

THE NEED FOR REDEMPTIVE PREACHING

by Hoyt Houchen, “Dead Yet Speaketh”

God has demonstrated His power in different ways. God exercised His power when He said, “*Let there be light: and there was light*” (Gen. 1:3). God exerted His power when He “*formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul*” (Gen. 2:7). God manifested His power when Old Mount Sinai was enveloped by smoke and fire, and when neither man nor beast was allowed to touch it (Ex. 19:13-17). God demonstrated His power on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ, when on that day, the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues (languages) “*as the Spirit gave them utterance*” (Acts 2:4). We see God’s power demonstrated today as we are awed by the scope and magnitude of the universe, the majestic mountains and the expansive seas. God’s power is indeed observed in many ways, but the only power that God uses to save the human soul is the gospel of Christ. It is “*the power of God unto salvation*” (Rom. 1:16). The word “power” is from the Greek noun *dunamis*, meaning “power, might, strength, force” (Arndt and Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon, p. 206). Man cannot

be saved by his own strength and power. He cannot be saved by his own plan or by his own works, apart from God’s way. Man cannot save himself (Jer. 10:23). It is only by the gospel, God’s power, that man is saved. Man must submit to it.

The gospel is “the good news” of man’s salvation. The word “gospel” (Gr. noun, *euangelion*) simply means “good news” (Ibid., p. 318). W.E. Vine states: “In the N.T. it denotes the good tidings of the Kingdom of God and of salvation through Christ, to be received by faith upon the basis of His expiatory death, His burial, resurrection and ascension” (Expository Dictionary of N. T. Words, Vol. 2, p. 167).

Since the gospel is “the good news” or “good tidings” of man’s salvation, it includes God’s plan of salvation — the scheme of human redemption. After declaring that the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16), Paul then adds, “*For therein is revealed a righteousness of God . . .*” (v. 17). “*For therein*” (in the gospel) is revealed “*a righteousness of God from faith unto faith.*” James Macknight gives a clear and concise

meaning of this verse: “The gospel is the power of God for salvation, to every one who believeth; because the righteousness of God’s appointment by faith, is revealed in it, in order to produce faith in them to whom it is preached” (The Epistles, Vol. 1, p. 185). The word “righteous” or “righteousness” has more than one application. While it is true that God is righteous, “*the righteousness of God*” in Romans 1:17 does not refer to an attribute of God. “*The righteousness of God*” in this verse refers to God’s plan for human redemption. The word “righteousness” is so used in Romans 10:3. Paul, referring to the Jews, wrote: “*For being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.*” The Jews were not ignorant of His redemptive plan. Like many today, they were attempting to establish their own plan of salvation. R.L. Whiteside sums it up succinctly: “In the gospel is revealed a plan which makes men righteous.”

It is sad that some preachers today are not preaching God’s redemptive plan; in fact, they do not even mention it in their

were visiting in another state, we heard a young preacher on a Sunday night. He preached a lesson that was true, as far as it went; but when he extended the invitation, he simply said that if anyone wishes to respond he may come forward. This was all he said. Our immediate reaction was, respond to what? Any in that audience who were not Christians would never know from that sermon what to do to be saved. Jesus died that *“repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name”* (Lk. 24:47). But the preaching of repentance and baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) seems to be a lost art in many pulpits of our present day. Sermons are sometimes preached when the specific terms of pardon are not mentioned. Too much else is coming from the modern pulpit. The right kind of preaching always includes the redemptive element. In fact, one who is not a Christian should never leave a service without knowing what to do to be saved. This does not mean that the steps of salvation must necessarily be given at the close of a sermon, as the preacher is stepping down from the rostrum; but somewhere in the sermon (beginning, middle or end), the redemptive element — the plan of salvation — should be included.

We should also remember that God’s redemption or offer of pardon is not only available to the alien but to the erring child of God as well. Forgiveness of sin is obtainable to both upon meeting God’s terms. To those not Christians, God has provided the necessary conditions (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:36-39; 22:16, etc.). For the erring child of God, the conditions of repentance and prayer are provided (Acts 8:22). Redemptive preaching will not

comfort the hearts of the lost (aliens or erring children of God), but it assures them of the hope of salvation when they adhere to it. When God’s terms of pardon are clearly set forth, the sinner is not left in a quandary as to how to be saved. Not only is hope offered to the sinner, but he also learns how he can obtain that hope.

It is sad that there is a “drought” of fundamental preaching. It is obvious that some, because of their academic attainments, abstain from preaching the plain, simple and unadulterated gospel of Christ. Reader, there is no substitute for that kind of preaching. It is the only kind that will save the world. While first principles are not all that is to be preached (we need gospel sermons on right living, worship, and work), yet we are not instructed to forget them. “Leaving” or pressing beyond fundamentals is not forsaking them (see Heb. 6:1). Certainly, we are to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18); but in doing so, let us not leave out the fundamentals — God’s scheme of redemption — how men are to be saved. I am afraid that too many have allowed the devil to corrupt their minds from *“the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ”* (2 Cor. 11:3). The preaching of the cross was *“foolishness”* to those Greek philosophers at Athens in Paul’s day, but nevertheless to those who are saved it is *“the power of God”* (1 Cor. 1:18). May we as gospel preachers, never become so sophisticated that we cannot with force preach the plain, simple story of the Cross with clarity.

Others, no doubt, will deal with the need for, and emphasis upon, distinctive preaching in

this special issue. But the present obvious trend away from this kind of preaching is coupled with the failure to preach or even mention God’s plan of salvation. Emphasis is not being placed upon the church of our Lord as being distinct from every denomination upon the face of the earth. Many seem to be afraid to expose error, thus failing to expose the false teachers. We must not shrink from declaring *“the whole counsel of God”* (Acts 20:27). Truth is to be preached in the right spirit and with the right motive, yet uncompromising, unwavering and with firmness. *“Speaking the truth in love”* is the admonition of Paul (Eph. 4:15), not “dressing down” an individual as such, but speaking and writing in love of the truth and in love of souls. Brethren, we must ever remember that our task is to preach the gospel to save souls. In fulfilling this responsibility, we must let those who are in error know where they stand (referring them to the Bible — book, chapter and verse) but with an attitude of kindness and humility, not harshly and with arrogance. All of us will do well to follow Paul’s advice (2 Tim. 2:25-26), *“in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God may give them repentance unto the knowledge of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him unto his will.”*

Preaching the gospel of Christ is a tremendous responsibility. It is more than declaring mere facts; it involves the task of presenting God’s redeeming love, the sacrificial death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for our salvation, and setting forth in

unmistakable language, God conditions of pardon. Preaching should be characterized by a balanced diet, dealing with what God has given us to know. Fellow gospel preacher, let us never forget nor fail to declare those specific conditions of pardon as a part of God's saving grace. May we never refrain from preaching what men must know in order to be saved. God-fearing and truth-loving brethren will never become weary when we preach the story that never grows old. May we never leave out the redemptive element in our sermons.

Brother, preach the fundamentals.

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Editor's Note: I only thing I add to the article is a hearty *Amen!* This article by brother Houchen originally appeared in the May 2, 1985 issue of Guardian Of Truth, a special issue on preaching. This Scriptural material is as much needed today as then, if not more so. It is lamentable that such is not being produced as it

once was. Brother Houchen was a friend to me. I first met him when he was preaching in a gospel meeting in Greencastle, Indiana in May of 1994. I was 17 years old at the time. He took an interest in me as a young preacher. He gave me autographed copies of books he had produced, including: *What Is In The Book?*, *Sermons Inside And Out*, and *The Houchen Tatum Debate*. In his sermon outline book he had written the message: "To John, With all best wishes 'Preach The Word' Brotherly, Hoyt Houchen 5-23-94."

I began preaching full-time in August of that year with the Westside church of Christ in Salem, Indiana. When Aleisha and I were married in June of 1995, we took our honeymoon out to Colorado. We visited the Boston Street church of Christ in Aurora, where brother Houchen preached at the time. We were privileged to hear him preach Sunday morning. He and his wife, Doris, invited us to spend the day with them. They treated us to a nice Sunday dinner and took us back to their house. I was asked to preach that Sunday evening.

I will never forget the time we spent together with brother and sister Houchen. I am thankful to God for men like brother Houchen who took an interest in me and encouraged me to preach the word.

How To Bring Others To Jesus:

We learn from Andrew in John 1:40-42 and the Samaritan woman in John 4:25-30 how to bring others to Jesus.

1) ***Find the truth.*** Both of these individuals found the truth in Christ. The truth is revealed in God's word (Jn. 17:17).

2) ***Go to others.*** Andrew found his brother (Jn. 1:41). The Samaritan woman went her way into the city (Jn. 4:28). To bring others to Jesus, we must go to them!

3) ***Say something.*** Andrew said, "*We have found the Messiah*" (Jn. 1:41). The Samaritan woman said, "*Come, see a man...*" (Jn. 4:29). Tell others what you have found and invite them to come!

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