

The Effectuality of True Preaching

by Bryan Anthony

The sermon emphasizes the importance of true preaching, which comes from a surrendered heart and is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and highlights the need for a return to apostolic living and preaching in today's society.

Scripture: Psalm 119:130, Isaiah 6:8, Jeremiah 23:28, Romans 10:14, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Timothy 4:2, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "True Preaching", "Spiritual Revival"

Description

Bryan Anthony preaches about the famine of true preaching in the midst of societal darkness, drawing parallels between the Gin Craze in 18th century England and the skepticism and hardness of heart prevalent today. He emphasizes the need for a revival of authentic preaching that shatters stony hearts and delivers the perspective of God Himself, as seen in the transformative power of the Gospel proclaimed by George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers during England's revival. Anthony challenges preachers to seek a holy resonance through surrender to the Lord, highlighting that true preaching is a divine phenomenon that brings eternity to bear upon its hearers.

Transcript

"For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe." -1 Thess. 2.13

"For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God...." -1 Thess. 1.9

There is a particular kind of preaching that we hear far too little of, and it doesn't have to do with a rare homiletical technique, or some secret methodology that we're missing. There is a famine of true preaching, the kind which Paul was engaged in, the kind that shatters the stony hearts of men and delivers the heart and perspective of God Himself.

In 1738, England was at one of its darkest points in history. The well documented "Gin craze" had swept through the society to the extent that one or two houses on every block functioned as Gin shops, and alcoholism was sweeping the land.

.... every sixth house in London had become a gin shop and the nation was in an uncontrollable orgy of gin drinking.

.... With but a few notable exceptions, the pulpits were cold, and discord and stagnancy were the chief features of denominational life.

.... the churches had failed. Furthermore, they had failed at a time when they were most sorely needed.

.... robbed of a sense of the reality of God, the people of England stood more in need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ than at any time since the Reformation. But they were denied the message of its transforming power and, as a result, found themselves in the bondage of sinful habit.

.... Perhaps the worst effect of the Gin Craze was that indicated by Bishop Benson, when, towards the close of his life he stated, 'Gin has made the English people what they never were before- cruel and inhuman.'

(George Whitefield: The life and times of the great evangelist of the 18th century revival, Arnold Dallimore; Banner of Truth Press, 1970; pp. 24-25)

It was at that time that Bishop Butler declared:

.... scepticism was so rampant that Christianity was treated as though it was now discovered to be fictitious.... and nothing remained but to set it up as the subject of mirth and ridicule.

(ibid., p. 31)

And Archbishop Secker gave this grim assertion:

In this we cannot be mistaken, that an open and professed disregard to religion is become, through a variety of unhappy causes, the distinguishing character of the present age. This evil has already brought in such dissoluteness and contempt of principle in the higher part of the world, and such profligate intemperance and fearlessness of committing crimes in the lower, as must, if this torrent of impiety stop not, become absolutely fatal.

(ibid., p. 31)

Dallimore continues by raising a question that ought to be raised in our generation as well:

But how was 'this torrent of impiety' to be stopped? It was evident that the writing of scholarly books in defence of Christianity would not suffice, for it had been tried, but with little avail. Nor would the threat of punishment, for the informing on wrongdoers and the increase of hangings had but hardened the criminal mind. The successive failures of the several attempts to better conditions simply proved that the nation's trouble lay basically with the individual human heart and that the 'torrent of impiety' would flow until some power was found that could stanch it at its source.

(ibid.)

They had never seen such widespread drunkenness, and it resulted in a drastic increase in violence and abuse within the homes of England. We may not be in the midst of a "Gin Craze", but is not skepticism rampant, and is not a hardness of heart the predominate condition, even in our Churches? Is not the moral

tone of our nation continuing on a downward spiral, while the prevailing attitude of the masses toward Christianity is much like the above description, "the subject of mirth and ridicule"?

Surely we are in need of the "sound of a voice." We must again hear that distinct note sounded, one that carries the resonance of God Himself. We are neck-deep in voices that are "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal," but when a man is anointed by God Himself, his voice will quicken something in his hearers. In 1738, England was covered with darkness, but in that great and grim hour there would come a remarkable light, and its glow would be seen and felt across the land, and for centuries to follow.

During the very months in which Bishop Secker wrote his foreboding words, England was startled by the sound of a voice. It was the voice of a preacher, George Whitefield, a clergyman but twenty-two years old, who was declaring the Gospel in the pulpits of London with such fervour and power, that no church would hold the multitudes that flocked to hear.

His voice continued to be heard, and then was joined by the voices of John and Charles Wesley and of many others, in a tremendous chorus of praise and preaching that rang throughout the land and was sustained in strength for more than half a century.

The effect has been described in the words:

.... a religious revival burst forth.... which changed in a few years the whole temper of English society. The Church was restored to life and activity. Religion carried to the hearts of the people a fresh spirit of moral zeal, while it purified our literature and our manners. (J.R. Green, 1899)

It is the story of the eighteenth century Revival, rich with its lessons for our own needy age....

(ibid., pp. 31-32)

"England was startled by the sound of a voice," and so were the people of Thessalonica when the apostle Paul declared the Gospel of God in their midst. We have sought to lean on all kinds of technology and program to increase the effectiveness of ministry, but the Lord has never reduced the importance and primacy of true preaching.

The chief reason that there is a famine of that Pauline brand of preaching, which causes men to turn away "from idols to serve a living and true God," is that we also have a famine of the Pauline brand of living. As Amy Carmichael once noted:

I don't wonder apostolic miracles have died. Apostolic living certainly has.

There is a holy resonance that comes through the voice of a man who has truly been sent by the Lord. Homiletical courses may serve some practical purpose, but there is no true preaching unless it comes through a vessel who has surrendered to the Lord in his inmost being. When a man is refined a thousand times over, when his heart is enmeshed with the burden of the Lord, when he is no longer speaking to please the men who stand before him, then he is in a place to proclaim the word of the Lord.

There are many who make careers out of their ability to speak. They have a facility with words and a corresponding gift to communicate them. If one is attractive, winsome with an audience, one can go far in the religious world. However, true preaching bypasses all natural talents; it is altogether a divine and supernatural phenomenon. It is the word of life. It quickens the dead. It sets in motion things that have a

myriad of consequences. It is a word that is sent.

(Apostolic Foundations: The Challenge of Living an Authentic Christian Life, Arthur Katz; Burning Bush Press, 2009; pp. 162-163)

Leonard Ravenhill once stated, "This nation is going to hell beneath a 10-mile high stack of teaching tapes."

That is not to say that we ought to discard Biblical teaching, but it is to say that the origin and source of our common Christian proclamation should likely be brought into question. True preaching brings eternity to bear upon its hearers. It causes men's souls to stand uprightly, for mankind- as a piece of God's creation- will "come forth" from the grave when a true "sent one" opens his mouth. Some will come forth to everlasting life, and others will come forth bearing their teeth and casting their stones. Either way, the word of the Lord brings an ultimate kind of requirement to the hearer, and it cannot be brushed off as mere religious opinion. The air of our nation is filled with preaching of a less efficacious kind than this, and we need to ask the Lord why this is so.

The word of human beings, however wise in substance or eloquent in expression, cannot produce spiritual life: this is the prerogative of the word of God, which works effectually in believers. Like the Corinthians a few weeks later, the Thessalonians had proved that "the word of the cross... is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1.18).

(Word Biblical Commentary: 1 & 2 Thessalonians, F.F. Bruce; WORD, Inc. 1982; p. 45)

Have you heard a word of this kind lately? If you are a preacher, what is the source of the messages you deliver? Are you coming to the people as one who has just come from the holy place, or are you merely repeating stories and ideas that have been cleverly constructed in a time of sermon preparation?

Neatly prepared sermons might please curious hearers, but only a word of the cross will deliver the kind of requirement that will cause men to "turn from idols to serve the living and true God." We may impress many souls with our speaking, but they will be bound by the spirit of this age nonetheless. The true task of preaching is to bring to bear upon men the very reality of God Himself, and all that is entailed in His Person and His purposes.

A word will not "perform its work" in those who believe unless it comes through one who has been sent by the Lord Himself. Are you coming out from the holy place with a sent word, or are you settling for something much more mechanical and much less glorious?

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