

Participant Guide for Study 7: Preach

Introduction

If the Sunday Service was an elaborate meal with soup, salads, and fancy silverware, then the preaching of the word is the main course. Everything surrounding it is important, of course, but if God's Word isn't preached then the result would be the same if it was a meal: everyone walks away hungry.

Let's start with what's familiar: Preaching is that 30 minute section towards the end of the Sunday service where the Pastor opens the Bible and preaches God's Word. The only thing following the sermon is the Benediction, which will be the focus of study next week.

Now for something slightly more difficult. Preaching is easy enough to spot when it happens on a Sunday morning, but how could we actually define preaching? If our goal is not just to understand but to truly appreciate the sermon every week, where should we start? Preaching is sort of like a speech, but the differences between the two are key. The same could be said if you compared preaching to a formal presentation, a theatrical performance, a stand-up comedy routine, a political rally, a news broadcast, or really any kind of public proclamation! Preaching is composed of delivering news, telling stories, dissecting culture, debating opposing viewpoints, presenting exegetical findings, providing wisdom and encouragement, but is not totally consumed by any of these things! This considered, a ground-up understanding of preaching requires us to consult the foundation of all of our Christian life and thought: the Bible.

What does it mean?

Let's start by defining the word "preach" according to Scripture. Starting with the most familiar places in Scripture, we could observe Jesus's Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) or his proclamation to his hometown in Galilee (Luke 4), Stephen's masterful sermon he gave just before being martyred (Acts 7), Paul's words at the Areopagus (Acts 17), or Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2). If we expand our scope a bit we could see the words of all the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel proclaiming judgement to the nations! You could also even include Jonah's little, one sentence sermon to Nineveh. But what is the criteria? What counts as preaching? Let's look at these two sets of verses from Paul's Epistles to the Romans and Corinthians.

Read Romans 10:14-17

[14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" [16] But they

have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” [17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (ESV)

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-2

[1] And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. [2] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (ESV)

Here we can form a summary definition of preaching from what we have read so far: Preaching is the proclamation of the testimony of God so that people will believe the Gospel. Of course, trying to define preaching in just one sentence is a difficult thing; There is so much more to be said about *what* preaching is, but this is a good a place as any for us to start.

Discussion:

1. What are some places in Scripture that you would find someone preaching?
2. Do you have a sermon that sticks out in your memory? Do you remember a sermon that particularly impacted you? Why?

Why do we practice it?

Knowing that preaching is the proclamation of the testimony of God, we do well to remind ourselves that everything we do is done after God, who has made it first. And the first and greatest reason we preach the Word of God every single week is because the Word of God is what every single person on earth lives off of (Deut. 8:3). In fact, it is how God made the entire earth. Have one member of your group turn to Genesis 1 and see how many times it says: “And God said...” The Word of God is the foundation for everything. And because the Word of God is our origin, it also is our direction for how to live every single day:

Read 2 Timothy 3:16

[16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (ESV)

The Word of God is how we are daily directed to be the people of God. It nourishes us, feeds us, and teaches us every time we come to it. In fact, the Word of God is *why* we know God at all! He has revealed Himself to us through it! Therefore, it is vital that we not only engage ourselves in it every day, but listen to God’s Word preached by God’s chosen pastors every single week, for this is no trivial task. See Paul’s words to Timothy:

Read 2 Timothy 2:1–2

[1] You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, [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. (ESV)

Discussion:

1. Why is the Word of God important to our lives?
2. What are some verses from Scripture that have shaped your life? What verses remain difficult for you to practice or convict you in a challenging way?

How do we practice it?

The primary means of practicing preaching as a church is submission. The role of the pastor is to faithfully submit to preaching the Word of God, adding nothing and taking nothing away. Preaching has been wisely illustrated before as a lot like being a waiter at a restaurant in that the only job of the preacher is to bring the Word of God to the church, much like a waiter's only job is to bring food to the table. The waiter, like the preacher, is doing his job poorly if they think their role is to fix the meal, or pick what they don't like off the plate! While this leaves room for things like illustrations, explanations, and persuasion, it doesn't leave room for the preacher to take away from God's Word what they don't like or try to improve upon it. On the other end, the "how" of the church is to be attentive hearers and doers of God's Word.

Read Ephesians 4:11–16

[11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, [14] so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. [15] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (ESV)

Notice how two things are connected: God has given ministers for building up the body and the body ought to grow in love. We have a responsibility as the recipients of God's Word to hear it, do it, and grow.

Discussion:

- 1) What do you find is often the effect of the sermon on your heart? Conviction? Encouragement? Education?

- 2) What are some practical ways we can be more attentive to the Sunday Sermon, especially during COVID?

Conclusion

“I preached as never sure to preach again, as a dying man to dying men.”

- Richard Baxter

Preaching is one of the main ways the Gospel of Christ is brought to a fallen world. It is critical that we don't just hear a sermon on Sunday morning, but that we also go out and preach the Gospel to others as well. As we hear, we ought to seek to give others what God has so graciously given us each week through the ministers He has raised up to preach.

Discussion:

1. What are some “spheres of influence” that you could preach into in your own life? Think friend groups, clubs, teams, etc.