiritual power in the preaching. Then follows the temptation to look around for alternative sources of the 'power' that seems to be so elusive. We can then get imprisoned on a merry-go-round of programmes, conferences, panaceas, journals, celebrations and events, in a frantic desire to discover the power that in fact was always there at hand in the preaching of the Scriptures.

Sometimes that source of relevance and power in preaching is perceived as lying in the realm of attractive and entertaining jokes and illustrations. Naturally there is a place for humour, and Jesus himself was always using illustrations. But of no outstanding preacher was it ever said, 'He was a terribly funny man'. No repentant sinner ever came to the Cross of Calvary laughing all the way.

Experiences and testimonies have their place, but they can never be definitive and central. Even those two disciples on Easter Day,

after the dramatic revelation of Christ to them on the Emmaus Road, were exclaiming to each other of how their hearts burned within them - but not primarily through the amazing experience of seeing the risen Christ. What moved them to the core was His explaining to them of the Scriptures along the way.⁹ Explaining and preaching God's Word can never lose its relevance along the highroads of time, for preaching means: *The Bible says*.

Preaching means: 'The preacher says'

Again, we must marvel at the privilege, that the God of the whole universe has thought to entrust the communication of His revealed and saving Word to humans. It is wonderful and terrifying at one and the same time. It is sobering to realise that a congregation all too soon knows whether it has a pastor-preacher who prays, who loves, who reminds them of Christ and who has a love for the Scriptures.

'Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men', wrote Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:11 (KJV). The Greek word *phobos* can mean anything from 'terror', through to 'fright', 'alarm', 'fear', 'reverence' and 'respect'. But, when it is used in the context of the actions of God in judgment, it invariably carries the stronger meaning, as it does here - because the previous sentence of the passage in 2 Corinthians 5 refers to 'the judgment seat of Christ'. Revelation 11:11 is a similar example.

Here is the preacher, then, spurred by the terror of responsibility before the Judge of all the earth. Listen to the Puritan, Thomas Manton:

'O ye ministers of the Word, consider well that you are the *first* sheets from the King's (printing) press; others are printed after *your* copy. If the *first* sheet be well set, a thousand more are stamped with ease. See, then, that the power of religion prevail over your own hearts, lest you not only lose your own souls, but cause the ruin of others.'

⁹ Luke 24:32

Terrifying though this is, yet the supreme motivation of every true preacher is the love of Christ that has drawn us to the foot of the Cross, and from there has sent us out to the people of God, inspired by the magnetism of Calvary.

But what is it that impels those very people to go and hear sermons at all? Why can they not obtain all they require simply from a book, curled up on a settee at home? Somewhere, Martin Luther gives the answer in his comment that, by attending a sermon along with others, *you have let go of the control*. With a book, or even when listening to the recording of a preached message, *you* have the control; you can stop the CD or have a cup of tea. Not so when you are listening with others to public preaching. There is something about being together under the preached Word that creates *a fellowship of assent* within a church, a unity of agreement that *this* is what we jointly believe. The apostle Paul puts it vividly in 1 Corinthians 15:11: *‘Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed.’*

‘I....they....we....you’ - the use of these four pronouns points to the fact that there was a unity of belief among the New Testament churches. They may have varied, from area to area on certain points of church order, but on the essentials of the apostolic doctrine, there was agreement among the saints. *Who were the preachers?* It scarcely mattered - whether it was ‘I’, says Paul, or ‘they’ - Silas, Timothy or Barnabas - *we preach!*

And what did they preach? The answer is there in the passage, the things that were of ‘first importance.’ There was no equivocation, no setting forward of alternative interpretations.

When the theology is loose, we hear it frequently said that a passage of Scripture can bear an infinite number of varying interpretations. But that is not the stance of the New Testament.

True, if I write to a friend and say, ‘I will meet you at the courts tomorrow’, some might wonder whether I meant the law courts or the tennis courts. But for anyone who has done their research on me, my meaning will be apparent; it is the tennis courts I am

referring to! *I do not intend that three or four alternative interpretations are to be attributed to my words.* I would feel mightily insulted as a writer if that were to happen. And it is a mortal insult to the integrity of the writers of the Bible when it becomes assumed that there is an infinite variety of interpretations that can be drawn from their words.

There is only one interpretation of any passage, and it is up to the preacher to work and study, to establish it. This is why the fellowship of others is important. This is why sermons are preached not in a studio, but in the setting of a church, where the listeners can check on what is being said, as the Berean believers did with the preaching of Paul¹⁰. The whole activity is a joint exercise: ‘We preached ... you believed.’ If the preaching is united, the strong likelihood is that the church will also be united and when you have a united church, you have a virtually unstoppable force.

Many young preachers appear to have reached their ceiling by the age of 25 or 30. They never improve, either because they are not hungry, or because they will not take advice. After a while, the sermons all begin to resemble one another. Spending time with the Scriptures, and with books is not wasted time. C.H. Spurgeon, in a sermon on Paul’s words in prison from 2 Timothy 4, about bringing ‘the parchments’, commented: *He’s inspired, yet he wants books! He had seen the Lord, yet he wants books! He’s been caught up into the third heaven, yet he wants books!*¹¹

This is why we who preach need, not only to maintain study on our own, but to engage in study with other preachers. A bite of breakfast, and then into the study time with others, forming a tiny hermeneutical community. That keeps us enquiring, challenging, digging.

Preaching is hard work. It would be surprising if it was not. We are required to ask of a Scripture passage, ‘What is the outstanding truth here, and how can my words fulfil what any piece of good publicity should do - to *attract*, to *inform*, to *persuade!*’

¹⁰ Acts 17: 10,11

¹¹ *The Biblical Illustrator*, J.S. Exell (Ed) 2 Timothy, p.373

All in all, the preacher is faced by the hard discipline of marrying what has been called the Old Hermeneutic and the New Hermeneutic. With the Old Hermeneutic, I am the subject and the Bible is the object; I am bending over the Bible page, and I am asking the question of it, *What did it mean?* As the answers to this question are discovered, I next apply myself to the discipline of the New Hermeneutic, in which the Bible is now subject over *me*, with its question: *What does it say?* It is essential to engage in the two disciplines: ‘What *did* it MEAN - *then?*’ and ‘What *does* it SAY - *now?*’ If we only ask ‘What did it mean?’ and neglect the application, we are in danger of lapsing into antiquarianism. If, however, we fail in the hard work of study, and only ask what the Scripture says to us in the immediate present, we are falling into the danger that both liberals and extremists are prone to, namely existentialism. This all sounds like hard work, and it is indeed the work of a lifetime.

We need to teach our trainee preachers what we already know; that the anatomy of a sermon begins with a text - a main theme, aim and introduction, with the Bible open. I have learnt to spend more preparation time on the introduction than on anything else. If we get the main direction right, we are likely to stay on course. But the message needs bones as well; a framework that will do justice to the flow of the passage. It also needs flesh, not padding, but the filling out of the main substance. An effective message has wings too, those personal and imaginative touches that make a twenty-five minute talk seem like five minutes. William Magee of Dublin, in the eighteenth century, once said, ‘There are some preachers you *cannot* listen to. There are some preachers you *can* listen to. And there are some preachers you *must* listen to!’ So the question must be put to our trainee preachers, ‘Is this message going to take off and fly?’

And has the sermon got teeth? Is there some *bite*, a challenge and application in all that is being declared? As the preacher steps forward to face the people, it should be with the prayerful inner conviction, *In the next few minutes, somebody’s life is going to be changed.*

I remember asking my long-time next-door neighbour, John Stott, whether he found that preaching became harder or easier with the passage of time. He replied at once, 'Oh, it gets harder'.

Continuing work is needed on our faults; on those habits or mannerisms that create an obstacle to our listeners. In my book on public speaking, I include a chapter on The Voice, in which I try to present a few *cameos* of some of the unfortunate speaking habits that I and my fellow-preachers have caught ourselves slipping into at times. It would be too painful to elaborate on them - *the Whine, The Drone, The Bark, The Moo, or The Gallop!*¹² All too easily a style of preaching can degenerate into what is no more than an easily-caricatured 'artform.'

'How did I do this evening?' asked a minister friend, shortly after leaving Charles Simeon's pulpit in Cambridge. The reply was kind, yet honest:

Why, my dear brother, I am sure you will pardon me - you know it is all love, my brother - but indeed it was as if you were knocking on a warming pan - tin, tin, tin, tin, without any intermission!¹³

'The *preacher says...*' Yet our aim is to keep out of God's way! Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine, who first brought Whitefield to Scotland, expressed the task of true preachers, 'that the people would see Christ *past them.*'

Preaching means: Society says

Perhaps here is the greatest issue of all as we think towards the recovery of preaching. What difference does the preaching of thousands of sermons make to the world of politics, sport, wealth-creation, the family, medical ethics, scientific research and ethnic relations?

¹² *Speaking in Public – Effectively*, Richard Bewes, Christian Focus Publishing, chapter 8

¹³ *Charles Simeon*, H.C.G. Moule, Christian Focus

In no way should it be implied that there is no discernible difference. Yet, however effective the preaching, the Christian is aware that we are not going to create heaven on earth. Traditional Marxists looked for a perfectible society, a Workers' Paradise, attainable in this life. Their ultimate disillusionment was inevitable. As Bishop Lesslie Newbigin once observed, 'Those who try to bring heaven down to earth, only succeed in bringing hell up from below.'

Nor do we believe that the coming of a Revival is anything other than the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. Our call is to witness, preach and work for the Kingdom of God, here on this tottering, fallen world, knowing that in this life we are not going to achieve a perfect society. *Nevertheless, we are going to make the attempt.* We can live with such a tension, once we understand it. Let us aim to turn the entire towns in which we live into a church! This may sound laughable. But Paul was laughed at, with the mighty Parthenon just behind him, looking as though it had been carved only the day before, instead of four hundred years earlier. Those jeering were not to know that the Parthenon itself would become a Christian church one day - and a church it remained for a thousand years. Christianity had the Parthenon longer than any other belief system. *So let us make the attempt!* In every generation, the Bible has never lost its power for the whole of Society.

The historian G.M. Trevelyan paid a compliment to the power of the Scriptures during the seventeenth century in Britain, when he wrote that the effect of the study of the Bible 'upon the national character, imagination and intelligence for nearly three centuries to come was greater than that of any literary movement in our annals or any religious movement since the coming of St Augustine'¹⁴.

Why should this not happen again? The Bible is doing explosive work in China, where the church is now uncontainable by the Communist authorities. Further, in a certain part of Asia, through the applied biblical preaching of an indigenous mission agency

¹⁴ *History of England*, Longmans, Green & Co, 2nd Ed, 1942, p.367

seventeen new churches on average are being planted *every day*. In addition, it is currently estimated that for every African child being born on the continent of black Africa, two Africans are becoming Christians. Surely surprises lie ahead for us too.

For a recovery to be on the way here, we shall discover afresh that Preaching means 'God says,' 'the Bible says,' 'the Preacher says,' and 'Society says.' For when Bible preaching is at its best, there is every expectation that its impact will be felt far and wide. Believe, with me, that your church could touch the world. That's what Jesus intended: "Jerusalem.... Judea.... Samaria.... the ends of the earth!"

What's next, people ask? *It's going to be Christ*. We preachers of the eternal Gospel believe it.

How blessed we are to be among the precursors of what is coming next!

It's going to be Christ.

THE PREPARATION FOR PREACHING

John Wiltshire

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John Piper's summary of 2 Timothy 1:1-12 is pertinent - "Timothy, keep feeding the white hot flame of God's gift - of unashamed courage to speak openly of Christ and to suffer for the gospel" - words that also summarise both this publication and, more importantly, our calling¹⁵. I make no claim to originality in what follows, in the words of a fellow Preacher, 'I milk a lot of cows, but I churn my own butter'¹⁶

In this chapter I'd like to look at three things:

1. *Some definitions of Expository Preaching*
2. *Some reasons for Expository Preaching*
3. *Some methods for Expository Preaching*

1. Some definitions of Expository Preaching

Denis Lane defines the exposition of Scripture as 'that process whereby the meaning of a particular passage is so explained in terms of the needs and circumstances of the congregation that the people understand what God is saying to them'¹⁷. For the purposes of this discussion I am assuming that exposition is of a whole passage, rather than simply a text. Denis Lane continues, 'The expositor should be able to take the Word of God and to open men and women's eyes to the application of that Word to everyday life'¹⁸. John Stott writes, 'It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository ... To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. The expositor prises open what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted and unfolds what is tightly packed. The

¹⁵ Piper, John in D.A. Carson (Ed) *Entrusted with the Gospel*, Leicester: IVP 2010 p.12

¹⁶ Pastor Alan Carr - www.sermonnotebook.org

¹⁷ Denis Lane *Preach the Word*, Evangelical Press 1988 p.25

¹⁸ Denis Lane p.27

opposite of exposition is 'imposition', which is to impose on the text what is not there'¹⁹. The great William Sangster writes, 'Exposition merely means *setting forth*, or *explaining*'. He adds, 'Word by word, seeking the overtones and the undertones, he [*sic*] will lay the meaning bare. It is the pure exposition of the Scriptures. Done well, it is perhaps the greatest service a preacher can render his people'²⁰.

In a very real way, as our title suggests, it is 'Digging for Treasure', and is also perhaps 'the missing jewel' in many parts of the Church today. Definitions abound - let me give a few more: The first from a dictionary (Webster's) - The word 'expository' is defined as 'the setting forth of the meaning or purpose of a writing'²¹. When it comes to expository preaching, therefore, it is to set forth the true meaning of the Word of God. The second is from Richard Mayhue. - He gives five elements that identify an expository sermon:

- a. The message finds its sole source in Scripture.
- b. The message is extracted from the Scripture through careful exegesis.
- c. The message preparation correctly interprets Scripture in its normal sense and its context.
- d. The message clearly explains the original God-intended meaning of Scripture.
- e. The message applies the Scriptural meaning today.²²

My favourite definition is from the Bible. It occurs in Nehemiah 8:8, after the rebuilding of the ruined walls of Jerusalem. The people gathered in a great assembly and we are told that the Levites, '**read from the Book of the Law of God, *making it clear*, and *giving the meaning* so that the people could *understand what was being read*'. A transformation resulted. Just read Chapter 9!**

¹⁹ John R.W. Stott *I Believe in Preaching*, p.125 Hodder and Stoughton 1982

²⁰ W.E. Sangster *The Craft of Sermon Construction*, Epworth 1949 p.61. I have also found W.E. Sangster *The Craft of Sermon Construction*, Epworth 1952 helpful in preparation of this chapter.

²¹ Webster's Dictionary p.438

²² Mayhue, Robert quoted in John MacArthur (Ed) *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, Word 1992 p.12-13

This fits with Dr Stephen Olford's comment that 'expository preaching is the Spirit empowered explanation and proclamation of the text of God's Word ... with the specific object of invoking a Christ-transforming response'²³. Commenting on Nehemiah 8:10, Dr Warren Wiersbe gets to the heart of matters: 'There are great treasures buried in God's Word, and you and I must diligently 'dig' for them as we read, meditate and pray', and without prayer, preaching is so much the poorer! The need for prayer underlies the whole chapter! 'When we find these treasures', Wiersbe continues, 'we should rejoice and give thanks' and, in this context, preach them too!²⁴

2. Some reasons for Expository Preaching

In other words "Why do we need it?"

The passage in Nehemiah 8:1-18 gives us several reasons, which are as relevant for the 21st Century Church as they were for the people of ancient Israel. I'd like to focus on three:

a. The need for understanding

We see this particularly in v.1-8. Dr Warren Wiersbe rightly points out that 'The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to cleanse and revive the hearts of the people of God'²⁵. He then goes on to say, 'God's Word must be understood before it can enter the heart and release its life-changing power'²⁶. I believe him to be correct. At least four times in this chapter, 'understanding' is mentioned, in verses 2, 3, 8 & 12. 'Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now **understood** the words that had been made known to them.' Understanding led to action. In Jesus' Parable of the Sower, as recorded in Matthew 13:1-9 & 18-23, again, the emphasis is on understanding the Word of God. Jesus compared understanding and receiving the Word to the planting of seed in the soil where it takes root and bears fruit. Wiersbe points out

²³ www.todayspreacher.com

²⁴ Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Determined: Nehemiah*, Victor 1992 p.101

²⁵ Wiersbe p.96

²⁶ Wiersbe p.96

three things that Ezra the scribe did in this amazing 'Bible Conference'.

- I. He brought the Book v.1-4. It is a travesty if the Book - God's Book - is not brought i.e. prominent in Christian worship today.

- II. He opened the Book v.5-6. The people were there to hear God speak and were willing to stand and listen. Worship followed. Wiersbe comments, 'They didn't worship the book; they worshipped the Lord who spoke to them from the book.' The Bible is supremely, after all, the revelation of God, who He is (in the perfection of His being, and His divine attributes) and what He has done for His people. 'Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' prayed our Lord in John 17:3. How can we know him if his Book is not opened! For long I have taken the motto 'Be a Berean' to heart (Acts 17:11). The Bereans 'received the message with great eagerness and *examined the Scriptures every day* to see if what Paul said was true.' How I long for the day when all of our Churches have Bibles in the seats! Open Bibles please! Am I preaching what's there or is it my own fancy? I want my congregations to tell me and to know from God's Word in front of them!

- III. He read and explained the Book v.7-8. The word was proclaimed and taught in such a way that the people were able to apply it to their own lives²⁷.

I would contend that we need expository preaching and teaching because we desperately need understanding! During my ministry, I have heard many rallying calls to evangelise and seek to bring the lost to Christ and no doubt I have given many such calls - and quite right too, but it is my conviction that unless we truly know our God, and the glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot rise up and take *action* or '*do exploits*' (see KJV of Daniel 11:32).

²⁷ Wiersbe p.96-100

Writing around the time I was born (!) in his seminal book “God has spoken”, Dr Jim Packer said “At no time perhaps since the Reformation have protestant Christians, as a body, been so unsure, so tentative and confused as to what they should believe and do. Certainty about the great issues of Christian faith and conduct is lacking all along the line. The outside observer sees us staggering on from gimmick to gimmick and stunt to stunt like so many drunks in a fog, not knowing at all where or which way we should be going. Preaching is hazy; heads are muzzled; hearts fret; doubts drain our strength; uncertainty paralyses action”²⁸. Now I believe in the 45 years since Dr Packer wrote there are many encouraging signs. However I also agree with Jonathan Lamb who asked “Would it be an exaggeration to say that today, as God’s people, we need to engage in a massive programme of re-education?”²⁹

One of my preaching heroes of a former generation tells of the time he was Vicar of Christ Church, Cockfosters, where they needed to have two evening (!) services in order to get everyone in. One of the big London newspapers ran a series of articles about those churches in the capital which were well attended. The question they were asking was “Why are these churches so full when so many are so empty?” When he was asked that question he replied “Well, I believe that people want to know what God has to say. My task is to find out from the Word of God what he has to say and then say it”. In the same vein more recently John MacArthur commented “When I started ministry I committed myself to expository preaching, just explaining the Bible, because I know that there was nothing I could say that was anywhere near as important as what God had to say”.³⁰

²⁸ Jonathan Lamb Keswick 2000 Responding to God’s Word p.135 OM 2000 *The Keswick Convention Website is well worth visiting – it gives access to much written Expository material, at very competitive prices. I also thoroughly recommend the annual Keswick Convention itself – over three weeks in the Lake District each Summer. There is no charge for the Convention. Excellent exposition and relevant worship.* www.Keswickministries.org

²⁹ Lamb p.135

³⁰ George Duncan *Preach The Word*, p.4 Marshall Morgan and Scott 1989. See also John MacArthur – *Servant of the Word and Flock* – Banner of Truth Trust - 2011

There is today a need for understanding what God has said and is saying through his Word. There was in Nehemiah's day and there is today. Expository preaching is, I believe, foundational for this need to be met. The prophet's words of a 'famine' of hearing the Word of the Lord challenge me constantly. I have been asked, "Is not expository preaching 'heavy' and 'academic', relating only to certain 'types' of people"? "Not so!", is my reply. Rev Stuart Olyott amply demonstrates this in his helpful and brief publication "Ministering like the Master". Here is someone who has the ability to expound profound truth accessibly to all, and in the words of one of his chapter headings "Our Lord was Not a Boring Preacher"! - and nor should we be!³¹

b. The Hunger of the People

I would wish to argue also that there is a hunger amongst our people for hearing the Word of the Lord. Certainly I have found this to be the case over 20 plus years of ministry in a Methodist context. I remember chauffeuring Charles Price when he was speaking at a local Bible Teaching Convention. As the journey progressed he reminded me that he'd spoken more than once at "Easter People". A comment that he made, and said positively, has always stuck with me ... "I always feel a great hunger when I speak at Easter People". The words of 2 Timothy 4:1-2 come to mind, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction". I love the Living Bibles paraphrase, "all the time be feeding them patiently with God's Word".

The same hunger underlies Nehemiah Chapter 8. The physical is complete i.e. the wall has been rebuilt; now attention is given to the spiritual. Jonathan Lamb sees three indications of the people's hunger:

³¹ Stuart Olyott – *Ministry Like the Master*, p.1-33 Banner of Truth Trust 2003

- i. Their expectancy v.3, v.5, v.13.
- ii. Their commitment v.3 - they stood for almost 5 hours without even a Coffee break!
- iii. Their reverence v.6. Ezra and Nehemiah put the Word of God first in the life of the city. V.9-12 show part of the people's response to the "making clear" and "giving the meaning so that the people could understand." They were deeply, deeply moved; there was mourning and weeping; God's word had touched their lives. In other words, the Word had done its work³².

However the same word that humbled also brought joy and Nehemiah exhorted the people to rejoice and celebrate. They did so "because they now understood the words that had been known to them." Their hunger had been met; the joy of the Lord and a confidence in him and the marvel of his forgiveness, as the context makes plain, had been made clear. Psalm 19:8 - "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant giving light to the eyes." Just read our Lord's Resurrection sermon in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus to see the reality of those words. What a Bible conference that would have been! Dr Jim Packer is spot on again when he writes in another context "The joy of Bible study is not the fun of collecting esoteric titbits about Gog and Magog, Tubal Cain and Methuselah, Bible numeric and the beast, and so on; nor is it the pleasure, intense for the tidy minded, of analysing our translated text into preachers' pretty patterns, with neatly numbered headings held together by apt alliterations' artful aid. Rather, it is the deep contentment that comes from communing with the Living Lord into whose presence the Bible takes us - a joy which only his true disciples know"³³.

That's why we need Exposition of the Scriptures! Indeed, as William J U Philip helpfully states: "If our focus is right, then God will be at the centre; he will be pre-eminent in all things. Our eyes will be upon him, his person and his glory; our ears open to his

³² Lamb p.140-142

³³ Quoted in Lamb p.142

Word of life-giving power, and our hearts opened to his church, the bride of his Son, whom he gave himself up for, and is now gathering from the ends of the earth to be with him for ever”.³⁴ There is much more that could be said, but we need to move on to the third reason for “Why” we should seek a revival of such expository preaching.

c. The Necessity of Obedience

This is seen in Nehemiah 8:13-18. As the words were made clear, and the meaning given so that the people could understand what was being read, they made a tremendous discovery; they realised they had not been living according to God's Word - how could they have been? They didn't know it! Verse 14 is instructive, “They found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem, 'Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees to make booths' - as it is written” - and they went out, in obedience, and did so. This amounted to a rediscovery of the Feast of Tabernacles in its fullness. The people not only had great joy in hearing the Word, they also had “very great” joy in obeying it. The Feast of Tabernacles was a time of looking back and remembering the forty years wandering in the wilderness when they lived in “booths” or temporary shelters - tents if you like! It was a time of looking around at the harvest blessings from God's good hand, and of looking ahead to the glorious future promises of the Lord (Zechariah 14:4, 9, 16-20). It was a week-long celebration with joyful praise and thanksgiving, focusing on God's goodness³⁵.

The point is - it was through the exposition of God's Word that the people were called back to full obedience in the celebration of this

³⁴ William J U Philip p.22 PT Media 2002 *Again I recommend a visit to The Proclamation Trust web site. The Proclamation Trust runs a number of excellent Preaching Conferences, and has a range of good resources, some available to download free of charge.* www.proctrust.org.uk/

³⁵ Wiersbe p.103

festival in its fullness. The English Standard Version Study Bible comments, “it is not security alone that is essential to the life of the community, not even the temple, but trust in God and obedience to God’s Word as revealed through Moses.”³⁶ This is, I believe, one of the great benefits of, and therefore also an indicator of the need for, consecutive Biblical exposition. You discover and re-discover truth you may otherwise have neglected, forgotten or just not been aware of.

At Highworth Methodist Church for the last eight years, and in Hexthorpe Methodist Church for years before that, we have, with the co-operation of Circuit Local Preachers and Ministerial Colleagues preached through “chunks” of the Scripture. (We have recently concluded, for example, a series on Mark’s Gospel.) More than one Preacher has commented “Had that passage not come up next in the series I would never have thought of preaching on it - but I’m so glad I did”. Hitherto neglected or unknown truths come to the forefront and by God’s grace a greater obedience should follow. It certainly did in Nehemiah 8. I concur with the Pastor who wrote “Expository preachers believe that the Word has more authority than their own personal opinions and anecdotes, and they consider it their divine mandate to herald that word with boldness and conviction. Expository preaching is preaching that exalts the Word of God so that the God of the Word can be glorified”³⁷, and he is glorified in the humble, and indeed joyful, obedience of his people.

To paraphrase the old children’s rhyme:

**“Here’s the Church. Here’s the steeple.
Open the Word. God speaks to his people”³⁸**

³⁶ ESV Study Bible p.836 Crossway 2008

³⁷ Source of quotation lost. *However please see Our Perfect God; A Summary of the attributes of God – Tim Smeaton Day One 2005, which directs our attention to Him*

³⁸ Don Carson

3. Some methods of Expository Preaching

Finally we move on to preparing an expository sermon. Whole books have been written on this, and in the footnotes I recommend several. There are indeed different ways of preparing expository sermons, so I give three suggestions, focusing on the first. However we do it, prepare we must! and prepare carefully, thoroughly, prayerfully and in dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

In his helpful book “I believe in Preaching”, John Stott tells the following (here slightly abbreviated) story to make this point. It is worth taking to heart! There was a certain Anglican minister who was lazy. He had long ago given up bothering to prepare his sermons. He was reasonably intelligent and his congregation were accepting and he got away with it for some time. He decided, to satisfy his guilty conscience, that he would make a “vow” that he would always preach extemporaneously and “place his trust in the Holy Spirit”. Everything went well until one day the Bishop, enjoying a rare Sunday off, walked in and sat at the front of the Church. The minister was horrified. He’d managed to get away with not preparing for years, but could he fool the Bishop? In his embarrassment he told the Bishop of his solemn vow to always preach extemporaneous sermons. The Bishop seemed to understand, and the service began. Half way through the sermon, however, the Bishop walked out. After the service the minister found a note from the Bishop left in the vestry. It simply said “I absolve you from your vow!”³⁹

If we are concerned with “the passage, the whole passage and nothing but the passage” we need to work hard at our preparation “struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works” in us (Colossians 1:29). How then do we prepare?

The first method is adapted from John Stott. It is roughly how I would go about my own preparation. He suggests six basic stages -

³⁹ Stott p.211. For the true and vital role of the Holy Spirit in Preaching see Spirit Empowered Preaching – Arturo G. Azurdia 111 Mentor 1998

a. Choose your Passage.

This is obviously key. As John Stott comments, “we are not speculators, but expositors”.⁴⁰ At this point I would like to advocate consecutive planned expository preaching through a book of Scripture (for example, an Epistle or a Gospel or part of a Gospel), a scriptural theme (e.g. holiness), or a character study over a number of weeks (e.g. the life of Elijah). Series can be short or long, depending on the subject matter and context, for example in one church we currently do continuous exposition through various parts of the Bible both morning and evening, in another we prefer to do two or three mini series each year. Planned consecutive week by week exposition of the Scripture is not easy to achieve in a Methodist context, but it is possible.

Denis Lane points out several advantages to this approach -

- I. “By preaching to a plan, whether it is by going through a book or by covering certain subjects, the whole of God’s plan can be unfolded”.
- II. “Regular exposition enables us to deal with some important matters of Christian living in a natural way”. (I have covered matters when they come up in the course of a series such as marriage, which, like the preacher quoted earlier, I may well not have thought to cover, did it not come up in the course of the programme - and don’t both Christians and not yet Christians need to hear what God says about such subjects?).
- III. “As the congregation begin to hear planned expository preaching, they start to think ahead”. (We always publish the passages in our church bulletins in advance.)
- IV. “Ethics, both pastoral and social, will begin to take their place in the regular teaching.”
- V. “The Old Testament will have its place in planned expository preaching”, and so we could go on.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Stott p.213

⁴¹ Denis Lane p.30-32

It is amazing how many times that the passages prayerfully set, months beforehand, have been, under the Holy Spirit, precisely the word we as a congregation have needed to hear. I reject the objection sometimes raised that the Holy Spirit only tells the preacher what to preach the week (or night!) before the Sunday service. He is far bigger than that! Again talking personally, in my own preparation, a great deal of the angst of choosing a passage is removed. You have God's Word in front of you, and thus participate with others in proclaiming "the whole counsel of God".

Stuart Briscoe helpfully lists some of the series prepared over the years. I quote one, entitled "Where to Find Help", based on the letter to the Hebrews -

1. Where to find help Cleaning up your Life - Hebrews 1:1-4
2. Where to find help Coping with your Fears - Hebrews 2:14-18
3. Where to find help Facing up to your Frustrations - Hebrews 4:1-13
4. Where to find help Dealing with your Temptations - Hebrews 4:14-16
5. Where to find help Seeing beyond your Problems - Hebrews 5:7-6:12
6. Where to find help Handling your Insecurities - Hebrews 6:13-20
7. Where to find help Clearing your Conscience - Hebrews 9:1-14
8. Where to find help Strengthening your Faith - Hebrews 10:19-39
9. Where to find help Running your Race - Hebrews 12:1-13
10. Where to find help Developing your Worship - Hebrews 12:14-29
11. Where to find help Improving your Attitudes - Hebrews 13:1-6
12. Where to find help Following your Leaders - Hebrews 13:7-25⁴²

⁴² D. Stuart Briscoe *Fresh Air in the Pulpit*, p.128 IVP 1994

I don't recommend simply 'lifting' someone else's series. Our minds work differently, but the above is one example of how it can be done. A group of preachers could perhaps meet together to plan out such a series. If I do not recommend 'lifting' a series, I most certainly do recommend reading and listening to expository preaching, which is the way, perhaps, that I have learnt most over the years.

b. Meditate on your Passage

John Stott speaks of the advantages of "a long period of 'subconscious incubation'".⁴³ He then goes on to explain what he means! If you know fairly far in advance what your passage is you can subconsciously meditate on it, and reflect on it as time to preach it begins to draw near. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was in the habit of choosing his passage in good time. He would then "try to sink deeply into it, so as to be really clear what it is saying".⁴⁴ Dr Jim Packer comments that in some kinds of preaching "the text is reduced to a peg on which the speaker hangs his line of thought; the shape and thrust of the message reflect his own best notions of what is good for the people rather than being determined by the text itself".⁴⁵ This is not the case with the "digging for treasure" of expository preaching. Again, to quote Stott, after the passage has been subconsciously reflected on, "sooner or later the time for more concentrated preparation arrives. What should the preacher do now? Read the text" (of the passage), "re-read it, and read it again. Turn it over and over in your mind, like Mary the mother of Jesus who wondered at all the things the shepherds had told her, 'pondering them in her heart' (Luke 2:18-19) Chew it as a cow chews the cud"⁴⁶. He continues "There is no substitute for spending time with the text".⁴⁷ I wholeheartedly agree! Truly this book is "Not like any other book".⁴⁸

⁴³ Stott p.220

⁴⁴ Stott p.220

⁴⁵ Quoted in Briscoe p.104

⁴⁶ Stott p.220

⁴⁷ Stott p.223

⁴⁸ I take this title broadly from Linleigh J. Roberts Know Your God – The Doctrine of God in the Pentateuch p.19 Evangelical Press 2009

Two key questions should be addressed to the passage

- I. What does it mean?
- II. What does it say?

We are seeking therefore the original meaning of the passage. E D Hirsch rightly emphasises “a text means what its author meant”⁴⁹ - and what is its message today, in the light of the whole revelation of God in Christ? For Old Testament preaching I have found Dale Ralph Davis’s book “The Word became fresh”⁵⁰ particularly helpful in this respect.

Personally it is at this point that I begin to dig into the commentaries. Practices vary from preacher to preacher, as to when to begin to use commentaries, but personally I find this a good time. There are a number of commentary series that I find particularly helpful. These are listed in the footnotes.⁵¹

c. Isolate the Dominant Thought

As we meditate, pray and study John Stott argues that we should be looking for the dominant thought in our passage - “every text has a main theme”⁵². Again two questions come to mind:

- I. What is God saying?
- II. Where does the emphasis lie?

“I am not denying that there may be several legitimate ways of handling a text, and several different lessons to learn from it; what

⁴⁹ Quoted in Stott p.221

⁵⁰ Dale Ralph Davis *The Word became Fresh* – How to Preach OT narrative Today – Mentor 2006

⁵¹ ‘Of the making of commentaries there is no end!’ Without endorsing every single word, from the perspective of preaching, I have found the following Series most helpful – The “Be” Series e.g. *Be Determined* – *Nehemiah* by Warren Wiersbe – virtually the whole Bible is now covered – Victor. *The Welwyn Commentary Series* – 49 volumes so far, dedicated to “practical exposition and exhortation of Scripture”. Evangelical Press, Focus on the Bible Series. *Christian Focus Publications* – especially anything by Dale Ralph Davis. *The Bible Speaks Today* – IVP. The ESV and NIV Study Bibles are also a valued resource.

⁵² Stott p.225

I am asserting, however, is that every text has an overriding thrust. We need the integrity to discern this and to resist the temptation to give the text a twist or stress of our own”.⁵³ David Day writes similarly of the uniqueness of a passage, “One very important implication might be that any particular passage in front of me has to be taken very seriously indeed. Spelled out, that means that each passage has something distinctive to say, or at least, I ought to approach it with that assumption. *Let me raise the stakes a little; God has something to say through this particular passage which he has chosen not to say in any other way* (emphasis his)”.⁵⁴

Again, at this point I find the commentaries help, as does having another preacher in the household! Most of all, thank God for the Holy Spirit, the One who inspired the word also illumines it still: God-breathed, utterly reliable. John Stott again, “so then, in our sermon preparation, we must not try to by-pass the discipline of waiting patiently for the dominant thought to disclose itself”.⁵⁵

d. Arrange your material to Serve the Dominant Thought

We are now seeking to enable the passage’s main thrust to make its maximum impact. This means that some information, as interesting as it is, needs to be left out. Denis Lane is helpful here: “Television adverts manage to convey a message in thirty seconds by ruthlessly cutting out all material not absolutely necessary.” If the preacher doesn’t do the same “you will lose both your sense of direction and your congregation.⁵⁶ Our hearer’s ability to receive is usually far less than our desire to give”. Conversely “we have to subordinate” all relevant material that we’ve mined out of the passage “to our main theme in such a way to illumine and enforce it”.⁵⁷ Three things, at least, help us to do this:

⁵³ Stott p.224

⁵⁴ David Day P.17 *A Preacher’s Workbook*, Lynx SPCK – 1998

⁵⁵ Stott p.227

⁵⁶ Lane p.45

⁵⁷ Stott p.228

- I. A Structure. I am a “three point” man, and without being unduly artificial I have found this to be a helpful structure (see George Duncan’s comments later). William Sangster conceded “that a sermon can be without form - and such is the grace of God - not utterly void”, but then goes on to add that “This” however “borders on the miraculous. No sermon is really strong which is not strong in structure too.”⁵⁸

- II. The Words we use. “Words matter. In order to communicate clearly, we have to clothe our thoughts in words. It is impossible to convey a precise message without choosing precise words.”⁵⁹ This is a subject in itself. Personally speaking our context is important e.g. what newspapers might people read? I read both the Times and the Mirror, but what about our hearers? I don’t think it’s wrong to use the great words of the Faith - indeed we should! It’s part of exposition, but when we speak of Redemption, Justification by Faith, Propitiation etc. - we must explain them!

- III. Illustrations. In my first appointment someone approached me after a service, thanked me for the sermon, and then proceeded to tell me what was wrong with it! One of his most helpful comments was, “We need some more illustrations, John. They’re windows to let the light in”. How true! Stuart Olyott takes us to the Ministry of the Master. He speaks of the three fold method of Jesus “and what was it? It was to *State - Illustrate - Apply* (his emphasis). Those three words changed my whole understanding of how preaching was to be done.”⁶⁰ The Evangelist Roger Carswell makes an incisive and relevant comment relating to Galatians 3:1 - “Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified”. He points out that the converted Christians of Galatia didn’t physically see Jesus crucified. So what did Paul mean? “He

⁵⁸ Quoted in Stott p.229

⁵⁹ Stott p.231

⁶⁰ Olyott p.2-3

is reminding them of the messages they heard from Paul himself. Paul preached in such a way that he turned people's ears into eyes and they saw the truth".⁶¹

e. Add the Introduction and Conclusion

When I first read these words in Stott's "I believe in Preaching" I found them so helpful! One of the things I most struggle with is the introduction. My practice is now to get on with writing the body of the sermon and then add the introduction (and the conclusion) last! I find it works! Obviously both introduction and conclusion are vital, grabbing the attention and applying the message - and it was liberating to find that John Stott actually recommends adding these last! If that's not a problem for you fine, but for me I have found this most helpful. There are many ways to begin and end. I like to recapitulate at the end quite often, although not all the time. However we do it I like to remember the words of Dr Paul White, author of the Jungle Doctor Books, who spent a life time working in Africa - "Hook 'em, hold 'em, hang onto 'em, humour 'em and hit 'em!".⁶²

f. Write down and pray over your message

I've probably been doing this throughout, but at some point the message should be written out. I take a full - and often amended! - script into the pulpit, but I do not read it. Others take notes of salient points only. However we do it my final words from John Stott are pertinent, "Good extempore preaching is very rare. Few people are such clear thinkers and concise talkers that they can express themselves lucidly on their feet without prior written preparation".⁶³ I remember hearing one preacher speaking on preaching years ago. He has an excellent expository ministry. One comment he made stuck with me, "I used to preach without notes, then I listened to myself on cassette (and it was cassettes then!)

⁶¹ *Facing a Task Unfinished* – Roger Carswell p.24 Christian Focus 2011. A related resource is www.10ofthose.com which contains much helpful evangelistic Bible based material, including evangelistic preaching material

⁶² Stott p.248

⁶³ Stott p.254

and I was shocked at how woolly and unclear it was. Sharpness and clarity are essential.” A prayerful dependence on God, of course, underlies the whole.

As I draw this chapter to its conclusion, because as already stated, we are all different, and the Holy Spirit uses us differently, let me briefly summarise two other approaches to preparation.

Firstly from Rev George Duncan. He says he had never really given his way of preparing to preach much thought until he was asked to write about it! When he reflected on what he did, three things emerged -

1. The first was to *analyse the text* - “in other words, to find out exactly what the passage, parable or miracle had to teach. So I would break the text into bits and pieces, finding out everything that seemed relevant, that seemed to speak to the needs of my heart and the hearts of my people”.
2. Secondly he would try to *crystallise the truth* - “that is to gather the bits and pieces into groups and headings. (I prefer three, simply because that’s about as much as most people can cope with!) The bits and pieces in the groups had to hang together and say something distinctive. Then my task was to find some words that would briefly sum up what those bits and pieces had to say”.
3. Thirdly “*I humanise the telling*” - “the vocabulary of the study is not necessarily the vocabulary of the pulpit The language we use must be of the ordinary person.” In other words, “Speak to the heart”. Preaching is not “a purely intellectual exercise”. He stresses Jesus’ concern with “real human life and human need” and the importance of illustration, application and inspiration.⁶⁴

Lastly, let me simply give the headings Denis Lane uses -

⁶⁴ George Duncan p.5-6

1. Study the passage thoroughly and soak yourself in its contents.
2. Write out an analysis of the passage.
3. Examine the passage for relevance to modern life i.e. its application.
4. Examine the structure of the passage.
5. Find the main message in the passage.

He then gives helpful pointers on organising your material -

1. Make your points clear and relevant.
2. Present your main points in a logical manner.
3. Stress your main points.

Finally he gives guidance as to developing the main points of your message -

1. Ask yourself whether you need to emphasise all the truths to achieve your aim.
2. Write down your thoughts in line with your aim.
3. Build up to a climax that emphasises your aim and then be prepared for a quick end.
4. Decide how much or how little time you can give to each part and keep to that.
5. Rely upon the Holy Spirit during delivery.
6. Arrange the order of presentation of your points for maximum effect.
7. Use parallel Scriptures carefully.⁶⁵

What an amazing privilege! - and what an awesome responsibility it is to “read from the Book Making it clear, and giving the meaning, so that the people (can) understand what (is) being read” (Nehemiah 8:8 - adapted). Indeed - what a task!

One parting word, the most vital of all, centrally and continually we must point, and point, and point again to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Bible itself in both New and Old Testaments does. “Sir, we

⁶⁵ Denis Lane p.38-47

would like to see JESUS” (John 12:21). He is after all “the Word made flesh” (John 1:14), “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3). So -

“Preach the Word. This should be our privilege and passion, knowing that when we do so, we share the voice, the hand, and the heart of God with thirsty people.

Whether they know they are thirsty or not, their hearts’ cry is always, ‘Give me Jesus’. How do we do that? Preach the Word.

When I am alone, give me Jesus. How? Preach the Word, and his voice will minister his presence.

When I am afraid, give me Jesus. How? Preach the Word and his hand will guide my path.

And when I am defiled, give me Jesus. How? Preach the Word, and his heart will cleanse my soul.

Give me Jesus. How? *Preach the Word* (2 Timothy 4:2)”⁶⁶

“Not that we are competent in ourselvesour competence comes from God” (2 Corinthians 3:5).

Thanks be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for his incomparable Gift!

Soli Deo Gloria.

⁶⁶ Ed Carson p.124. Chapter written by Bryan Chapell

COURAGE TO TRANSLATE GOD'S WORD

Colin Reasbeck

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A look at William Tyndale, his martyrdom, and his influence on the King James Bible

“Lord, open the King of England’s eyes” were the famous words of William Tyndale’s dying prayer in 1536. Remarkably, within two years, King Henry VIII issued an edict that every parish church should provide for its parishioners before the next Easter (1539) “one book of the whole Bible of the largest volume in English”. It is said that three large volumes were made available in the old St Paul’s Cathedral and crowds of people gathered round in daylight hours to listen to it being read from the three lecterns. Tyndale’s buried seed had produced fruit almost immediately. There was much more in succeeding years. A series of English versions followed, culminating in the publication of the King James Bible (KJB) in 1611.

In the year of the 400th anniversary of the KJB, it is being recalled that William Tyndale was described as “the Apostle of England”. His voice is being recognised as the single biggest influence behind the “most successful book ever produced by a committee” as it is estimated that at least 80% of it are his words. The Preface of the English Standard Version (ESV) of 2001 refers to Tyndale’s New Testament (NT) of 1526 as the “fountainhead...(of)...the classic mainstream of English Bible translations over the past half-millennium”.

Tyndale’s Bible translations were the first into English from the original languages. His translations were also the first to be printed and to be made available in large numbers. His other writings showed his ability as a reformed theologian; as a supremely skilled linguist he had a significant contribution to the development of the English language. But his stature as the greatest of all English Bible translators rests on the fact that so much of the very first translation from the original languages into

English has never been improved upon. This applies to sentences, phrases and single words. For example, the choice of “ponder” in Luke 2:19, out of many possible synonyms, was repeated in the 20th century by the Revised Standard Version, New English Bible, Jerusalem Bible, New International Version, English Standard Version.

1. Why did it take courage to translate the Bible into English?

(a) Because of England’s history of opposition to a vernacular Bible

As he contemplated beginning his translation work, Tyndale would have been aware of previous opposition which was enshrined in the Constitutions of Oxford of 1408 which were passed to control the Lollard movement. This had arisen around the ministry of John Wycliffe, an Oxford don, who had expressed anti-clerical views as well as criticising some of the central doctrines of the church. He asserted that truth was only to be found in the Bible, inspiring a translation from the Latin Vulgate into English that became known as the Wycliffe Bible. Dozens of manuscript copies were made (though few at the side of Tyndale’s thousands). Wycliffe died in 1384 but he was formally branded a heretic at the Council of Constance in 1415. So for over 100 years before Tyndale it had been illegal without official permission to translate the Bible into English, and preaching and criticising the church were forbidden. These measures, designed to stamp out Lollardy, were stricter than anything found on the continent, and were a reason why England lagged behind in vernacular Scriptures. It is not coincidence that Lollard influence continued strong in Tyndale’s home area in the Cotswolds. But official attitudes on these matters had not changed and this was dramatically illustrated in Coventry in 1519 with the burning of six men and a woman for teaching children the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments in English.

It was unsurprising then the church leaders were appalled at the spread of Lutheranism in England around 1520. Those who had begun a serious study in England of the Greek New Testament made available by Erasmus were not long in seeing for themselves the key doctrines that had been lost over the past centuries. There

was a ready market for Luther's writings that were smuggled into this country along the trade routes that would be later used for Tyndale's books. Luther had begun his protest in 1517, criticising the abuses in the church and expounding the doctrine of justification by faith which he had discovered in Paul's letters to the Romans and to the Galatians. In 1520 there was a public burning of Luther's books in Cambridge. A year later, a similar event took place in London. "Before an enormous crowd, Wolsey took the chair under a canopy of a cloth of gold, attended by a brilliant throng of peers, bishops and ambassadors." Churchmen were always afraid of the link between a vernacular Bible and heresy and/or rebellion. Wycliffe and the Lollards had been persistently linked with the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and Luther's reputation later was to be damaged by the Peasants' War of 1524-5. While protestations of any link were made, the Bible was a dangerous book to be placed in the hands of ordinary people (or so it was perceived).

(b) Because of the refugee life-style Tyndale was compelled to adopt

Tyndale's life-story is fairly straightforward, partly due to lack of detailed information. Born probably in 1494, he studied at Oxford, at school and university, where he came under the influence of the humanism that had been stimulated by Erasmus's NT Greek text and his new Latin translation. "Erasmus's Latin broke a thousand-year chain, the unchallengeability of Jerome's Vulgate text. But his Greek was the real breaker of chains. Luther saw that the Greek made a new German possible. Tyndale was to do even more and discover in the Greek an English which was to last for 500 years" (David Daniell, Professor Emeritus of English Language, University of London). But first Tyndale discovered Christ in his Greek NT. He did not need Luther to teach him about justification by faith for he found it himself, both the doctrine and the experience, and began teaching it to others, both as a leader of a small group in the university and later as a street preacher at St Austin's Green in Bristol. It was there in Oxford, and possibly after spending some time at Cambridge in a group that included at least six future martyrs - Bilney, Barnes, Frith, Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley - that Tyndale conceived the idea of translating the Bible into English.

Initially working at Sodbury Manor, near Chipping Sodbury in the Cotswolds, he failed in his attempt to obtain a licence from the Bishop of London for his project, though his preaching in St Dunstan's, a church in Fleet Street, attracted the attention of those who styled themselves as "scripture men", including significant merchants. They helped him come to the conclusion that there was no safe place for him in England, and he was compelled to seek anonymity on the continent. No pictures, portraits or rough sketches of him were ever produced during his lifetime. That would have increased the risk of him being identified. Under the famous portrait, posthumously produced, which hangs in his old Oxford College are Latin words which mean:

*"To scatter Roman darkness by this light
The loss of land and life I'll reckon slight."*

From 1524 his whereabouts and activities can only be traced by the arrival in England of a series of his publications as he spent time in places like Cologne, Wittenberg, Hamburg, Marburg, Mainz, Worms, Antwerp. In 1525 he narrowly escaped arrest as the Cologne print workshop of Peter Quentell was raided. Only work up to Matthew 20:12 survived, and separate sheets of these chapters found their way to England as the first-fruits of Tyndale's continental labours. In 1526 his first translation of the New Testament arrived in bales of cloth and other merchandise, then a series of books on current issues, leading up to the second edition of the NT in 1534. A frustrated Henry VIII, unable to find him but aware that through his books his influence was becoming widespread, exclaimed "He is nowhere but is everywhere!" But soon agents, royal and ecclesiastical, were on his trail and following a particularly deceitful betrayal, he was arrested in 1534 and put to death two years later.

(c) Because English was not a prestigious language

Tyndale showed that his interest in Bible translation was practical not academic. English was an unfashionable language. In the university library at Oxford only 60 out of 6,000 volumes (1 in 100) were said to be in English. This is why Tyndale's work was to have such a significant impact on the English language, just as Luther

and Calvin are credited with significant contributions to the development of the German and French languages with their Bible translation work. The great Erasmus apparently never spoke a word of English throughout his stays at Oxford and Cambridge. Similarly, Latin was the language spoken by Tyndale during his time at the universities, whilst French was the court language.

Tyndale is credited with being fluent in seven languages other than his own, Latin, Hebrew, Greek, French, German, Italian and Spanish and “whichever he speaks, you would think it his native tongue”. Thus he had several translations to use in his work though it was the originals that he truly majored on. Tyndale made two discoveries that greatly facilitated and encouraged him in his work. First he found that translating Hebrew into English was much easier than into Latin and also he sensed the Greek of the NT, via the Septuagint, was influenced by the Hebrew of the OT. He preferred to translate Old Testament (OT) quotations in the NT direct from the Hebrew rather than from the Greek NT.

But like a true linguist Tyndale was a master of his own language and it was this skill he used to produce the kind of translation he was after, as near to the original as possible, but simple, direct, clear English that “even the plough-boy could understand.” For Tyndale the translation had to make sense, and it should be the language that ordinary people spoke, not what the scholars wrote. He was magnificently successful in this. There are a number of aspects to this that Daniell has helpfully analysed.

In practice this meant he used Anglo-Saxon rather than Latin-based words. Tyndale was a master of writing sentences consisting almost entirely of one-syllable words.

“They heard the voice of the Lord God as he walked in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8).

“Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid” (Matthew 5:14).

“And the floods came and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it” (Matthew 7:27).

“So we pray you in Christ’s stead, that ye be at one with God: for he hath made him to be sin for us, which knew no

sin, that we by his means should be that righteousness which before God is a-loved” (2 Corinthians 5:20-21).

We know too from many familiar passages in the KJB that Tyndale was a master at creating memorable phrases. These are just a few that came from his pen:

“Man shall not live on bread only” (Matthew 4:4).

“No man can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24).

“To give up the ghost” (Mark 15:37).

“Let not your hearts be troubled” (John 14:1).

“The scales fell from his eyes” (Acts 9:18).

“The powers that be” (Romans 13:1).

“Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might” (Ephesians 6:10).

“Fight the good fight” (1 Timothy 6:12).

In addition to phrases like these, there were new words he coined for Bible terms such as Passover, scapegoat, mercy-seat, atonement, loving-kindness.

Tyndale’s direct style also caused him to avoid subordinate clauses, typical of Latin and go for sentences of simple construction. His use of “and” underlines his concern to translate as people spoke. It is particularly evident in the narrative sections of the OT, for example in Genesis 28:11-12. In these two verses Tyndale uses eight “ands” (all retained in the KJB); the NIV uses one.

Daniell says that Tyndale captured in his translations the glory of the English language in its early development, with its rich vocabulary and multitude of synonyms. He suggests he must have had a remarkable poetic and musical ear. “He turned NT Greek-coloured-by-Hebrew into rhythmic, unforgettable English”. And yet when Tyndale began, English was regarded as an inferior language. Such was his influence that some judges go so far as to say “no Tyndale, no Shakespeare”.

(d) Because Tyndale’s theology was implicit in his Bible translations

Emotions can still be aroused when familiar words and terms are replaced by unfamiliar ones, not least if there are theological implications. The RSV was criticised, for example, for its substitution of “rooms” for “mansions” (John 14:2) and “expiation” for “propitiation” (1 John 2:2). Tyndale’s changes were of a different order. They had the effect of undermining the sacramental structure of the Roman Catholic Church by his use of “repentance, love, acknowledge, favour, elder, congregation” in place of “do penance, charity, confess, grace, priest, church.”

Some of the traditional terms may not have been inaccurate translations but their usage over centuries had filled them with new meaning, and some like “do penance” and “priest” were simply wrong. Together, the old terms described a system where “grace” was administered by the “church” to those who “confessed” their sins to a “priest” who decided the appropriate “penance”. Tyndale’s shock tactics emphasised the internal nature of true repentance and faith, and that people constituted the church not the hierarchy. “*Thou art Peter and on this rock I will build my congregation*” sounds strange even to our ears. It was not surprising that the church establishment reacted furiously. At one point the Bishop of London was buying up copies of the infamous 1526 edition to burn, whilst on the continent Tyndale and his friends arranged to supply such customers to finance the next edition!

(e) Because of the virulent opposition and persecution that his work provoked

It is difficult to exaggerate the anger and hostility that Tyndale’s work produced. Apart from the two editions of the NT (1526 and 1534), a constant flow of his writings poured into England. There were three important books on key subjects: justification by faith (the first statement in English of the key Reformation doctrine), the requirement of Christians to obey their rulers, and an examination of the texts showing the validity of Henry’s first marriage, as well as further published translation work like the “Pentateuch” and “Jonah”. All this was seen primarily as the work of a heretic and as an attack upon the church as an institution (which truly it was).

He was not surprised when some of his writings were burned; he had witnessed the bonfires that destroyed some of Luther's work. But what dismayed and amazed him was when, as he said, "They burned the New Testament". Their excuse was that it contained so many errors that it ceased to be what it claimed to be, the Word of God. Tunstall, the Bishop of London, who himself had worked with Erasmus on the Greek text, ordered searches for "this pestiferous and pernicious poison." But then a third step was taken. Men began to be burned for their association with Tyndale, either for being directly involved in his work or for possessing one of his heretical books. Some of the finest young scholars in England were arrested and several killed. Chief amongst the casualties was Tyndale's close friend and colleague, John Frith. There was dismay across Europe as the news spread. But others too, of lower profile, in the south and east of England, in London, Oxford, and Cambridge felt the weight, and sadly the heat, of the church's anger.

Tyndale felt personally the sufferings of those who had in their possession copies of his NT or other of his books. As Calvin was later to write from exile in Geneva to those imprisoned and suffering in France, Tyndale corresponded from exile with those in prison and awaiting death in England, seeking to strengthen them in the Lord. He also personally felt the withering verbal assaults of Thomas More who had been commissioned to respond to Tyndale's writings. But More had met his match. Nevertheless the vitriolic language and abuse that poured forth from More's pen did no credit to a man whose reputation has strangely been maintained over the years.

The suffering and persecution culminated in the eventual betrayal of Tyndale himself. A charge of heresy was brought against him by the Imperial authorities representing the Emperor, Charles V, the nephew of Catherine of Aragon. Tyndale prepared his defence during his 501 days as a prisoner in Vilvoorde Castle in Belgium with a small treatise called "Faith alone Justifies before God". He wanted it to be clear what it was he was dying for. In October 1536, with the prayer for King Henry VIII on his lips, William Tyndale was strangled at the stake in a foreign land, and his body

committed to the flames. His prayer was to have an unexpectedly early answer.

2. Why did Tyndale have so much influence on the King James Bible, seventy five years after his death?

(a) Because of the series of English translations that appeared 1536 to 1611

1535 Coverdale's Bible

Even before Tyndale died, his colleague Miles Coverdale had produced a Bible in English. He was really the editor, incorporating a number of different translations including some of his own work from Latin, but the core was from Tyndale including the NT, the OT from Genesis to 2 Chronicles along with other smaller sections (like Jonah). Coverdale's Psalms became enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer.

1537 Matthew's Bible

This was the pseudonym of William Rogers. It was basically the same as Coverdale's, but included marginal notes. It was approved by Henry and "set forth with the King's most gracious licence".

1539 The Great Bible

This had the authority of Thomas Cromwell who asked for a revision of Matthew's Bible without the marginal notes. It was a combination of Tyndale and Coverdale and held the field until the Geneva Bible was printed.

1560 The Geneva Bible

This was the most important translation after Tyndale's even up to the Civil War. The KJB was very unpopular when first published. The "Mayflower" was searched lest copies of that "pernicious" book should find its way to the New World. The Geneva Bible was known as the Puritan Bible; it was the Bible of Shakespeare (who died in 1616), of Oliver Cromwell and his Roundhead soldiers, and used by Milton and Bunyan. It was the work of English exiles in Geneva during the time of the Marian persecution. For the first time chapters were divided into verses. It was noted for its

“apparatus” which consisted of Bible references, illustrations and more controversially for its marginal comments basically explanatory but which often strayed into the political realm, not least with warnings about tyrants. In some circumstances they might be overthrown, since even the King was not above the law. Unsurprisingly this was not popular with King James I with his strong belief in the Divine Right of Kings. Nevertheless, the Geneva Bible was significant in the build-up to 1649 and the execution of Charles I. In Scotland, under Knox’s influence, it became law in 1579 for every household to have a copy. To replace the Geneva Bible was one reason why James acceded to the Puritan request at the Hampton Court Conference for a new translation to be undertaken.

1568 The Bishops’ Bible

This was regarded as the official Bible through to 1611 but had difficulty competing with the Geneva version.

1582 The Roman Catholic Rheims New Testament

This was translated not from the Greek, but from the Latin Vulgate which the Council of Trent had confirmed was the only authorised Roman Catholic Bible.

In all these translations, with the exception of the Rheims NT, Tyndale’s work lived on. The change in atmosphere, the freedom to translate and propagate English versions of the Bible, with reformed doctrines alongside them, would have astonished him.

(b) Because the aim of the KJB was to “make a good translation better”

The KJB translators did not begin with a blank sheet of paper. Their approach has been described as “backward-looking”, certainly conservative on a number of key decisions. This attitude helped to preserve Tyndale’s influence.

Among the rules drawn up for KJB translators were instructions to follow the Bishops’ Bible, but other translations were to be used when closer to the text, such as Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthews, Whitchurch (printer of the Great Bible) and the Geneva. The old

ecclesiastical words that had been replaced were to be used, specifically “church” not “congregation”. However they only restored “church”, “confess”, and “charity” but retained “repentance” and “elder” and the doctrinal change these words represented from the Vulgate’s “do penance” and “priest”. There were to be no marginal notes. No emphasis was given to originality and novelty for there was a belief that “one generation is nourished by the achievements of its predecessor”. Nor was literary elegance given as a criterion to the translators, accuracy was the overwhelming value. Alister McGrath argues that aiming at truth, “they achieved what later generations recognised as beauty and elegance”. The KJB was “Appointed to be read in the Churches”. For at least another 100 years that meant being read aloud, whether in the home or in church. How it sounded was therefore of supreme importance, but this had always been Tyndale’s consideration.

Bible translators are always aiming at a moving target and there can be no perfect or ultimate production. As well as the discovery of better manuscripts of the biblical text and progress in the study of ancient languages, the English language was developing. The translators showed their conservatism in shrinking back from incorporating recent changes and therefore even as it was published the KJB seemed slightly old-fashioned. Generations were to be brought up on “*the greatest of these is charity*” although “love” had been the preferred word for 80 years in the Tyndale/Geneva versions of 1 Corinthians 13.

Alister McGrath has drawn attention to an intriguing if unimportant example of the translators’ difficulty. This is in how they dealt with the changing meaning of the word “his”. Matthew 5: 13 in the KJB reads, “*if the salt have lost his savour*” changing slightly from Tyndale’s, “*if the salt have lost her savour*”. But Matthew 6:34, (where Tyndale reads, “*for the day present have ever enough of his own trouble*”) the KJB reads, “*Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*”. The Middle English definition of “his” as “belonging to him or to it” was becoming more specific and the word “its” was being introduced. The KJB had reservations about using this new word and did so only once throughout the entire KJB, in Leviticus

25:5, “*that which groweth of its own accord*”. The translators resorted to using the clumsy “thereof” for all measurements as in Exodus 25:5 for example, “*the length thereof.....the breadth thereof*”, avoiding “*its lengthits breadth*”.

More important however is the retention of what was already becoming outdated, even obsolete, the use of “thee, thou, thine” etc and verb forms like “est, eth,” etc. There is evidence of the shift in some of Shakespeare’s verse, but there is no difference between Tyndale’s text and the KJB in this respect, although there had been a massive change in spoken English. Long-held arguments that the retention of the old forms reflects the dignity appropriate when addressing the Godhead can easily be seen to be invalid. Texts from Genesis 3:9, “Where art thou?” and Matthew 16:23, “Get thee behind me Satan”, where Adam and Satan are being addressed, also retain the older forms. In any case, such terms tended to be used, as in modern dialect, to peers and inferiors rather than to superiors.

This raises the issue of whether religion should have its special language, removed from ordinary, everyday speech. Tyndale had made his position clear. But the KJB translators diverged and were not true to *koine*, the everyday language of the NT. The language of the KJB controlled the language of Christian devotion, of prayer and praise, for at least three and a half centuries. It is a strange contradiction that Tyndale would have been unhappy that his words in this respect were retained. The current imaginative revision of some of Wesley’s hymns would have been unnecessary had the KJB translators been bolder.

(c) Because of the sheer quality of Tyndale’s work

The quality of Tyndale’s work has already been assessed. He had outstanding skills as a linguist, in English as much as in other tongues with an ability to choose just the right word, to coin a new phrase, to construct sentences that were clear and yet sonorous. No one person is automatically identified with the KJB. Tyndale’s name is absent from the preface. Yet modern computer analysis has shown that at least 83% of the NT in the KJB was Tyndale’s work and a similar percentage of the OT section that he had

translated. The translators were not necessarily conscious of this because much of their eventual script was percolated through the various versions they referred to, all of which were indebted to Tyndale's original work.

(d) Because of Tyndale's motivation

There were different motives among those responsible for the translation of the KJB, from King James downwards, reflecting the religious and political tensions of early 17th century England. The King hoped the new translation, being neither Puritan nor Roman Catholic, would be a means of uniting his new nation. In some cases the interest was of an academic nature, in others a matter of prestige at being involved in such a high-profile royal project. Finance does not appear to have been a motive since the participants were not financially rewarded. But none would have had quite the motivation that spurred Tyndale on in his dangerous work.

Tyndale's testimony was that he "found Christ" as he read his Greek NT. John's Gospel told him, in his translation of the words of Jesus, that "*This is life eternal, that they may know thee that only very God, and whom thou has sent Jesus Christ.*" He determined that his countrymen should hear this Gospel, that they might believe in Christ, especially that they might know that we are saved through faith in Christ and in his sacrifice upon the cross. For this to happen they needed the Bible in the vernacular language.

Tyndale started from scratch. That has been true of no other English translator since. Every subsequent translation has to some extent been a revision. Tyndale's translation consequently had a vibrancy and an urgency that belonged to no other. It was a significant element in the KJB.

(e) Because Tyndale's NT was sprinkled with the blood of martyrs
God's blessing must have been uniquely present on the work of a man hunted down and killed for wanting to propagate the Gospel. He was not the only one. Others in this country died because of their involvement in what Tyndale was doing. They too share the martyr's crown. Little could they or Tyndale have imagined how

dramatically and overwhelmingly his dying prayer would be answered, or that the English language would be used so effectively in spreading the knowledge of Christ around the world, supremely through the King James Bible, carrying so many of his words and phrases to the ends of the earth.

Conclusion

In this anniversary year, 2011, the importance of the KJB in understanding English culture is being acknowledged: in the realms of English language and literature, in music and the visual arts, in government and politics, even in what constitutes “Britishness”. It is not always recognised that values still regarded as important and that undergird democracy like truth, freedom, tolerance, justice, equality, reverence for life, human dignity, mercy, forgiveness, discipline, stem from the same source. The impact of the KJB has been immense within these islands and throughout the English-speaking world. As the 6 million English speakers of Tyndale’s day has grown to an estimated 1.4 billion, it can only be seen as an amazing providence that God raised up such a man at the very fount of English Bible translation. William Tyndale was a decisive influence on the subsequent history of the dissemination of the Gospel in our country and beyond. We are all truly in his debt.

Prayer:

*Almighty God,
by whose grace and power your holy martyr William Tyndale
triumphed over suffering and was faithful unto death:
strengthen us with your grace,
that we may endure reproach and persecution,
and faithfully bear witness to the name of Jesus Christ our Lord;
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God now and for ever.
Amen*

CONCLUSION

Mark Reasbeck,
Pastor, Gateway Church, Barnsley

**“Speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly”,
Philippians 1.14.**

The Apostle Paul writes how his fellow Christians were encouraged to “speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly”. Indeed, they were spurred on by Paul’s total commitment to Jesus, his master, whilst a prisoner in the Roman Palace! They were inspired, because of Paul’s chains (Philippians 1:14) - his sufferings for Jesus.

We too need to be inspired by the heroes of the past to stir us up in the present. This book reminds us of the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, and the courageous ministry of William Tyndale. The other two chapters in this book both quote and remind us of a very recent ‘inspiration’, John Stott, who died in July 2011. His fruitful ministry, books and leadership, will surely live on to influence the world-wide church for many more years.

Whether it is the apostle Paul, Tyndale or Stott, or many others, the truly great preachers throughout the history of the church have been those who have recognised that they have no authority in themselves. Rather they see their task as explaining the unique words of Scripture and applying them in a real and relevant way to their hearers. That takes courage.

Whilst creativity, and good speaking ability, and personal testimony all have their place in good preaching, something else is still needed. Great preaching draws its power from God’s powerful words. Courage is needed for the preacher to address the congregation and in essence say, ‘Here is the passage...This is what it means...Do you understand this?...You must believe and obey it with all your heart because this is what your Creator is saying.’ That’s the authority of Scripture. It requires courage. It is bold and daring.

But what does it really mean to have ‘courage’? Some translations use the phrase ‘more bold’ in Philippians 1:14. It is not a ‘grin and bear it’ attitude, but a quality of life rooted in faith in the risen Jesus.

‘And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed...’

(2 Timothy 1:11-12).

‘So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?” ’

(Hebrews 13:6).

The above verses of Scripture remind us that, as Preachers, we are called (appointed) and we may consequently experience hardship. It may simply be subtle mockery of God’s Word that is aimed at us, but we know the truth (‘I know whom I have believed’) and the Lord stands beside the Preacher in the Pulpit (‘the Lord is my helper’). That is the source of our courage. It is a quality of confidence in God. True Preachers seek to be faithful to God’s Word, in the preparation and in the delivery, whilst placing themselves in the hands of the almighty God.

Therefore, courage to preach is derived from the Preacher’s personal relationship with the Lord, empowered by His Holy Spirit. I close with this illustration from the preacher John McArthur, from his very first sermon at Grace Church where he has ministered for over 40 years.

“There was an actor at a drawing room function who was asked to recite something for the audience. He stood up and being gracious to his audience said, “I’ll recite anything you would like me to recite.” No one suggested anything at first. But an old preacher who happened to be there, sitting at the back of the room, stood up and said, “I’d like to hear you recite the twenty-third Psalm”.

Well, the actor was a little shocked at that, but he had made himself available to recite anything that was requested, so he did what the man asked. He happened to know the twenty-third Psalm, so he said he would recite it. He repeated the twenty-third Psalm with complete eloquence - it was a masterful interpretation. His diction was beautiful. When he finished, the entire room of people erupted into spontaneous applause.

The actor, figuring he'd get back at the old gentleman for suggesting he recite something from the Bible, said, "Now, sir, I'd like to hear you recite it." The old gentleman hadn't bargained for that. But because of his love for Christ he stood up and repeated the twenty-third Psalm. His voice cracked, it broke, and it wasn't very beautiful. The interpretation wasn't really that good either. When he finished there was no applause, but there wasn't a dry eye in the room.

The actor, sensing his own emotion, stood up and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I reached your eyes and ears, and he reached your heart. The difference is this: I know the Psalm; he knows the Shepherd."⁶⁷

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (John 10:14). So as we read and reflect on 'The Recovery of Preaching' and the 'Preparation for Preaching' in this 400th anniversary of the King James Bible which has had such an impact upon the world, it is vital we keep close to the Shepherd because it is in Him alone that we find our courage.

Keep on speaking.⁶⁸ Keep your spiritual fervour.⁶⁹ Keep in step with Spirit.⁷⁰ Keep the unity of the Spirit.⁷¹ Keep yourself pure.⁷²

⁶⁷ *Truth Endures...Landmark Sermons*, by John MacArthur, published by Grace to You 2009, p.84

⁶⁸ Acts 18:9

⁶⁹ Romans 12:9

⁷⁰ Galatians 5:25

⁷¹ Ephesians 4:3

⁷² 1 Timothy 5:22

Keep your head in all situations.⁷³ Keep your lives free from the love of money.⁷⁴ Keep yourselves in God's love.⁷⁵ Keep the words of this book [the Bible].⁷⁶

Keep 'Digging for Treasure' with 'Courage to Preach the Word'.

⁷³ 2 Timothy 4:5

⁷⁴ Hebrews 13:5

⁷⁵ Jude 21

⁷⁶ Revelation 22:9



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If preachers are to be faithful to their divinely appointed task, godly courage will be needed. In *Courage to Preach the Word*, the contributors seek to inspire us to find that courage, restoring expository preaching to its central place in the life of the Church. Preachers are encouraged to prepare to preach carefully and prayerfully and to celebrate the priceless treasure we have in the Bible. Read on to find *Courage to Preach the Word*!

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Cover by **amillionmonkeys**

Published by **MOORLEY'S**
Print & Publishing

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