

Church, SS, 2023, PRIORITY: Preaching & Prayer

6/18/23

This morning, we consider **The Priority in the Church of Preaching and Prayer.**

I. PREACHING**1. The Priority of Preaching is First Seen in the Significance of the Prophetic Office in the Old Testament.**

Noah is the first recognized preacher in the Scriptures. According to **2Pe 2:5**, he was a “*herald of righteousness*”. The office of the prophet, however, first came into prominence in the person of Moses. He was called and gifted of God to regularly speak the message of God to the people of God.

On occasion, the Lord spoke directly to his people. But that was very rare. Almost always, God spoke through his anointed one. The words were God’s words. But they were conveyed through a human instrument. That messenger was a weak sinner, like those whom he addressed. But he was ordained of God to be the mouthpiece of God to his people.

The prophet’s ministry was extremely important. One of the great Old Testament promises of the coming Messiah centered on the significance of the prophetic office. Speaking through Moses, the Lord proclaimed:

Deut. 18:18 “*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that*

I command him.” The latter half of v18 sums up the essence of the prophet’s task: *I WILL PUT MY WORDS IN HIS MOUTH, AND HE SHALL SPEAK TO THEM ALL THAT I COMMAND HIM.* It’s God’s Word; it bears God’s authority. But it is spoken through a human mouthpiece. The prophet’s work was not to create the message but to accurately relay GOD’S message.

Of course, Deut. 18:18 was speaking of Jesus Christ, the Great and Final Prophet. That brings us to our second point about the priority of preaching.

2. The Priority of Preaching is Seen in the Public Ministry of Jesus

We read of numerous private conversations that Jesus had with various people. We read also in the Gospels of his miraculous deeds of mercy. Again and again, he healed those that were sick or demon-possessed. During those years of his public ministry, however, Christ especially gave himself to the work of preaching.

Luke 4:18-19 *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because **he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,*** ¹⁹ ***to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.**”*

Luke 4:31-32 *And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, ³² and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.*

Luke 4:43 but he said to them (his disciples), "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."

Jesus did not rely upon his miracles to change the hearts of people. His mighty works attested to who he was. They were clear evidence that he was indeed the Messiah sent from God.

The more significant priority, however, of his public ministry was the authoritative proclamation of his Father's word. Whether it was in a synagogue or by the waterfront or on a prominent mount, Jesus gave himself to preaching. He was the herald of his Father's message. He expounded the Old Testament Scriptures, drawing attention to their true meaning and showing how they pointed to him.

What struck people about his preaching was not how entertaining he was, nor even how eloquent he was, but rather, it was the AUTHORITY with which he spoke. In his preaching, listeners were confronted with the majesty of God. There was a weightiness in his words and in his manner. Jesus was not simply a communicator; he was a herald bearing royal authority. It's not just that he spoke FOR the king; he was himself THE KING.

Jesus trained the Twelve so that they too were equipped to be heralds of the authoritative word of God. This brings to our third point.

3. The Priority of Preaching is Seen in the Ministry of the Twelve

Mark 3:14 *And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him **and he might send them out to preach.***

When we think of discipleship, we think of more private and personal interaction in which one more mature in the faith models, explains, coaches, and equips one or more who are less mature in the faith. Jesus was committed to that kind of ministry. Having given the matter much prayer, he chose 12 men “*so that they might be WITH HIM*”. They would essentially live with Jesus for a few years, daily observing his conduct and having frequent opportunity for private interaction with him alongside his public instruction.

But why did our Lord enter into such a close, sustained relationship with the Twelve. “*He appointed twelve so that they be with him AND HE MIGHT SEND THEM OUT TO PREACH.*” Jesus led a seminary. He trained these men to be preachers. As part of their training, he would send them out on preaching missions. We read of his sending out the Twelve; later he sent out 70 or 72.

Mark 6:7-13 *And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ ... ¹² **So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.***

Luke 10:1-9 *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to*

go. ² And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴ ...⁹ Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’

Later, after the Lord had died, risen, and ascended, the Apostle Peter would speak of Jesus to a Gentile named Cornelius: Acts 10:42 *And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.*

4. The Priority of Preaching is Seen in the Ministry of the Apostle Paul

Acts 9:15-20 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of **mine** to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ ...²⁰ And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

Ephesians 3:8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...

Romans 15:20 and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,

5. The Priority of Preaching is Seen in Paul's Training of Those Under His Leadership

*2 Timothy 4:1 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

*2 Timothy 2:2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men **who will be able to teach others also.***

6. The Priority of Preaching is Seen in the Goal of NT Proclamation

*Matt 28:18-20 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.** And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

*Col. 1:28 **Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ.***

APPLICATIONS:

- The conspicuous priority of preaching in the NT church has been a key factor in our having maintained the practice of an evening worship service on Sunday night.
- Please pray regularly for God’s blessing upon the preaching of his word.

II. PRAYER

1. FIRST, the New Testament church was born in the context of a group of disciples united as one, seeking the LORD together in prayer.

Acts 1:4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

... 14 All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer...

DEVOTE means, *“to concentrate on a particular pursuit”*. Those first disciples were concentrating on corporate prayer. Their shared purpose was to wait together, as the LORD had commanded, for what the LORD had promised, the Holy Spirit. **Their shared activity was prayer.** The mission of his “sent ones” could not proceed without the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit.

*Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, **they were all together in one place.** 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ...4 **And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.** It was out of the “womb” of being *all together in one place...devoting themselves to prayer*” that the church was born.*

APPLICATION: Our redemptive-historical situation is different. The Spirit has come. But has our God not made promises that we yet yearn to see fulfilled?

Does not the Bible indicate that we can know additional fillings with the Spirit?

Do we not have matters, as a church, in which we are waiting for our God to act?

Ps 81:10 *I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.*

Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

Matt 7:7-11 *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

2. SECOND, consider next that the newborn church grew spiritually and numerically in connection with a continued devotion to coming together for prayer.

Acts 2:41 *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. 42 **And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.***

Acts 2:42 again uses the verb, “devoted”. Now they concentrated their attention and time on four particular pursuits. **They continued to concentrate on the pursuit of praying together.** They “*devoted themselves to ‘THE PRAYERS’*”. It may be that the ESV uses the definite article, THE prayers, to

indicate that there were stated times of corporate prayer, hours that were designated specifically for coming together as the body of Christ to seek God's face in prayer. That there were such appointed hours is clear from the opening words of chapter 3.

Acts 3:1 *Now Peter and John were going up to the temple **at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour (3pm).***

For some time, each and every day, at 3pm, the first church gathered at the temple for an hour of prayer. It is spoken of as, THE HOUR of prayer. It was fixed on the schedule. It was recurring. It seems to have been daily.

Corporate prayer was not secondary. It certainly was not tertiary. It was not a peripheral activity in the church. No, it was front and center. It was one of the conspicuous, defining features of the church. It was an activity to which the church was DEVOTED. The first very church grew spiritually and numerically in connection with an ongoing concentration on the activity of praying together.

APPLICATION:

- Make a sincere effort to gather with the church for prayer.
- Nurture and protect the conviction that prayer is a privilege, not a mere duty that is difficult to perform.

3. **THIRD, note that Corporate Prayer was Conspicuous in the Early Church's Response to Opposition.**

According to **Acts 3-4**, the miraculous healing of a lame man created an opportunity before hundreds or thousands to proclaim that Jesus had risen from the dead. Large numbers were converted and added to the church. The powerful leaders of the Jews, the priests and Sadducees, were greatly annoyed by the Apostles' bold preaching. Peter and John were arrested, condemned, threatened, and charged to desist from speaking "*in the name of Jesus*". Verses 23f tell us how the Apostles and the growing congregation of believers responded:

Acts 4:23-31 *When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.*

24 *And when they heard it, **they lifted their voices together to God** and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,*

25 *who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, " Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?*

26 ... 29 *And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,*

30 *while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."*

31 **And when they had prayed**, *the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*

Note that their immediate response was “*they lifted their voices **TOGETHER** to God*”. One of the great benefits of facing trials that are obviously bigger than we can handle ourselves is that such trials can move us to prayer. This was the church’s corporate response. United as one, they prayed together.

Note that they did NOT pray first and foremost for safety or for the removal of danger. Understanding that persecution was certain for the followers of the Crucified Lord, they instead **prayed for BOLDNESS**. They pleaded with God to do wonders in the midst of the hostile opposition.

Note that THEY PRAYED THE BIBLE. Recognizing correctly that the 2nd Psalm was so pertinent to their situation, they quoted God’s own words back to him in their words to him. Christians can be confident that they are praying according to the will of God when they correctly use the language of the Bible in speaking to God.

Note that their conviction that God’s hand and plan had predestined all things, including the hostile execution of Christ, did NOT lead them into a passive fatalism. Rather, they understood and believed that it was imperative that they continue to BOLDLY BEAR WITNESS to the risen LORD. **They likewise were convinced that they must continue to PRAY for the boldness needed and for the effectual blessing needed upon their witness.**

This same readiness to pray TOGETHER when challenges arose is seen in Acts 12.

Acts 12:1-12 *About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. 2 He killed James the brother of John with the sword, 3 and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. ... 5 So Peter was kept in prison, **but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.***

*...12 When he (Peter) realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, **where many were gathered together and were praying.***

4. Praying together is one of the basic responsibilities of how we conduct ourselves in the household of God, the church.

1Ti 3:14 *I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, **you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.***

1 Timothy 2:1f *First of all, then I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every*

way. ...**8** *I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;*

Paul's perspective was that opposition to the cause of Christ is so sustained, so widespread, so violent at times, and so hindering, in some ways, that the church, **FIRST OF ALL**, must be given to corporate prayer.

5. Fifth, God's people are commanded to pray the LORD of the harvest to thrust out gospel workers into the needy harvest fields.

Matt 9:37-38 *Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

The Lord God alone can create qualified ministers of the New Covenant. He has promised to do so. **Jer. 3:15** *"And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.*

APPLICATIONS:

1. Let us grow in our conviction that it is a great and wonderful privilege to have the true and living God so near to those that call upon him.

Deut 4:7 *For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?*

2. Let us grow in our conviction that one of the most basic ways that the Bible answers the question, “Who is God?” is that he is the one “WHO HEARS PRAYER”.

Ps 62:5 *Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed.*

O you who hears prayer, to you shall all flesh come.

3. Let us grow in our conviction that since the Old Covenant temple is described in the Bible as a “HOUSE OF PRAYER”, how much more should the New Covenant church be a house of prayer!

Luke 19:45 *And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, 46 saying to them, "It is written, 'My **house** shall be a **house of prayer**,*

Heb 10:19-22 *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,*

4. Let us grow in our conviction that supernatural Satanic opposition can only be overcome through prayer.

Mark 9:28-29 *And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" 29 And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."*

