

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

“The Preaching That I Bid Thee”

By Tommy L. McClure

Introduction

“And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. And Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a days journey, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:14).

In events leading up to this passage, God had commanded Jonah to cry against Nineveh because of its wickedness (1:1,2). For some unknown reason, Jonah didn't want to do so and sought to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord (1:3). Considering God's omnipresence and all-seeing eye, this was a rash, foolish, failure-destined move (Psa. 139:7-11; Jer. 23:24; Psa. 15:3; Heb. 4:13). Though Jonah found a ship going to Tarshish and boarded it, his attempted “get away” was brought to disaster: God sent a tempest which almost broke the ship to pieces, the mariners cast lots to see who was to blame from their plight, the lot fell upon Jonah (*“be sure your sin will find you out,”* Num. 32:23), he was cast overboard and swallowed by a great fish prepared by the Lord (1:4-17). Note that every step he made was down – down to Joppa and down into the ship (1:3), down into the sides of it (1:5), down into the sea (1:15), down into the belly of the fish (1:17), then down to the bottoms of the mountains (2:6) – down, down, down! And friend, that is the direction you will go, spiritually, if and when you try to flee from God! In the fish's belly Jonah prayed unto the Lord, probably the most earnest prayer he had ever prayed in his life, and upon the Lord's direction the fish vomited him out upon dry ground (ch. 2). Then God spoke to Jonah the second time in the words quoted above.

“The preaching that I bid thee” was not changed from what God had commanded at first. He had told the prophet to *“cry against it”* because of their wickedness (1:2). Their wickedness had come up to God and his wrath was coming down upon them. If the severity of the message was what caused Jonah's attempted flight, it was not changed to please him. God is no compromiser, neither with preacher nor hearers. With him *“is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”* (Jas. 1:17); *“another gospel”* he will not tolerate (Gal. 1:6-9); and those who know him not and obey not the gospel of his Son will suffer *“everlasting destruction”* (2 Thess. 1:6-10). Compromise is contrary to His nature, for He is *“a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he”* (Deut. 32:3, 4); there is no unrighteousness with him (Rom. 9:14), and in him is light and no darkness at all (1 Jn. 1:5). Why should and how could such a Being compromise? His word is everlasting and unalterable; it does not conform to the whims of men, but they must conform to its truths and laws!

What kind of preaching does God require today? We are not left in the dark as to the answer, for we can determine it by statements, commands, necessary inference and approved examples contained in God's word. Often there is a vast difference between the preaching God bids and that which men want; men often want *“smooth things”* (Isa. 30:8-11) and ear-tickling fables (2 Tim. 4:14), but God says, *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God”* (1 Pet. 4:11).

The preaching God bids is:

Christ-Centered Preaching

This was the outstanding characteristic of apostolic preaching!

Look at Peter's sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:22-36). He preached that Christ was approved of God by miracles (v. 22), crucified by the hands of lawless men (v. 23), raised from the dead by God's power (v. 24), and exalted by God to the high position of Lord and Christ (vv. 33, 36). When the convicted hearers asked Peter and the other apostles what to do, Peter told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (vv. 37, 38). Christ - center and circumference of the preaching!

When Paul waited for Silas and Timothy at Athens, stirred by the widespread idolatry which there existed, he disputed both in the synagogue and market; to some of the opposition, he seemed to be a proponent of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection (Acts 17:16-18).

When the same apostle went to Corinth, his determination was to know nothing among them except ***"Jesus Christ and him crucified"*** (1 Cor. 2:1,2).

When Philip went to the city of Samaria, he preached Christ unto them (Acts 8:5). When he met the eunuch on the Jerusalem-Gaza road, he began at the same scripture the eunuch had been reading and preached unto him Jesus (Acts 8:35).

"Preach Christ" and its equivalents appear at least thirty times in the New Testament, and this doesn't include ***"preach the gospel"*** and its equivalents. God doesn't have to say something thirty times for it to be so; but when he repeats it thirty times there is no excuse for missing the point. Yet much preaching today is centered around or concerns science, current events, personal experiences, politics, the Middle East war threat, and psychiatry. In fact, some church members are beating worn paths to the doors of worldly-minded psychiatrists in an effort to get their thinking straight when they ought to be studying the word of God with the firm intent of shaping their lives according to its teachings. Doing that will give them peace, peace with God, the greatest peace in the world! ***"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength"*** (Isa. 26:3, 4). ***"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ"*** (Phil. 4:6, 7). ***"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful"*** (Col. 3:15). This is not to say that no one should ever seek the services of a good psychiatrist, nor is it to say that illustrations are never to be drawn from the above subjects. I am saying that psychiatrists are not to be used in an effort to circumvent shaping one's life according to the will of God in seeking relief from depression and anxiety brought on by downright self-centeredness and a guilt complex; the pangs of conscience are to be relieved by knowledge of and compliance with God's will! ***"For if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God"*** (1 Jn. 3:20, 21). The above subjects are never to be made the center of preaching and unless illustrations in some way point to Christ, they are out of place in the pulpit. It is high time to regard preaching as serious business, not an entertaining side-show!

Scripturally-Circumscribed Preaching

This simply means the preaching must be confined within the bounds of scriptural authority.

What God bids is his will, and the Scriptures are the expression of that will. If we go beyond, we have not God (2 Jn. 9; cf. 1 Cor. 4:6, ASV); if we preach another gospel, we stand accursed (Gal. 1: 6-9; cf. 1 Pet. 4:11); if we teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are to be withdrawn from (1 Tim. 6:2-5); if we refuse to hear the words of God given by inspired men, we are not of God (1 Jn. 4:6); if we continue not in the words of Christ, we are not his disciples indeed (Jn. 8:31); if we do not his commandments, we have no right to the tree of life nor entrance into the eternal city (Rev. 22:14).

With those truths from the word of God, contrast this statement from one of "our" religious papers a few years ago: ***"Brethren make not practicing some things a term of fellowship contending that there is no command, example, or inference to establish the practice, when in fact we don't need one."*** That can mean only one of two things: (1) There is another way to establish Bible authority. If so, WHAT? (2) Authority for our deeds in the work and worship of the church is unnecessary. If so, the statement contradicts every passage given above, and such reasoning will admit every innovation under the sun from the organ to counting beads in prayer!

Brethren, let's get back to, support, and demand book, chapter and verse preaching!

Sin-Condemning Preaching

Sin should be condemned for many reasons, but we shall concentrate on two here.

Sin is to be condemned because of what it is—its nature. Sin is lawlessness (1 Jn. 3:4, ASV). **“Lawlessness”** (anomia) here means: “1. prop. the condition of one without law, – either because ignorant of it, or because violating it. 2. contempt and violation of law, iniquity, wickedness” (*Thayer*, 48). The law violated is God’s who is the zenith of perfection in wisdom, justice, mercy, goodness, love and every other characteristic which can be thought of. Sin is devoid of all good – not one good thing can be said for it! It never betters man physically, socially nor spiritually; it brings not true happiness in this world nor in the world to come; it never healed a disease, bridged a chasm, clothed the naked, fed the hungry, or extended a helping hand to the weak. Everything about it is detrimental to the sons of men. Thus, it deserves vehement condemnation!

Sin is to be condemned because of what it does – its results. To see the results of sin physically and socially, one needs only to visit our cemeteries and prisons; view the mangled bodies on our highways with the glass, oil, gasoline, whiskey and blood mingling together; and consider the broken homes in our nation and churches with the distraught, mixed-up children they produce. Spiritually, sin separates from God (Isa. 59:2; Col. 1:21), keeps men out of heaven (1 Cor. 6:9,10), and condemns them to hell (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 21:8).

New Testament preachers strongly condemned sin and so should preachers now. John the Baptist condemned unlawful marriage - to the face of guilty Herod (Matt. 14:3,4; cf. Mk. 6:14-18); Peter condemned those responsible for the crucifixion of Christ (Acts 2:23; 3:14,15); Paul condemned idolatry when he spoke before idolaters in Athens (Acts 17:28-30). Let’s be sure we don’t confuse **“condemn”** with “condone” when dealing with the subject of sin!

Hearer-Adapted Preaching

In the beginning we saw that God adapted Jonah’s message to the needs of the men of Nineveh. New Testament preachers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, adapted their sermons to the needs of their hearers. Peter, speaking to Jews on Pentecost who were not yet convinced of the resurrection of Christ, made that the point of emphasis in his sermon (Acts 2:22-32). When Paul preached to Felix unrighteous, intemperate and unprepared for judgment **“he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come”** (Acts 24:25). Examples could be multiplied if space allowed.

Yet, some sister will tell the preacher, *“I brought my Baptist neighbor tonight; be sure not to mention Baptist doctrine, lest she be offended.”* The story goes that a young preacher had been repeatedly told (as was I when young and starting to preach), *“Just preach the gospel and let everybody else alone.”* One night he arose and said, *“An infidel is in our audience, so I can’t preach on faith and confession. One of our own brethren has come, inebriated and smelling like a brewery, so repentance is out. A Baptist has come, so I can’t preach on the necessity of baptism for salvation. We have a Methodist present, so I can’t preach on the action of baptism. A Christian Scientist is in our audience, so I can’t even say, I’m glad to be here, for he contends that my bodily presence is only a mental illusion! Does anyone have a suggestion for a topic on which the truth will not bother anyone?”* One old brother spoke up, *“Let the Jews have it; ain’t none of them here!”* Funny maybe, but diametrically opposed to New Testament examples!

The good sense of adapting lessons to the needs of the hearers is seen in physical matters. If I take my automobile to a mechanic because the brakes are bad, I want him to fix the brakes, not grind the valves. If I go to the doctor with appendicitis, I don’t expect a tonsillectomy. If one speaks to a group mixed up on marriage, divorce and remarriage, why should he shun that subject like the plague to speak on something about which there is no problem? Preaching to win friends and secure a job is not to be confused with preaching to save sinners!

Hell-Warning Preaching

New Testament preachers warned their hearers of hell to prevent them from going there.

Jesus warned of the ***“danger of hell fire”*** (Matt. 5:22). He taught his followers to ***“fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell”*** (Lk. 12:5). He told hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, ***“Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”*** (Matt. 23:33) He taught that it is better to give up an offending hand, foot or eye than ***“to go into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched”*** (Mk. 9:43-48). Speaking of the ones on the left hand who will be told to depart into everlasting fire, Jesus said, ***“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment”*** (Matt. 25:41, 46). Regardless of the ranting and ravings of Jehovah’s Witnesses and other unbelieving religionists, Jesus taught the existence, danger and duration of hell, and clearly described the type who will go there.

Paul taught that ***“the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power”*** (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Is there any wonder why he said, ***“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”*** (2 Cor. 5:11)?

The Hebrew writer taught that a ***“sorer punishment”*** than death ***“without mercy”*** awaits the Lord’s ***“adversaries”*** and added, ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”*** (Heb. 10:22-31).

John taught that the wicked are to ***“have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death”*** (Rev. 21:8).

“But,” one says, ***“polls have been taken on the views of a cross section of thousands of preachers showing that a high percentage of these ‘men of the cloth’ no longer believe in the future punishment of the wicked.”*** So? What effect does their unbelief have on these statements of God’s word? The same as if a man, while standing on the earth, points his finger upward trying to punch a hole in the sky! Remember that a high percentage of prophets called Baal from morning until the time of the evening sacrifice, but ***“there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded”*** (1 Kgs. 18:22-29). Paul’s statement ***“yea, let God be true, but every man a liar”*** (Rom. 3:4) well fits this situation!

Heaven-Pointed Preaching

Heaven is the goal to which God’s entire plan points; it should, therefore, be the goal to which all preaching points. Everyone preaching or contemplating preaching should ask himself: ***“Why?”*** To be highly regarded of men? To have a less strenuous livelihood? Because of the thrill of swaying large audiences with fluent, spine-tingling flights of oratory? Because of a desire to be the center of attention? Are you interested in following in the footsteps of a hero? Because of a promise made to your mother on her dying bed? If these, or such like reasons, be your motivation, you will do yourself and the cause of Christ a great favor by forgetting it! Preaching should come from a fervent desire to stand in the middle of that ***“ten lane freeway”*** which leads down to the depths of hell, and cry, ***“Turn back! Turn back! Take the narrow trail leading upward to eternal life in the habitation of the eternal God!”*** Preaching is for the purpose of keeping men out of hell and getting them into heaven!

Yet, many preachers make appeals for gospel obedience on a purely social basis – ***“You will be better parents!”*** ***“Your home will be happier!”*** ***“Society will be made better!”*** ***“Godly people will think more of you!”*** These are merely the byproducts of being a Christian. The real reason for gospel obedience is well seen in Paul’s discussion of death, Christ’s coming, the resurrection and ascension of the righteous ***“to meet the Lord in the air”*** where they shall ***“ever be with the Lord”*** (1 Thess. 4:13-18). What was he doing? Pointing his readers to heaven! John did the same when he wrote, ***“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city”*** (Rev. 22:14).

Brethren, let’s do, demand and support the preaching God bids! The word of the Lord is right (Psa. 33:4; Isa. 45:19; Jn. 17:17). Preach it! – ***Truth Magazine***, April 16, 1992. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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