

# Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## Faithfulness in Preaching

### *The Attributes of a Prophetic Call, Part 4*

#### “Successful” Pulpits

A few weeks ago Lakewood Church in Houston Texas — the fastest growing church in the US — held their first worship service in their new facility. In the end, over 56,000 people attended. While the preacher, Joel Olsteen, has been criticized for not mentioning sin, propitiation, hell, justification, and the like, nevertheless his reply is, “There is so much positive in the Bible; we don't need to dwell on the negative.”

More than 30 years ago a young preacher by the name of D. James Kennedy went door to door in the Ft. Lauderdale area in the hopes of sharing the good news of Christ with his city. Today through satellite and cable, his sermons reach millions on a weekly basis. It appears to me that the focus of his pulpit is the addressing of the following:

- The evil's of the public school system.
- The need for Christian congressmen.
- The religion of our country's founding fathers.
- The evil's of gambling.
- Planned parenthood/abortion.
- And many of the other social ills that our society has.

Years ago in my first pulpit, a gentleman asked to meet with me because he had some “concerns” about my preaching. He began by saying that I could never build a church approaching the text the way that I was. What I needed to do was, instead of preaching, give a multi-media presentation about some facet of the Christian life. ”After all,” he said, “This was the modern trend.”

In contrast, Walter Chantry wrote this:

“Much of modern preaching is anemic, with the life-blood of God's nature absent from the message. Evangelists centre their message upon man. Man has sinned and missed a great blessing. If man wants to retrieve his immense loss he must act thus and so. But the Gospel of Christ is very different. It begins with God and His glory. It tells men that they have offended a holy God, who will by no means pass by sin. It reminds sinners that the only hope of salvation is

to be found in the grace and power of this same God. Christ's Gospel sends men to beg pardon of the Holy One.

“There is a wide difference between these two messages. The one seeks to blaze a trail to Heaven for man while ignoring the Lord of Glory. The other labours to magnify the God of all grace in the salvation of men.”<sup>1</sup>

So the question is this: Which approach is right? What constitutes a faithful pulpit? Excluding such things as personality, style, and packaging, what ought to characterize Biblical preaching? Does the Bible say? Or, is it simply left up to taste and the opinion of man?

The Bible does say, and our text is one passage that, while it contains the message given to Samuel roughly 3000 years ago, nevertheless it serves as a didactic tool for all preaching. For what we see here is not just one message... given one time... to one person but rather a pattern after which ALL sermons must comport in order to be Biblical sermons.

## Salvifically Shocking

Thus let us begin examining this passage endeavoring to understand the elements of Biblical preaching. The first element is that the message must be Salvifically shocking.

1 Samuel 3:11, “And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.”<sup>2</sup>

This verse described an interesting result of a word from the Lord: tingling ears. This term *tingle* in the Hebrew is the assumed root of many terms or expressions. From it we get the words for cymbal or bell,<sup>3</sup> darkness — as in the valley of the shadow of death; a place of intense horror and grief<sup>4</sup> — a spear — which when held quivers in the hand<sup>5</sup> — and the whirring of locusts.<sup>6</sup>

Now you look at the word group for *tingle* and you discover that that which binds all of these words together is the concept of “intense shaking” and thus a “ringing” — as in a bell — or a “tingling” — as in the ear.

What would be the effect of an extremely loud noise on your hearing? If someone blew a trumpet right next to your ear or you attended a loud concert, or you were as close as you could get to an explosion or train without getting hurt, what would happen? You might describe the effects with the word dazed or stunned and your ears would ring, you'd have a sense of numbness and depending on what actually happened, you might even experience shock.

That is the idea behind this word. In the context of a message from the Lord, it denotes conviction, amazement, awe mingles with fear, sorrow, horror, a loathing of self, and a longing for healing. It is a salvific shock!

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<sup>1</sup> “Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic? pp. 25-26.

<sup>2</sup> ללס tsalal

<sup>3</sup> Compare 2 Samuel 6:5; Psalm 150:5; Zechariah 14:20; Exodus 28:36; 1Chronicles 13:8; 15:19; 16:5

<sup>4</sup> Compare Nehemiah 13:19; Psalm 23:4; 107:10-14; 44:19

<sup>5</sup> Compare Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Volume 2, page 766

<sup>6</sup> Compare Deuteronomy 28:42

And that would be the effect of the word of God given to Samuel upon all who heard it, “tingling ears.” In fact we see this throughout Scripture as one of the effects of Biblical preaching. For example the people at Pentecost heard of their guilt in the crucifixion of Christ and the message of salvation “were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Or think of Habakkuk when he received the prophetic word.

Habakkuk 3:16, “When I heard, **my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself**, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.”

We see it in Corinth. Paul describes the result of Biblical preaching.

1 Corinthians 14:24-25, “But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.”

In fact, one of the stated purposes of the word of God — and thus the stated purpose of every pulpit — is this:

Hebrews 4:12-14, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.”

## **Conviction, Growth in Grace**

From this we derive the first characteristic of a Faithful Pulpit: It will aim at nothing less than conviction, devastation, being cut to the quick, growth in grace — all of which are denoted by the Hebrew expression, “tingling ears.”

Contrast this Biblical view of a sermon to what so many are longing for in a sermon today. We don't want our ears to tingle; we want them to be tickled! We don't want to hear the truth; we want to hear that which will inspire us, make us feel good, and send us out all fired up and excited. This is the spirit of the age predicted in the last days. After calling Timothy to preach the word, Paul told him this:

2 Timothy 4:3-4, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”

And yet the longing for messages which tickle the ears is nothing new. Isaiah ministered in a generation much like ours.

Isaiah 30:9-10, “That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits:”

And lest you think this was true just in Bible times, recently a preacher of a large church said this:

“We have put a lot of time and thought into what non-churched people want from a Sunday morning service, and we have concluded that they basically want four things: Anonymity, uncomplicated teaching, a non-threatening environment, and contemporary relevancy.”<sup>7</sup>

Truly if you haven't seen it, the desire is real today. Make me happy and filled! Stroke my ego! Inspire me! Tickle my ears! A. W. Tozer wrote of the type of preaching that was becoming common in his day—he said that it “does not slay the sinner; it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. To the self assertive it says, 'Come and assert yourself for Christ.' To the egotist it says, 'Come and do your boasting in the Lord.' To the thrill-seeker it says, 'Come and enjoy the thrill of the abundant Christian life.’”<sup>8</sup>

Now, as exciting and thrilling as this type of preaching may be, it nevertheless falls way short of the standard established in Scripture by such texts as ours. **DON'T MISS IT!** The goal of all preaching is not tickling ears, but tingling ears!

So why is there so much “tickling of the ears” going on in our day? Quite frankly, it is because it is much easier to tickle ears than it is to tingle them. Tickling ears is something anyone of us can do. Many can tell a stirring story, produce a great multimedia presentation, and play great music. It is not hard to manipulate the emotion such that people leave a church all charged up. Ah but “tingling” the ear is another matter.

What man is there who can preach a sermon and create conviction, sorrow for sin, and a hungering and thirsting after righteousness?

**NO MAN!** For these responses are the works of the Spirit of God. These responses only come as the Spirit of God wills.

And that is why in our day where the success of a church is based in part upon whether the pulpit “moved” the individual, churches have abandoned the unpredictable effects of the true preaching of the word for the predictable results of tickling ears! A famous critic of expository preaching wrote this:

“Many preachers, for example, indulge habitually in what they call expository sermons. They take a passage from Scripture and, proceeding on the assumption that the people attending church that morning are deeply concerned about what the passage means, they spend their half hour or more on historical exposition of the verse or chapter, ending with some appended practical application to the auditors. Could any procedure be more surely predestined to dullness and futility? Who seriously supposes that, as a matter of fact, one in a hundred of the congregation cares, to start with, what Moses, Isaiah, Paul, or John meant in those special verses, or came to church deeply concerned about it?”

“[Instead] the modern preacher... should clearly visualize some real need, perplexity, sin, or desire in his auditors, and then should throw on the problem all the light he can find in the Scripture or anywhere else... There is nothing that people are so interested in as themselves, their own problems, and the way to solve them. That fact is basic. No preaching that neglects it can raise a

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in MacArthur's, “Our Sufficiency in Christ,” p. 148

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in “Tell the Truth,” pg. 39.

ripple on a congregation.”<sup>9</sup>

And so the bottom-line today is, “Were the people moved? Were their needs met?”

And yet this approach comes at such a great price. Let me ask you these questions:

- Do you think the church is ready for persecution?
- How equipped are we today to suffer?
- Do you think that the average Christian today is ready for the baptism that awaits them which may come in the form of lost loved ones? Ill health? Hardship?

I say, “No!” And yet here is the travesty. In our feel-good churches where sermons tickle, caress, and massage we leave excited and pumped up. But how long does it last? A day — maybe two?

And so like the effects of sugar on the body, many a pulpit today gives an initial buzz but then it quickly wanes and leaves a person hungering and thirsting NOT for God or righteousness BUT for another lift, more excitement, and the opportunity to “experience Jesus.” Jeremiah commenting on this very issue wrote this:

Jeremiah 5:30-31, “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?”

Indeed! What will you do when you are at the end of yourself? When God deals you a bitter providence? When you experience loss? What good then will be the feel good sermons we have heard?

Indeed! May our prayer be that the pulpit of BPC ever and always be a means through which God “tingles” our ears unto the conviction of sin, the breaking of our rebellious hearts, purging us of our dross, rebuilding us in the image of Christ, and equipping us unto every good work. Any aspiration less than this is a compromise!

## **Consistent**

Secondly Biblical preaching will be consistent with the rest of God’s word.

1 Samuel 3:12, “In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.”

Recall 1 Samuel 2. Here a man of God confronted Eli a couple of years before our text. Here the Lord — through this prophet — promised Eli that the “days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever” (1 Samuel 2:31-32).

In 1 Samuel 3:12, the message that Christ gave Samuel was that now this word was going to come to pass! From this we see a common theme found throughout Scripture with regard to the purpose and place of God’s word- it always will be in accord with the Scripture previously given. It will confirm what has

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<sup>9</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, “What Is the Matter with Preaching?” Harpers Magazine (July 1928), pp. 134-35, 138.

already been spoken by God. And it will be consistent with the rest of God's word.

Again from other passages we learn that this indeed is the norm for Biblical preaching. Even though “miracles are a sign of a true prophet<sup>10</sup>, the bottom line when it comes to a genuine prophet is fidelity to Scripture.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3, “If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams. . . .”

From this passage we derive the truth that every sermon, teaching, or exhortation from a pulpit must always be in accord with the rest of Scripture. If it contradicts the word of the Lord, it must not be heeded or obeyed — no matter how awe-inspiring it may be. And thus we read this when the Living Word was confronted with the option to do His own way or the way prescribed in Scripture Christ said, “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15).

Though Christ was the Word made flesh, nevertheless He submitted Himself to the Word of God. From this we see that a mark of true preaching is fidelity to the Word. In fact this served as a teaching point for Christ.

Matthew 5:18-19, “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Even the smallest point in God’s word is important. In fact, this is being stressed in our text as God tells Samuel that the prophecy given to Eli would be fulfilled, “from beginning to end”- i.e., to the very last point!

## **Upholding the Word**

The second expected effect of true preaching: The Upholding of the Word of God!

Again this is such an important principle! A characteristic of the errant or corrupt pulpit is that in the last days the pulpits will be given over to tickling ears.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the push of a compromised pulpit—and thus one of its characteristics will be the new, the novel, the fresh. Paul said that false preachers are “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7).

Think of it. If they are always learning and yet never coming to truth, then we expect that their pulpits also will reflect this. Consequently when one listens to a false-pulpit you will not hear truth, but error repackaged and passed off as new, exciting, and life-changing. The focus of preaching will not be the doctrine of God’s word but that of another doctrine.

1 Timothy 4:1, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from

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<sup>10</sup> Compare Deuteronomy 18:21-23

<sup>11</sup> 2 Timothy 4:3-5

the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.”

What is the doctrine of demons? Is it murder? Rape? Pillaging? Burning?

No, the doctrine of demons will be demonstrated in the pulpit by messages that explore topics like these:

- Ten steps to God.
- Four steps to a successful businessman.
- Eight principles for living.
- Etc.

All these may be interesting topics, but they are all void of the gospel. This is why Paul wrote these words to Timothy:

1 Timothy 6:20-21a, “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith.”

The major temptation for a preacher is to dabble in speculation and those things which are falsely called knowledge. That is why Paul exhorted Timothy the way he did here. Truly a major temptation no matter the era in which you live will be the production of that which is “New!”

And thus today we see it happening even in good churches and good denominations. Recently we've witnessed such controversies as these:

- New Perspectives on Paul.
- The Openness of God.
- The Emerging church.
- The Federal Vision.

All these purport to have a NEW teaching, a NEW doctrine, a NEW way of doing things!

In contrast, listen to one of the dying words of the great Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield: “I thank God that nothing new came out of Princeton.”

Brothers and sisters listen! It is much more difficult to preach only the word of God — and not stories or new fangled doctrines. It is difficult to expound upon a text of God's word week in and week out, year in and year out. It is difficult to labor to uphold the word of God.

Yet listen — and let's never forget it!

2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

I love how MacArthur put it: “The Bible is like a lion... Just open the door and let it out. It'll take care of itself.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “Our Sufficiency in Christ,” p. 143.

Thus our call is to preach the word — ever and always — letting God take care of the rest. One must expect nothing less from this or any pulpit. We need to train our children that they too might settle for nothing less!

## **Divine Discipline**

I close with this sobering truth- the thought of which makes my “ears tingle.” The mark of a faithful pulpit is that it will be Salvifically shocking and that it will be consistent with the rest of God’s word. This is so that God’s people will hunger for God, long to fellowship with Christ, and not settle for anything less than the truth. And it is was God’s disciplining His people throughout history that He removed the faithful pulpit from His people.

Amos 8:11-12, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.”

You be the judge, but I look around and conclude that today is a day in which Amos 8 is a reality. For the sake of God, I urge you to pray with me for the pulpit of BPC.

- Pray for its fidelity to the word.
- Pray that nothing new would come forth from it.
- Pray that God would always make us eager listeners.
- Pray that the blessing of God would attend it in the lives of our children, families, students, aged, and everyone.



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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on August 14, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church. .