

# THE NATURE OF PREACHING

## The Myron J. Taylor Preaching Lectures

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In this last lecture I want to talk with you about the nature of preaching. What kind of act is it? What does it do? I can almost hear you say, "But you haven't said anything yet about how to preach!" Let me assure you I am aware of that. Other matters are of such paramount significance that I simply have not had time to get to it. What comes first. That is intended to be a statement, not a question. To begin with, "How do we preach and how can we do it better?", is to ask the wrong question. Logically and theologically, "What?" comes first. Right answers are of little use if they are given to the wrong questions. You remember in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* that when Alice first meets the Red Queen, she says politely, "How do you do?" and the Queen replies tartly and disconcertingly, "How do you do what?" The Red Queen could have made a daunting but effective homiletics teacher. "What?" comes first.

I. As we begin I want to state a principle and then I want to attempt to develop it and make it clear. It is called the sacramental principle. "Sacramental" is not a popular word, especially among our Christian Churches, but I beg for your indulgent and patient attention. The sacramental principle came to my mind a long time ago and only after a number of years of careful study did I come to see its application to preaching. The sacramental principle is: Through the human the divine comes; through the material the spiritual is made manifest; through the natural the supernatural is revealed. John Macquarrie in his excellent study, *A Guide to the Sacraments* says: "We should notice, too, that among early Christian writers, the Latin *sacramentum* became the standard translation for the Greek word *mysterion*, 'mystery'" (4-5).

The concept first came to my mind when I studied under Dr. William Robinson of Great Britain as a graduate student many years ago. He wrote a small booklet, *The Sacraments and life*, which had a tremendous impact on my mind. Dr. Robinson helped me to see that the sacramental principle has application in many areas of thought and life.

Consider first the world of nature. Nature is sacramental. Through the natural the supernatural comes. There is a knowledge of God in nature, in spite of Barth's insistence to the contrary. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1 KJV).

"Beauty is conveyed to us through things, through the autumn tints in the woods, through the arrangement of pigment on the artist's canvas, through the striking of the taut wires in the piano by felt-covered hammers. And latent patriotism is aroused by the sight of a flag, and love by the impact of lips upon lips. We live in a material universe and cannot know our fellow human beings apart from their material bodies. The material is largely the vehicle of all the experiences we have, whether pleasurable or painful (Ford, *The Ministry of the Word*, p.120).

In Christianity the material is not the opposite of the spiritual. In fact, Christianity is the most materialistic of all the religions. The Christian belief is that God made matter. As C. S. Lewis states it, "God likes matter; He invented it." God is the Creator and the Sustainer of the material world. And does not Jesus' use of parables from nature to teach men and women about God imply something of this view of the natural order? There actually exists such an essential harmony between the working of the spiritual and the working of the natural that Jesus can point to the material and natural in order that people may recognize the spiritual and transcendent. It seems to me that this view says creation is good, material is not evil, the body is not to be

despised, and sex is not evil as God gave it. Nature is sacramental – through the natural the supernatural comes.

Consider the Incarnation. Jesus Christ was a sacramental person. "The Word was made flesh (sarx) and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). God became man and came right into the human situation. As Will Robinson puts it, "The channel of the spiritual in the highest of all revelations was physical" (*Essays on Christian Unity*, p.173).

Donald M. Ballie, in his book *The Theology of the Sacraments*, gives this word of caution and confirmation:

But if we are to be at all true to the New Testament, we must make this continuity, this extension of the incarnation wholly dependent on the Word and the Spirit. . . . The Word is not a timeless deposit of philosophy but the story of an episode, and when it is spoken, when the story is told, with the witness of the church, the Holy Spirit does His work, takes the things of Christ and gives them to us. Christ is present with us, not incarnate in the church, but through the Holy Spirit working in the church by Word and Sacrament. And it all happens that way because Christianity is the religion of the incarnation (pp. 66-67).

Consider The Bible. The Bible is a human book. It is made of paper, printing and binding. Every word in the Bible is a human word – originally written in Hebrew, Greek, and possibly some Aramaic. Our Bible contains only English words –all human words. At the same time we call the Bible the Word of God. How can it be both the words of men and the Word of God? Dr. George Eldon Ladd answers like this:

At this point we are confronted by the central feature of the biblical truth of revelation and of the role of the Bible in this divine self-revelation; God has revealed Himself to men not only in words, but first of all in acts, in deeds, in historical events. History is the vehicle of the divine self-revelation. . . . Here is the biblical mode of revelation; the revealing acts of God in history, accompanied by the interpreting prophetic word which explains the divine source and character of the divine acts. Deeds – words; God acts – God speaks; and the words explain the deeds. . . . God has given to the church the Holy Spirit, one of whose

ministries is to make the events of the past revelatory and redeeming history contemporaneous with every age, to make the prophetic words written long ago living words to the modern reader (*The New Testament and Criticism*, pp.26,27,32).

Through the words the Word comes. Through the human the Divine comes. Through the temporal the Eternal manifests itself. The Bible is a sacramental book: through the words the Word comes.

Consider the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper. May I remind you that in the New Testament there is no word which refers to these two rites together. We often call them ordinances (which is a biblical word but not a biblical word referring to these biblical acts. Nowhere in the New Testament are baptism and the Lord's Supper called ordinances). Because of the present line of thought I am developing, I prefer to call them sacraments (with care taken to use my definition of sacrament and fully aware of the misunderstanding which might arise if my definition is not carefully followed). Sacrament is not a biblical word but it contains an insight which contributes to the deepening of our thought concerning baptism and the Lord's Supper. No longer are they regarded as mere ritual acts – pieces of ceremony – which can be dispensed with at will. Through the human the divine comes. God has chosen material media of water, bread and wine to re-present the Gospel – the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Christianity, the material is not the opposite of the spiritual; rather, here the material is profoundly spiritualized. Through the material the spiritual comes. Christianity transforms and transfigures the life of this world, making all things new, investing everything and every action with a new significance. Nothing that a person in Christ does in his daily life – business, politics,

recreation – can be divested of this significance. There is no way of setting "spiritual" over against "material" for all is spiritual.

To put it simply, this means that when a man accepts Baptism he becomes a new kind of creature functioning in this world, no longer living unto himself. He forsakes selfishness for community. When he shares in the service of Holy Communion, it means that he makes all things holy during the following week, whatever he is engaged in (Robinson, *The Sacraments and Life*, 4).

This clearly means that Christian sacramentalism is quite different from the sacramentalism of the early Greek and Oriental cults. Christian sacramentalism is ethical – not mystical or magical. This is illustrated by the fact that Paul could appeal to both baptism and the Lord's Supper as grounds for arguing about Christian conduct (Rom. 6: I Cor. 11:20-34).

It was moral cleansing – the end of one kind of moral life and the beginning of another, lived in the power of God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was such a new kind of moral life that it could only be lived by supernatural power. It was the whole body which was immersed. Think of the implications of that! The lower limbs and the feet could never again be engaged on errands of hurt to any human creature, on running to and fro with intent to do mischief; the sexual organs could never again be devoted to lustful and harmful purposes, in fornication and adultery – they also had been baptized; the hands could never again minister hurt to any of God's creatures; the mouth could never again lend itself to false speech, whether lascivious, covetous, or malicious; the eyes could never again look upon evil with pleasure; the ears could never again listen to slander and false evidence and take pleasure in it; and the brain could never again devise schemes of craftiness and terror. It was total immersion and it

meant total surrender to the will of God and the way of Christ, the resisting of every temptation to fall to a lower standard in ways of life, whatever the respectable standards of the environment might be. Christians were a different race of people with entirely different standards of life, and they were in possession of a new power which would enable them to manifest their new standards and to work as a leaven within the world transforming it (Robinson, *The Sacraments of Life*, p.9).

In Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper there is action – something happens. Paul speaks of baptism as "putting off" and "putting on". Early in the church, a candidate for baptism was stripped of his garments and after immersion re-clothed in garments of white. (How far back this goes is impossible to say. Some would claim as far back as the first century). This is realistic symbolism – that is, it effects what it represents. What it pictures – it does. In baptism something happens--like getting married or becoming a citizen – God's grace meets my faith (obedient trust), bestowing forgiveness of sins, giving me the Holy Spirit, receiving me into the fellowship of His Church, making me a new creation and endowing me with a new dimension of existence – eternal life. Baptism introduces one into a new kind of moral life (see Galatians 5:19-26). In the Lord's Supper, whether we take the words, "Do this as my anamnesis" to mean "do this for my re-calling" (Gregory Dix), where it has the full sense of "bringing back", or whether we take them to mean "do this in remembrance of me," the meaning is clear that we have been in the very presence of Christ and have been either blessed or condemned.

II. Now, at last, consider preaching. What does it mean to preach? Is it a person merely speaking to other persons? Is it simply talk? What is the nature of preaching? I have inflicted

upon you all that has gone before in order to say that it is my conviction that here, too, the sacramental principle holds – through the words the Word comes. Preaching is an essential part of the redemptive act of God. As Leonard Griffith puts it: "It is part of the event itself."

Preaching is necessary to Christianity. So far as I know, no person anytime, anywhere has ever become a Christian without the telling of the story (preaching). Hear H. H. Farmer in his excellent volume, *The Servant of the Word*:

It all begins in an event, or rather the Event, God's Event. . . . An event can only establish itself – by happening, by being given. And it can only become generally known by being borne witness to, by being proclaimed, by the story being told. . . . whoso said Christianity, said preaching. . . . Bearing witness to the unique, saving activity of God in Christ is now seen not as merely an adjunct, even an indispensable adjunct to, but as indispensably part of, the saving activity itself. . . . Witnessing to the event was indeed part of the event from the very beginning (pp. 18,19,21,22).

Preaching is part of the event by which God comes into the contemporary moment to personally confront men and women for either redemption or condemnation.

Preaching is that divine, saving activity in history, which began two thousand years ago in the advent of Christ and in His personal relationships with men and women, and has continued throughout the ages in the sphere of redeemed personal relationships (which is the true church), now focussing on me, confronting me, as a person indissolubly bound up with other persons at this present time. This focussing on me is not apart from what has gone before, nor can it be, for it is part of the continuous purpose throughout the years which began in Christ; hence preaching is telling me something. But it is not merely telling me something. It is God actively probing me, challenging my will, calling on me for decision, offering me his succour (help), through the only medium which the nature of His purpose permits Him to use, the medium of a personal relationship. It is as though, to adopt the Apostle's words, God did beseech me by you. (*The Servant of the Word*, pp.27-28).

Preaching is necessary to Christianity. It isn't a matter of whether we want to preach or not. It is a fact, that without a faithful telling of the story, Christianity will cease to be. On the

other hand, by the faithful telling of the story by the power of the Holy Spirit, God actually comes into the present moment to confront us in the most significant moment of our lives. When we stand before God, we receive either salvation or condemnation; there is no possibility of walking away unscathed and indifferent. Remember the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer – "When Jesus calls a man, he bids him come and die." You cannot escape that kind of challenge.

John Knox states the case precisely:

The Spirit makes the ancient event in a very real sense an event even now transpiring, and the preaching is a medium of the Spirit's action in doing so. In the preaching, when it is truly itself, the event is continuing or is recurring. God's revealing action in Christ is, still or again, actually taking place. . . . Here is the final test of Christian preaching, if it be genuine preaching and genuinely Christian: Does it really convey the saving action of God? Just as God used the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, so also, if in a subordinate way, is he using the preacher's preaching of that life, death, and resurrection as the medium of his power and love? . . . Insofar as preaching is failing, here is the primary point of its failure – not that it fails to be learned enough, or entertaining enough, or brief enough, or 'modern' enough, but that God's power and action are not being effectively communicated in it. This is the primary point of failure, because in failing here, preaching is failing to be preaching at all. A man is expressing his opinions, true or false, interesting or uninteresting, about matters important or unimportant. But God is not acting. Something is being said, but nothing is taking place. The judging and saving event of Christ is not recurring. The Spirit, the 'glorious might' of God, is not present (*The Integrity of Preaching*, pp.93-94).

Preaching is sacramental. Through the words the Word comes. Preaching is not merely saying something but doing something. The true sermon is a real deed. I am indebted to P. T. Forsyth for first setting my mind to thinking in this direction. "The Gospel is an act of God," said Forsyth. "Its preaching must therefore be an act, a 'function' of the great act. A true sermon is a real deed" (*Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p.22). To preach the gospel, then, is not merely to say words but to effect a deed. True preaching is an extension of the Incarnation into the contemporary moment, the transfiguring of the Cross and the Resurrection from ancient

facts of a remote past into living realities of the present. A sermon is an act wherein the crucified, risen Lord personally confronts men either to save them or to judge them. The Preacher speaks through the preacher.

If this be so, then much that passes for preaching is not of the essence of preaching at all. Eloquence, literary finesse, logical arrangement, sustained progression, the personal appeal of the preacher, handsome appearance, intellectual brilliance, profundity of thought, the ability to sway an audience by the subtle arts of speech – these are but the accidents, not the essence, of preaching. One could have all these and yet not preach. One could lack all of these and yet preach. These are not to be discounted in their usefulness, for presumably a person who is richly endowed in the accidents of preaching will be more effective, if he has also the essence of it, than one who is poorly endowed. But an authentic word from God through a poor human agent is true preaching, whereas a sermon which does no more than communicate human ideas is not true preaching at all. To introduce men and women to God so that He and they have dealings with each other is an event of abiding value, no matter how crude the introduction. Merely to talk about God without His being present is spiritually worthless, no matter how eloquent or enjoyable the speech. A true sermon is a real deed.

I want you to hear Dr. David H. C. Read, internationally known minister of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, as he speaks of preaching as a sacrament and as a mystery:

"In a Christian context, preaching is a unique event in which human words, ordinary contemporary words, are used to declare the Word of God, the gospel of Christ as it is found in the Bible. Karl Barth's image of the preacher as the man with the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other shows what this means. Preaching is an encounter of modern man with the Word of

God. It is a sacramental mystery in which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the 'bread and the wine' of the everyday speech of very ordinary mortals become the vehicles for the Real Presence of Christ.... when we think of preaching as mystery, we are restoring it to its proper place in the enduring life of the church. . . . It is a mystery in which human words, in the tones and overtones of contemporary speech, become the vehicle of the living and eternal Christ (*Sent From God*, pp.14,30, 31).

Dr. Read has more to say to us about the misuse of preaching as mystery:

Preaching, however, is not a mystery in the sense of mumbo jumbo or hocus-pocus. It is all too possible for a preacher to cast a spell over an audience by the use of all the tricks in the arsenal of demagoguery – rapid-fire, authoritative projection of logical absurdities, stirring up of latent prejudices, bamboozling the crowd with claims to esoteric information, creating an aura of mystic rapture signifying nothing. Luke tells us in the book of the Acts that one of these spiritual demagogues was active in Samaria at the time of Peter's mission in that area. "A certain man called Simon," he wrote . . . "bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that he himself was some great one." Curiously, the man responded to Peter's preaching and was baptized. But then it occurred to him that Peter was really nothing more than a superior kind of mystery-maker, and he offered Peter cash if he would tell him the secret. Peter's reply, in J. B. Phillips' version, was a rough one – "To hell with you and your money!" (A text I have never yet dared to use on Budget Sunday). It is interesting that hocus-pocus is etymologically a description of the perversion of the true mystery. During the period when the medieval mass was at its most debased, and little was heard by a congregation except some mumbling up at the altar, the Latin words of consecration, "Hoc est corpus meum", were heard as "hocas-pocus", and the supreme mystery of Christian worship had become a mere mystification. In the same way exactly, the mystery of Christian preaching can degenerate into mystification when the sermon ceases to be the vehicle for the Real Presence of Christ and becomes a spellbinder for the confusion of a congregation and the benefit of the preacher" (*Sent From God*, p.31-32).

The very nature of preaching makes it central. God speaks through preaching. Preaching is revelation. The most significant preaching has grown out of a Word-of-God theology of preaching; it is preaching that communicates God's Word to humankind, through human speech. Preaching at its best, then, is sacramental; it is that point of communion between the responding person and the presence of God; it is a genuine avenue of grace (Holland, *The Preaching Tradition*, p.112).

III. The sacramental principle in the light of scripture. In the Prologue to John's Gospel, we find a kind of symphony on the theme of the Word of God. Without being too schematic (precise), we might express it somewhat like this: We believe in the living God, in whom the Word – communication – is eternally present as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; this outgoing God brings the world into being and in that world seeks communion with his human family through the light of his Spirit. At one specific point in time he made the supreme revelation as "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Those who "beheld his glory" have left the record of what happened: and thus the preacher today is enabled to proclaim the Word as one "sent from God" and to "bear witness to the Light." For those who need a little more structure to the thought it may be expressed like this: the eternal Word (Father, Son and Holy Spirit); the living (Incarnate) Word (Jesus Christ); the written Word (the contemporary witness to Jesus, along with the tradition of the law and the prophets out of which He came); the spoken Word (the word of the contemporary preacher).

I once read a simple statement about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which still seems to be illuminating: it said we can think of the Father as "God everywhere and always"; God the Son as "God there and then"; and God the Holy Spirit as "God here and now." With that in mind one could say that the sermon as the word "here and now" is mightily dependent on the presence of the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is present, the eternal God and the living Christ are suddenly contemporary. The Holy Spirit is God in the present tense. Here and now in the preaching God is speaking, and through contemporary words the Word of God comes into action.

"So we return to the central mystery by which human words, spoken words – eloquent or faltering, logical or lyrical, premeditated or spontaneous, wise or foolish – can become the

vehicle of the Word of God, the Real Presence of Christ." (Read, *Sent From God*, pp.40-41). If this sketch of a theological backbone for preaching based on John's Prologue is in any sense valid, it points in the direction of our sacramental principle – through the human the divine comes; through the words the Word comes.

Paul describes his own preaching in II Cor. 5:20 (Phillips): "We are now Christ's ambassadors as though God were appealing direct to you through us." "That is, God was actually doing the appealing through their sermons. Their preaching, therefore was a continuation of the work of Christ" (Jones, *Principles and Practice of Preaching*, p.18). The redeeming God is actively present, judging and redeeming now in the solemn realities of this moment. Then God really becomes the Preacher. The sermon is no longer the effort of a human person to speak moving words; it has become the deed of God. True preaching is re-enactment of the deed of redemption as both the atoning love and resurrection power of Christ express themselves once again through His body, the Church.

II Corinthians 5:18-20. Vs. 18 – "and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." "Having made reconciliation possible, God put in us, committed to us (cf. Gal. 2:7), put in our mouths (entrusted to us RSV on v. 19) the message of reconciliation . . . Some, for example Windisch and Conzelmann, . . . take this verse to refer to the establishing in the Church of the office of preaching; so in a sense it does, but Paul is thinking not in general terms but specifically of his own ministry" (C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle To The Corinthians*, pp. 177-178)

This verse adds little to the theology of the paragraph, but it sums up the picture of Paul's apostleship. On the one hand, Paul has no importance, and indeed no message, of his own. . . . On the other hand, where Paul is at work, Christ, whom he represents, is at work; where Paul speaks, God speaks. . . . In other words, the preaching itself also belongs to the event of salvation. It is

neither a narrative account of a past event, that once happened, nor is it instruction on philosophical (weltanschauliche) questions; but in it Christ is encountered, God's own word to man is encountered: "So we act for Christ, while God at the same time preaches through our mouth, Be reconciled to God!" (2 Cor. v. 20) (Bultmann, *Exegetica*, p. 228). Barrett, op. cit., pp.178-179.

Of this C. H. Dodd writes:

The personality of Christ receives, so to speak, an extension in the life of His body on earth. Those 'saving facts', the death and resurrection of Christ are not merely particular facts of past history, however decisive in their effect; they are re-enacted in the experience of the Church. If Christ died to this world, so have the members of His body; if He has risen into newness of life, so have they; if He being risen from the dead, dieth no more, neither do they; if God has glorified Him, He has also glorified them" (*The Apostolic Preaching and its Development*, pp.62f.).

Preaching is the act through which these "saving facts" are re-enacted in the experience of the Church now. A sermon, therefore, is not primarily something said, but something done. Not mere words, but a deed.

In Peter's speech to Cornelius he speaks of God "preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36). He then mentions the life and mighty works of Jesus – his death, his resurrection, his exaltation to the position of Judge of the living and the dead, and his power to forgive sins. The total Christ-Deed was the preaching of God to men. God's preaching was to enact redemption.

In Ephesians 2:17 the preaching of the apostles is described as the preaching of Christ. In their preaching He was active, breaking down "the dividing walls of hostility" between Jew and Gentle, and reconciling "both to God in one body through the cross." John Calvin remarks on this passage that the apostles preached "not only in his name and by his command, but as it were in his own person," so that their preaching "is justly ascribed to none other than (Christ) himself."

Another passage which equates the preaching of the apostles with God's redemptive action is to be found in I Peter 1:23-25. Peter speaks of the fact that his readers "have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." This word is the Logos, the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of the world. It is through him that they have been "born anew." But how was this new birth through the grace of the Redeemer effected? "The word referred to, as far as you are concerned," says Peter, "is the message of the Gospel that was preached to you." Here the living Word which redeems is equated with the preached word which was the agent of its action. The preaching of the apostles was the Redeemer in action.

The same truth can be seen in I Thessalonians where Paul describes the welcome the Thessalonians gave his preaching, and how they "turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven." This was accomplished, Paul says to them, because "When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (I Thess. 1:9,10; 2:13). Dr. George Eldon Ladd Says,

To receive the gospel tradition does not mean simply to receive instruction and intellectual enlightenment. To receive the tradition means to receive Christ Jesus as Lord (Col. 2:6). In the voice of the tradition, the voice of God himself is heard; and through this word, God himself is present and active in the Church (I Thess. 2:13)" ("Revelation and Tradition in Paul" in *Apostolic History and The Gospel*, edited by Gasque and Martin, p.226).

Ilion T. Jones writes: "The early preachers were not expressing their own ideas but publishing the word of God. Once accepted by the believer, that word became alive and active

within them. Thus preaching was the means of starting God's redemptive work in the believer"

*(Principles and Practice of Preaching, p.18).*

"He that negotiates between God and man,  
as God's ambassador, the grand concerns  
of judgment and of mercy, should beware  
of lightness in his speech"

From "The Task" by William Cowper.

But perhaps the most vivid statement of the conception of preaching as an actual participation in the Deed of Redemption is to be seen in Paul's letter to the Galatians (4:19). Here is one of those undesigned, spontaneous statements which reveal things which no conscious effect could portray: "Oh my dear children, I feel the pangs of childbirth all over again till Christ be formed within you." What was Paul's initial preaching among them? It was surely something more than a neat pattern of words. It was the pangs of childbirth through which Paul, participating in the agony of redemption, was striving to bring Christ to birth in the Galatians. And what could this have been but Christ Himself, through Paul, bringing the power of his suffering love to bear upon their lives until they were born into the life of the Kingdom of God?

The character of preaching as being not merely a reporting of the event but itself a part of the event is set forth in Romans 1:16 – "I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation." By "gospel", Paul means the preaching (that is all they preached in the New Testament). His point is not simply that the event proclaimed in the preaching is the saving "power of God," but that the preaching itself participates in this "power." The preaching is the extending of the event itself, not merely the knowledge of it.

In I Corinthians 1:21 Paul speaks of "preaching" as being the means through which God will "save those who believe." It is Christ crucified and preached who is "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

In Luke 4:18ff. Christ's quotation from the prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor," seems to make the preaching an element in the gospel itself. And Luke 7:22-23 seems even clearer: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."

Preaching in the New Testament is really God in action. Through the words the Word comes. Preaching is a part of the event itself. Preaching is God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit confronting men and women for redemption or judgment. Preaching actually conveys the saving action of God.

As the word of God, the gospel is indeed a divine communication; and it includes facts, truths, doctrines. However, if the gospel does no more than communicate facts and doctrines, it has been reduced to the level of human tradition. In the word, God communicates not only facts about redemption and truth about himself; God communicates himself, salvation, eternal life. The word of God is both the report about a redemptive event, and is itself a redemptive event, for in the word of the cross, the crucified himself confronts men to communicate to them the benefits of his redeeming death" (Ladd, op. cit., pp.227-228).

IV. There is one problem with all of this that must be considered – it has to do with the relationship between tradition and revelation. The preaching or proclamation of the apostles consisted primarily of the heralding of certain recent events in history: Jesus' death and resurrection. It included, along with the events themselves, the proclamation of the redemptive meaning of these events. At the same time, Paul claims that the kerygma (preaching) is a

revelation from God purposed through all ages, but now disclosed to us through the apostles and prophets (Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:5). Reflection on these statements could easily lead to the conclusion that revelation is concerned only with the redemptive meaning of these historical events, not with the events themselves. This could lead logically to the further conclusion that revelation did not take place in past historical events, but only in the proclamation of the meaning of these events, i.e. in the preaching of the gospel. Only in the proclamation of the word does God confront men/women and reveal himself.

That conclusion has been drawn by modern existentialist theologians who see the event of revelation and salvation as "nowhere present except in the proclaiming, accosting, demanding, and promising word of preaching" (R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol I, p.302). In Bultmann's view, salvation occurred in the proclaimed word of the apostles, and continues to take place in the word as it is proclaimed today. From this point of view, the gospel is not the recital of past events; it is a present event. Revelation is not the disclosure of truths about God, the communication of knowledge; revelation is the confrontation with God which occurs in the proclaimed word (R. Bultmann, "Revelation in The New Testament", *Existence and Faith*, S. M. Ogden ed., pp.58ff).

This view finds apparent support in the fact that there are sayings in Paul in which revelation seems to occur in the kerygma (preaching) and in the evangelion (gospel) rather than in past events. Romans 16:25-26 appears to equate the gospel and the kerygma of Jesus Christ with the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now disclosed and made known to all nations. Furthermore, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). The gospel itself is "mystery" (Eph. 6:19), i.e., a secret purpose of God now made known to men. The

gospel is not only of divine origin (Rom. 1:1; I Thess. 2:2-- "the gospel of God" is subjective genitive); it is a divine activity for the benefit of men and women (O. Piper, "Gospel," IDB, II, 414). The gospel does not merely bear witness to salvation history; it is itself salvation history (Frederick, TDNT, II, 731) for it is only in the preaching of the gospel that salvation is accomplished. Bultmann is right, therefore, when he underlines the "existential" character of the gospel (Piper, loc. cit.).

However, the kerygma and the gospel cannot be limited to the activity of preaching; they designate also the message itself, the content of preaching. God's purpose to save men through the "foolishness of preaching" (I Cor. 1:21 AV) does not refer to the activity by the content of preaching (Frederick, TDNT, III, p.716; C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching*, p.31; C. T. Craig, IB, 10, p.30; Grosheide, *First Corinthians*, p.47), and this content is "Christ crucified"--an event in history which is offensive and foolishness to all but believers (I Cor. 1:23). Thus the gospel includes the proclamation of facts in history: the death of Christ, His resurrection, His appearances to His disciples (I Cor. 15:3ff). (Bultmann's one-sided emphasis upon the kerygma as proclamation and not content requires him arbitrarily to exclude I Cor. 15:3-8 from the kerygma. See *Kerygma and Myth*, I, p.112). However, it is not the proclamation of mere events, but of events meaningfully understood. Christ died for our sins. The gospel is both historical event and meaning; and the meaning of the event is that God was acting in history for man's salvation.

As Dr. George Eldon Ladd so aptly states it:

There exists a dynamic unity between the event and the proclamation of the event, for the proclamation is itself a part of the event. It is impossible to place the primary emphasis upon events as past history, or as present

proclamation; the two are inseparably bound together, for two reasons. Apart from proclamation (kerygma, evangelion), the events in history cannot be understood for what they are: the redeeming acts of God. Furthermore, apart from proclamation, the events are mere events in past history: but in proclamation, they become present redeeming events. The past lives in the present through proclamation. That is why Paul can speak of the gospel as itself the power of God unto salvation ("Revelation and Tradition in Paul," *Apostolic History and The Gospel*, eds. Gasque and Martin).