

VIGIL



“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

~ I Peter 5:8

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PREACHING NEEDED TODAY

REASONS THERE IS A CRISIS IN PREACHING

Dale Hubbert

It is the will of God that the message of God’s love and His desire to save mankind be communicated by means of preaching (Jonah 3:2, Matthew 3:1, Matthew 4:23, Acts 8:4,12). God’s attitude toward this matter is reflected by the fact that the only son of God was a preacher. Is there a crisis in preaching? The word crisis is defined by the *Thorndike/Barnhart Comprehensive Desk Dictionary* as “the turning point in a disease, toward life or death.”

This definition frighteningly describes the state of preaching in some places and among some preachers. The preaching of the gospel is the “power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16). It still pleases God by preaching to save those who will come in penitence with humble hearts and faith (1 Cor. 1:21). How and why could there be a crisis in this grand scheme of God?

A crisis occurs as the result of some in regards to the message being preached. Tickled ears rather than pricked hearts are the preferences of some (2 Tim. 4:3). The plain preaching of the uncompromising gospel does not fit with the attitude of a seemingly increasing number today even among the people of God.

Preachers are then drawn into a conflict: preach an unpopular doctrine, which will produce anger and apathy or compromise the truth to please some in the pew.

Preaching reaches a state of crisis when elders in the local congregations do not have the backbone and fortitude to embrace and promote the preaching of the strong and distinctive doctrine that needs to be proclaimed in a time of moral ignorance and wickedness. Elders who will not stand behind preachers who speak the truth plainly (John 10:24), in love (Eph. 4:15), and without fear or favor (Acts 18:9) thrust preachers into an unnecessary state of limbo. There is a fear that members will get mad and leave causing the numbers in attendance and the contribution to decrease. Numbers are more important to some than the salvation of souls and the maintenance of pure and undefiled lives.

Those who preach the gospel should be compensated appropriately. A crisis can exist in preaching because some who preach the unsearchable riches of God are not adequately paid for their work. They are then unable to meet the financial needs of their families and suffer

under needless pressure. Some good men and faithful preachers then choose other vocations to provide for the needs of their families even though they would rather be preaching.

The problem of insufficient financial support is compounded by congregations who are adamant about having a “full time” preacher and yet are unable to support a man at a comfortable level. This often leads to the financial struggles of preachers and a merry go round of changing preachers every two or three years because good men care about providing for their families. Does not the man preaching the gospel and his family deserve to be taken care of in regard to salary as much as any other family in the congregation?

Fear is a factor in the crisis in current preaching. How will the audience respond? Will I lose my job if I preach what the Bible says about marriage, divorce, and remarriage? Where will I go if I lose my job? Will I lose friendships if I preach the truth that points out sin in the lives of my friends? Who will stand beside me and behind me when I preach sermons that are not popular?

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EDITORIAL

The Kind of Preaching We NEED Today

Paul told Timothy, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:2-4). Peter suggested, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet. 4:11). There are all manner of ideas on what preaching should be. Some want all “fluff and no stuff” in their preaching, while others want just the facts. Our preaching has to be effective. We are promoting the most important matter in this world. How can we do this? Let’s examine the first recorded Gospel message and see if we can learn anything.

In Acts two we can see that this was a **POWERFUL** message. Paul wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). Where is the power? It is in the word of God. When we as proclaimers of the message forget that, then the message we give is powerless. Time after time, Peter alluded to the word of God. He spoke of what Joel had written (Acts 2:16-21; Joel 2:28-32). He quoted from Solomon on several occasions (Acts 2:25,26; cf. Ps. 16:9,10; Acts 2:31; cf. Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:34,35; cf. Ps. 110:1). It appears that Peter knew where the

power was. It was and is in the word of God. This word was not left to stand on its own. Peter alluded to the proof. Peter said, “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22). The signs used were given for the validity of the word. Proof that what was said was neither toothless nor clawless, but backed by God! Then the ultimate proof was that of the resurrection (Acts 2:24). The empty tomb gives power to the message! It is time for our preaching to become powerful. Not some kind of watered down, socialized, politically correct garbage, which corrupts instead of cures! Where is the power in our preaching? In the Word of God!

We can also see that Peter produced a **PRICKING** message. As Peter closed his account of what happened to our Lord and Savior, he said, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). To prick is to “strike or prick violently, to stun, is used of strong emotion” (*Vines*, Vol. 3, p. 210). Peter had produced a sermon so pointed and convincing that it struck at the heart of his listeners. How sad it is today that many preachers do everything they can to avoid producing this effect. Many audiences don’t want the burdens of sin, so they clamor for soft-spoken, warm fuzzy sermons that tickle the nose, but would never prick the heart. Peter’s sermon made them realize what they had done. It caused them to recognize where they truly were. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do” (Acts 2:37)? When the pricking message is left out, how is an

individual to know where he or she is in relationship to Christ? If we never see our need, then we will never seek a Savior. In the parable of the prodigal son, we see that he “...came to himself...” (Luke 15:17). This boy had to come to the realization that he was in need and his solution was at home before he was motivated to move. The message we produce today should be one that will prick the heart of those lost.

In the last place, this message was one of **PROMISE**. “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). When the powerful word of God is preached and it produces the response that is proper, then we can have the assurance of the promises of God. There is the promise of salvation. “Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). Peter also recorded, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is non other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). We can have the promise of strength (Acts 2:41,42) and hope (Acts 2:38-47). God is faithful in His promises (2 Pet. 3:9). God’s promises are special (2 Pet. 1:4). But this hope, strength and salvation are only viable when the word of God is preached in its entirety and simplicity.

May we never fail to preach the word!

DOCTRINAL PREACHING

Sam Willcut

The kind of preaching needed today includes doctrinal preaching: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (II Timothy 4:2-3). Doctrinal preaching is that which originates from the Holy Scriptures (II Timothy 3:16). “Doctrine” is from the Greek word *didache*, which means, “teaching, that which is taught...instruction” (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, pp 144-145). One might think that the phrase “doctrinal preaching” is redundant, but when one understands the lack of teaching and instruction from many preachers, one will appreciate the term.

Jesus was involved in doctrinal preaching: “And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine...” (Mark 4:2; cf. 12:38; John 18:19; Acts 13:12). It is synonymous with “the doctrine which is according to godliness” (I Timothy 6:3). However, he clarified just what his doctrine was—“My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:16-17). Therefore, Jesus took a subordinate role in the scheme of redemption, and “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7), only teaching that which came straight from his Father (cf. John 3:34; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10, 24). Since Jesus promised to give the Holy Spirit to the apostles to help with their doctrinal preaching (cf. John 14:26; 16:12-14), then we know that “the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42; cf. 5:28) was

really a continuation of the subordinate chain of doctrine—God, Christ, and the apostles. Therefore, when Paul alludes to his doctrine (II Timothy 3:10), it is not anything but what he received from Christ (cf. Galatians 1:12). It may seem as “new doctrine” to some (cf. Acts 17:19), but it is all the same thing. Yet, some are as “children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness...” (Ephesians 4:14). Others are not interested in the doctrine of Christ (II John 1:9-10), but are interested in their own commandments and traditions (Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7; Colossians 2:22). It is these with whom we mark and avoid (Romans 16:17). There is an interesting Greek compound word in 1 Timothy 1:3—*heterodidaskalein*, which means “other doctrine” or “different doctrine.” Coupled with the Greek negative word before it, Paul essentially tells Timothy to remain in Ephesus and charge them not to instruct differently. We are to heed the same charge.

Doctrinal preaching involves only sound doctrine. Paul uses the phrase “sound doctrine” four times (I Timothy 1:10; II Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1), also referring to “good doctrine” (I Timothy 4:6). As opposed to the doctrine that is wholesome, we would call the antithesis of such “strange doctrine” (Hebrews 13:9). God warns us of some who would not use doctrinal preaching. During his personal ministry on earth, Jesus warned his apostles about “the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matthew 16:12). The Holy Spirit warns about “doctrines of devils” (I Timothy 4:1). Through the apostle John, Jesus mentioned “the doctrine of Balaam” (Revelation 2:14) and “the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate” (Revelation 2:15).

These should warn us all to be careful and preach sound doctrine!

Doctrinal preaching is distinctive preaching. The gospel writers recorded six times the expression that the people were astonished at the preaching of Jesus, because it was distinctive from anything else they had ever heard: “And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power” (Luke 4:32; cf. Matthew 7:28; 22:33; Mark 1:22, 27; 11:18). If only every congregation of our Lord would exemplify what Ezra did in Nehemiah 8:1-8. First, the people gathered in the spirit of unity “as one man” (Nehemiah 8:1) to hear God’s word. Second, Ezra taught only the law of God from a pulpit specially made for that event. Third, the people were attentive to the instruction from Ezra as God’s spokesman. Fourth, the congregation of Israel was reverent in their worship when Ezra read from God’s word. Fifth, “they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8). That is doctrinal preaching! It centers on a distinctive God and Savior, a distinctive religion, a distinctive system of worship, a distinctive church and a distinctive guide to matters pertaining to religion and morality.

Since doctrinal preaching is necessary for obedience (Romans 6:17; cf. I Timothy 4:16), we should “give attendance...to doctrine” (I Timothy 4:13) in our preaching, considering the fact that our behavior affects such (cf. I Timothy 6:1; Titus 2:7-10). My prayer and desire is for God to bless all who love both to preach and to hear doctrinal preaching.

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COURAGEOUS PREACHING

Ben Wright

“Courageous” is defined as, “having or showing courage; brave” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, pg. 139). As one reads God’s Holy Word, it is plain to see that God’s spokesmen on earth have always needed courage. Noah had to be extremely courageous in preaching to the vile people of his day. The prophets were courageous unto death, so much so, that we are told by inspiration that the “world was not worthy” of these men (Heb.11:38). John the Baptizer was a man of courage and it cost him his life. Once the apostles had seen the risen Savior they were extremely courageous. It takes courage to be a Christian, let alone a gospel preacher.

The book of Acts shows us how courageous the apostles were. In the face of beatings, being stoned, imprisonment and ridiculed, the apostles would say, “... we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). They counted it a privilege to suffer shame for the name of Christ.

In Acts 5:20 we read: “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people, all the words of this life.” This verse is small in number of words, but great in its impact. A preacher learns what courage is from this verse.

First, we see that we must go to the lost. Many today want to sit back in their padded office chairs and do nothing but come up with soft sermons that tickle ears. The angel of the Lord told these men to go to where the lost were “in the temple.” Too many preachers are not willing to go out and talk and deal with the lost. The Hebrews writer reminded his readers they could, “with good courage say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:6, ASV). It is a sin to be afraid (Rev. 21:8). It takes courage to go to the lost and let them know that they are lost. Too many today, in our “let’s not offend anyone” age, refuse to admit that anyone is lost

because that would be judging and that is not right. Brethren and friends, if we cannot let someone know they are lost, then how are we ever going to convert anyone to Christ? God knew that His apostles had to get out and preach the word and it is no different today.

There are different ways to go. Some go and knock doors. Some make telephone calls. Some work through the Internet. The printed page has allowed great access into homes as well as being able to have television programs. The radio has long been a way to get into the homes of those who are outside the body of Christ. Whatever means of going is used is wonderful, but the fact remains that we must go.

Second, we see that we must stand. According to *Strong’s*, this word carries the meaning, “to be of a steadfast mind; of quality, one who does not hesitate, does not waiver.” Sadly, this does not sound like a definition that could be applied to a vast number of “so-called” gospel preachers. There are too many among us that waiver, that hesitate when the truth is attacked or questioned. God needs men of courage who will stand for the truth and defend it. We have too many today who spend their time apologizing for what God said instead of standing for it. Paul told the Ephesians to put on the whole armor of God and then, when they had done everything they could, keep standing (Eph. 6:13). Jude wanted to write an uplifting letter about the common salvation, but could not because “it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Jude wanted his readers to stand for the truth and we should today as well. Otherwise, many will go off into eternity unprepared to meet God in judgment.

Third, we see that we must speak. God is a wonderful God in that He never tells us to do something without telling us how to do it. In this passage, the apostles are told to speak. Many of us have that part down pat. Many sermons, every Sunday, are filled with a lot of talk. Many conversations with those who are lost are filled with a lot of talk. We talk about the weather, sports, hunting, whatever small talk comes to mind. Tragically, what is needed most by those to whom we are preaching or speaking is left out. The apostles were told to speak, but God also told them what to speak: “all the words of this life.” God wanted the gospel preached to the lost. If one of us just got out of prison for speaking about Christ we would probably have a lot of things about which to speak, the least of which would be Christ. God, in reality, said, “Get back in there fellows and preach it some more.” This took courage on the part of the apostles. Thankfully, they followed the command given them by God.

If the lost are going to be saved and the saved stay that way, then preachers are going to have to be courageous. Preachers are going to have to stand in the pulpits and preach the word of God without fear or favor. Paul told Timothy, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). Marshall Keeble said this meant to preach when they like it and when they do not like it. That is the command to preachers today. Let us remember the inspired words of Paul: “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to **fear**; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15, emp. Mine, BW).

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BIBLE CENTERED PREACHING

Ashley Kizer

The Bible is the most fascinating book ever written. It is a light unto our paths, guiding our way; a matchless treasure that can be contained in our minds (Psalm 119:105; 2 Corinthians 4:7). Not only is it the power of God unto salvation, it can be a deterrent against sin (Romans 1:16; Psalm 119:11). This wonderful book contains the truth because it is inspired by the Almighty God Himself (John 17:17; 2 Peter 1:21). It alone contains all the information we need to be saved and live righteous lives (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Titus 2:11-12).

Considering the value of the Holy Scriptures to our lives, it is difficult to surmise why it is that so many have neglected to study and apply them. The ancient Israelite families were commanded to surround themselves with Scriptures and commit them to memory (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). However, most children today have a great deal more pop song lyrics committed to their memories than verses of Scripture. Even more disturbing is my own observation that much of the preaching today is becoming less focused on God's Word and more centered on testimonials and illustrations. (Notwithstanding that observation, I will go on to use one myself.) I recall an experience I had at a Christian university in which my brother Drew's wisdom shined brightly. We had been having a conversation in my dorm room when a young classmate of ours, an enthusiastic youth minister for a large congregation at that time, popped in for some help with his upcoming devotional lesson. His request was, "Do you guys know any good stories I can use? For example, I heard a good one a while back about how natives in the arctic hunt for wolves using a bloody knife." My brother's response, in all sincerity was, "Why don't you just use a story

from the Bible?" Precisely! What a simple and perfect solution! You can never go wrong with Bible centered preaching.

Notice some of the blessings that can be enjoyed when God's people focus themselves on the Word of God and the preaching of it. The initial consequence is the acquirement of knowledge. Not all knowledge is beneficial, but the knowledge of God's Word can produce faith (Romans 10:17). When all of God's people have a common knowledge and acceptance of the authority of the Bible, we can enjoy unity (cf. John 17:11). This unity brings greater strength and power to the body of Christ. When we are united, "nothing which [we] purpose to do will be impossible for [us]" (Genesis 11:6). These words contain great power. Jesus used them to defeat the devil, resisting his temptations (Matthew 4). The Scriptures contain so much power because they tell of the gospel, which is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). So, salvation is another product of Bible centered preaching. Isaiah wrote, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news...who announces salvation..." (Isaiah 52:7). As the seed of the Word is sown, more souls will be added to the church (Luke 8:11; Acts 2:41). God's Word will not return to Him empty, but we must scatter it far and wide in order to receive a greater increase (Isaiah 55:11; 1 Corinthians 3:6-7)!

The apostle Paul was not ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:16). He wrote to the Corinthians, "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Apparently, this lowly missionary distanced himself from the temptation of trying to impress men with

eloquence of speech and his own human wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:1). It was sufficient for him to proclaim only "the testimony of God." He considered himself, not only a preacher, but also a steward of the gospel, and he took these roles seriously (1 Corinthians 1:17; 4:1-2).

The Word of God alone can have a tremendous effect on people's hearts, even if it is simply read to them. Notice the example of King Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34. When he was just a teenager, in the eighth year of his reign, he began to seek God (v. 3). Eventually, he decided to have Judah purged of her idols and the temple was repaired and restored (vv. 3, 8). While Hilkiah, was bringing out some money that was being used to fund the restoration, he discovered the "book of the law of the Lord given by Moses" that had been neglected for years (v. 14). Later, he read the book to the king, who upon hearing it, wept and tore his clothes (vv. 19, 27). The result was that "the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God..." (v. 32).

Nevertheless, there is often a need for the Scriptures to be explained. When Philip asked the Ethiopian if he understood what he was reading, the eunuch answered, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me" (Acts 8:31)? Another relevant example is found in Nehemiah chapter eight. After the exiles returned to Jerusalem from being in Babylonian captivity, the book of the law was read in the hearing of the people. Verse eight says, "...they read from the book...translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading." So, preaching does not necessarily have to be Bible only, but it definitely must be Bible centered.

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“ALMOST THOU PERSUADEST ME”

Raymond Elliott

“King Agrippa, Believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said to Paul; Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:27,28). The apostle Paul is an example to all Christians in his dedication to preach the gospel of Christ to every person. He felt indebted to the human race because he possessed the knowledge of the truth and was ready always to preach the good news of salvation (Romans 1:14-16). He proclaimed that gospel as a free man, and, according to the context of this passage, as a prisoner for the sake of the Lord. Thus, before King Agrippa, he expounded the glad tidings that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament (26:22,23). Paul’s sermon was so convincing that Agrippa exclaimed, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Let us now observe some of the pertinent messages contained in this statement of the king.

1. “ALMOST” Paul, in asking Agrippa if he believed the prophets (concerning Jesus), mentioned that he knew that he believed. Yet, Agrippa was not a Christian. A believer has the right to become a child of God but faith alone does not save a person (John 1:11-12; James 2:24,26). Almost is not all the way. Here you have a believer who was not yet a Christian. “*Almost cannot avail; almost is but to fail: Sad, sad, the bitter wail, almost, but lost.*”

2. “THOU”. Agrippa said, “*Almost thou...*” that is to say, he was addressing the apostle Paul, the preacher. This infers that the

Holy Spirit in a direct manner was not trying to get Agrippa to obey Christ. Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 4:7, that the gospel of Christ at that time was in the inspired apostles. In every example of conversion mentioned in the book of Acts, it was always a man preaching to men and a man endeavoring to get men to believe and obey the gospel (Romans 10:13-17). There is not one example wherein an angel or the Holy Spirit ever preached the gospel to a human. God used the agency of man in the spreading of the gospel (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19).

3. “PERSUADEST ME” To persuade is to “*prevail by advice, urging, reason and inducement.*” The sinner needs not to persuade God to save him. God is willing to save all men who will turn from their sins and obey His son (2 Peter 3:9; I Timothy 2:4). The idea found in the ‘mourner’s bench’ that is, to ‘pray through’, begging God to save an individual is not according to the Lord’s divine scheme of redemption for mortal man.

4. “TO BE” True religion of God is not something we get but rather something we do. “To be” is to do (James 1:27). The term “*be converted*” in Acts 3:19 (KJV) actually means to “*turn again*” (ASV). The sinner is not passive in the process of conversion. To “*turn again*” infers action on the part of the one needing to be saved. The eunuch in Acts 8:35-39 confessed his

faith in Jesus Christ and was baptized. The Jews on Pentecost believed in Christ, repented of their sins and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:36-41).

4. “A CHRISTIAN” There is something in a name. God changed Jacob’s name to Israel (Genesis 32:28). The last two letters of the name Israel is EL which is a Hebrew name for God. You cannot say Israel without saying a name of God. In the New Testament, the disciples were called (divinely called) Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:26). In principle, as with the name, Israel you cannot say “Christian” without saying Christ. The name Christian was given by God and by that name many saints suffered (Isaiah 62:1,2; 1 Peter 4:16). It is in the name of Jesus Christ that we are saved. “*And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12).

As far as we know, King Agrippa died without ever obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ, even though he possessed a faith in Him. How sad to know and not to do what is required to God in order to be saved from our sins. Salvation is only promised to those believers who are obedient to the Son of God (Hebrews 5:8,9).

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DID JESUS PREACH IN TARTARUS?

Hugo McCord

“Tartarus” is the place where God sent “the angels who sinned...delivering them into chains of darkness, holding them for the judgment” (2 Peter 2:4). Because Jesus “went and preached to spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:19), it is easy but false to conclude that Jesus, after his death, preached in Tartarus, giving sinners another chance for salvation.

If Jesus did give sinners another chance for salvation, he contradicted his preaching that “a certain rich man”, after his death, was in an inescapable fiery “torment” (Luke 16:23-24). Moreover, after Jesus

died, he went, not to Tartarus, but to Paradise (Luke 23:43).

But how could Peter say that Jesus “went and preached to spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:19)? The wicked people (Genesis 6:5) who were drowned in the flood were, in Peter’s day, “spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:19), likely Tartarus (2 Peter 2:4), or under the name “Hades” (Luke 16:23-24).

But Jesus’ preaching “to spirits in prison” had been done while those wicked people were in the flesh, not by Jesus in person, but by his “Spirit” (Genesis 6:3; 1 Peter 3:18) in the words of Noah, “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5), “when

the patience of God waited in the days of Noah” (1 Peter 3:20) for “a hundred and twenty years” (Genesis 6:3).

God was patient, but he had said, “My Spirit will not keep on contending with men in their straying. They are flesh and their days will be 120 years” (Genesis 6:3). Only “a few (that is, eight souls)” paid attention to Jesus’ preaching “by the Spirit” through Noah’s sermons (1 Peter 3:18, 20; 2 Peter 2:5).

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SERMONS WE SEE

Edgar A. Guest

I’d rather see a sermon than hear
one any day;

I’d rather one would walk with
me than merely tell the way.

The eye’s a better pupil and more
willing than the ear;

Fine counsel is confusing, but
examples always clear.

And the best of all the preachers
are the men who live their creeds;

For to see the good in action is
what everybody needs.

I soon can learn to do it if you’ll
let me see it done.

I can watch your hands in action,
but your tongue too fast may run.

And the lecture you deliver may
be very wise and true;

But I’d rather get my lessons by
observing what you do.

For I might misunderstand you
and the high advice you give,

But there’s no misunderstanding
how you act and how you live.

When I see a deed of kindness, I
am eager to be kind.

When a weaker brother stumbles
and a strong man stays behind,

Just to see if he can help him,
then the wish grows strong in me

To become as big and thoughtful
as I know that friend to be.

And all travelers can witness that
the best of guides today

Is not the one who tells them, but
the one who shows the way.

One good man teaches many; men
believe what they behold;

One deed of kindness noticed is
worth forty that are told.

Who stands with men of honor
learns to hold his honor dear,

For right living speaks a language
which to everyone is clear.

Though an able speaker charms
me with his eloquence, I say,

“I’d rather see a sermon than hear
one any day.”

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Reasons There is A Crisis In Preaching by Dale Hubbert-----Continued from page 17

The desire for popularity is a contributor to the preaching crisis. We all have an inward hope to be popular and liked by others. When this yearning becomes too great there can be a sacrifice of truth and doctrine at the expense of souls. Some love the praises of men more than the praise of God (John 12:43).

An increasing number of brethren who in the past faithfully declared the whole counsel of God have sacrificed the purity of New Testament Christianity on the alter of popularity. From book sales to speaking appearances, the gospel has been watered down and diluted to the extent all of their material can be presented in virtually any

denomination without offending or arousing a soul. While our purpose is not to offend, this response cannot be avoided when undenominational Christianity and the distinctive nature of the one church of the New Testament is unveiled before those who are in doctrinal error.

The gospel is appreciated and obeyed by the minority and not the majority (Matthew 7:13-14). God forbid that we ever compromise doctrinal truth to gain a follower. Large numbers, book sales, and speaking engagements must never be the primary thrust behind the gospel we preach.

What is the solution to the crisis in preaching? We need men who are

dedicated to preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, with faith like Noah to keep preaching when there appears to be no response (2 Peter 2:5). We need men with courage like Peter, Paul, and the apostles to preach the truth in the face of danger and a lack of popularity (Acts 5:29). We also need the full support of the leadership and membership to proclaim the whole council of God.

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