

## Preaching: What is the Point?

Years ago, the sermon was the longest single part of the worship service in a Christian church. The sermon, not just the service, might last all of an hour, and taught deep truths; it was not just a ten minute story or Bible lesson.

Today many prefer shorter sermons, skits, dances, and other ways of presenting the gospel. Others, not liking sermons and the gospel they present, don't go to church at all.

But what is the purpose of the sermon? Do we value it as highly as God Himself does?

### **The point of preaching.**

In defending the place of preaching in a worship service, I'm not defending every speech that might be called a sermon.

A proper sermon explains one or more Bible passages, shows how that passage speaks of God's grace in saving sinners in Jesus Christ, and calls believers to live as Jesus did. In other words, a proper sermon sets God's own Word before God's people. A sermon in which some man sets forth his own ideas about society, life, religion, or any other subject, is not a proper sermon.

But why have sermons in church? Why *preach* the gospel of salvation in Christ? Especially, why preach this gospel in church, to those who have already heard it and know it?

Several answers can be given.

First, because we need to see our sins, and to be called to turn from them, again and again. Proper preaching does this. Peter ended his sermon on Pentecost with these words: "Repent, and be baptized . . ." (Acts 2:38).

Second, because God's people need to be told again and again that God loves us, so that we are always sure of His love. Proper preaching assures us of this, as it presents the gospel: Jesus Christ, God Himself come in our flesh, bearing the guilt of our sins, enduring God's punishment in His death, raised again the third day with new life, working in our hearts by His Spirit to bring us unto God!

Third, the preaching of the gospel is the chief way in which God builds up His people in faith. Not merely the *gospel*, but the *preaching* of this gospel, is this chief way. See how the Holy Spirit teaches us this in Romans 10:13-17: to be saved, we must call on the name of the Lord; to call on His name, we must have faith; to have faith, we must hear; to hear, we need a preacher. In conclusion, we read in verse 17: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

To *have* faith is not enough; our faith must continually be made *stronger*. God tells us in the Bible that He uses especially the preaching of the gospel to make our faith stronger. He uses other means too - the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; but these are properly used only in the worship service, as additions to the preaching.

### **The preaching as primary.**

Because God strengthens faith primarily by gospel preaching, the sermon is to be the center of the whole worship service.

Symbolically, Reformed churches show the preaching to be primary by having the pulpit in the center of the platform, with the baptism font and Lord's Supper table lower or to the side of the pulpit.

By allowing the preacher enough time for the sermon, so that he can unfold the text deeply, the church shows she receives the preaching as primary.

When the church insists that what is preached is the gospel of God, she shows she receives it as primary.

### **Other presentations of the gospel.**

Do other ways of presenting the gospel have a place in the worship service? May the church include skits and liturgical dances?

She may not. God has not provided any other means for the church to use to present the gospel in her worship services, than the preaching of the gospel and the sacraments. The church is not free to use other means which God has not given her.

Neither are more means needed. The preaching appeals to the hearing, and the sacraments to the sense of sight, touch, and taste. In the preaching and sacraments, God has already provided that which skits and liturgical dances mean to do.

### **Sit under the preaching!**

Because of what God does through the preaching of the gospel, the believing child of God who is spiritually healthy will want to hear the gospel preached! And he will trust that God will meet His spiritual needs in this way.

So he will come to church, regularly, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25).

And to the one who preaches in his church that day, he expresses his one longing and desire: “Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:21). Minister, preach the gospel to us!

# Pastor Douglas Kuiper

*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord . . .* 2 Corinthians 4:5

*. . . But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching . . .* Titus 1:3

*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God . . . For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* 1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-24