

## Preaching Matters!

In the late 1970s, I attended a conference on preaching. One of the speakers, a great and well-respected preacher of the time, spoke of preaching a revival recently in South Africa.

This was not long after the death of Stephen Biko. Nelson Mandela was still languishing in a prison cell on Robben Island, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu had not yet been recognized by the world with a Nobel Peace Prize. And any hope for a land made beautiful by a rainbow of the children of God living in peace and justice in the way of love seemed far removed from the reality of race wars.

In this context the preacher had been invited to preach, but with strict limitations imposed by the apartheid government. He was warned that he would be carefully watched. He was not to comment on the sociopolitical situation of South Africa. He was only to “preach from the Bible”—that’s all, just preach from the Bible.

And so, that is what he did.

He only preached from the Bible . . . and told the story of Moses and the Hebrew children, slaves in Egypt, but set free by the mighty and outstretched hand of the Lord God Almighty.

Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them.” (Exod. 3:7–8)

He only preached from the Bible and told of how the Lord Jesus Christ identified his work on earth with the prophecy of Isaiah that says,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18–19, from Isa. 61:1–2)

He only preached from the Bible, citing passage like this:

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31–32)

And . . .

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. (John 13:34)

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 5:1)

He only preached from the Bible . . . and such preaching matters and makes a difference!

Proclaiming the loving, liberating, life-giving message of Jesus Christ matters!

Preaching matters!

And because preaching matters, the study of preaching— theological, scriptural, and historical study, as well as the study of life and human society—matters. I am therefore grateful that the board of the *Anglican Theological Review* decided to begin the journal's second century (volume 101.1) with a special issue devoted to preaching. And I am delighted that the Episcopal Preaching Foundation is co-sponsoring this issue. The practice of preaching is truly worthy of our study, from all angles of view. And may the practice and the study of preaching continue for many years to come.

God bless you, God love you, and keep on preaching!

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