South West Gospel Partnership, 6.3.24

**Theology of Preaching**

**1. Setting the scene**

Mark Thompson: ‘The often remarked-upon decline in the effectiveness of contemporary preaching is due, more than anything else, to the neglect of a theological understanding of its nature and function within the Christian congregation’.[[1]](#footnote-1)

What are your favourite and least ways for a service-leader to announce that the sermon is coming next?

**2. Scripture**

**Prophetic proclamation to the assembly**

**Ash on Deut – Scripture needs to be proclaimed, not just read**

OT

*Prophetic preacher…*

*….to the assembly*

NT

*The assembly…*

Hebrews 12.18-27

*…hearing the preacher/prophet*

‘Man of God’ (2 Tim 3.17)

Summary

It is particularly through these people (prophet-preachers) in this context (the assembly of the people) that God now leads his people.

How is preaching theologically distinctive?...

**3. Voices from history**

NT preachers as successors of OT priests/prophets

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.1.5.

‘[God ensured that Israel] ‘should never be destitute of prophets. But as he did not entrust the ancient folk to angels but raised up teachers from the earth truly to perform the angelic office, so today also it is his will to teach us through human means. As of old he was not content with the law alone, but added priests as interpreters from whose lips the people might ask its true meaning, so today he not only desires us to be attentive to its reading, but also appoints instructors to help us by their effort. This is doubly useful. On the one hand, he proves our obedience by a very good test when we hear his ministers speaking just as he himself spoke. On the other, he also provides for our weakness in that he prefers to address us in human fashion through interpreters in order to draw us to himself, rather than to thunder at us and drive us away. Indeed, from the dread with which God’s majesty justly overwhelms them, all the pious truly feel how much this familiar sort of teaching is needed.’

The function of preaching in the assembly

William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*

‘In keeping with its dignity, preaching has a twofold value: (1) It is instrumental in gathering the church and bringing together all of the elect; (2) It drives away the wolves from the fold of the Lord’ (p.3).

Christ’s on-going prophetic ministry, through appointed ministers and through all his people

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* vol.4

‘The power to teach has its roots in the prophetic office for which Christ has been anointed and which he himself continually still exercises by his Word and Spirit. Christ has never transferred it to any human being … but he is still continually our chief prophet. … Still, in this connection he regularly employs people as his organs, not only office bearers in the strict sense, but all believers, every one of them according to the grace given to them’ (p.418).

**4. Preaching Christ**

Michael Horton: ‘It is crucial to realise that for the Reformers the proclamation of the Word is not simply teaching concerning Christ, but the personal address of Christ himself through which the Spirit delivers Christ to us and invites us to him.’[[2]](#footnote-2)

D.A. Carson: the sermon is ‘re-revelation’ … ‘God … is re-revealing himself by that same Word once again. Preachers must bear this in mind…. Their aim is more than to explain the Bible, however important that aim is. They want the proclamation of God’s Word to be a revelatory event, a moment when God discloses himself afresh, a time when the people of God know that they have met with the living God.’[[3]](#footnote-3)

**5. Preaching and the gospel**

The very form of a Sunday sermon expresses grace:

- a message to which we contribute nothing but open ears and hearts

- one way to be saved, whoever you are.

Hence preaching is trans-cultural.

**6. The question of a preacher’s authority**

1. ‘Preaching and the Church’, paper delivered at 13th Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference, 2009 <https://www.academia.edu/7250492/Preaching_and_the_Church> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011), 758. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. D.A. Carson, ‘Challenges for the Twenty-first-century pulpit’, in Leland Ryken & Todd Wilson (eds), *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2007), 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)