

The Purpose of Preaching

Mr. Taylor says I have been preaching for years and years and years. I think that's a little exaggerated. It was only in 1927 that I was ordained, and I have preached occasionally every year since. but never steadily because my work has been training preachers primarily rather than preaching myself. So I feel rather fitted to take the subject given tonight, the purpose of preaching because that's been the purpose of my life—not to preach, though I've done a fair amount of that, but to train others to preach. What would be the point of that if there were not a very definite purpose.

I'd like to start by looking at Isaiah 40:9. We read, "You who bring good tidings to Zion go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout; lift it up do not be afraid. Say to the towns of Judah Here is your God. See the Sovereign Lord comes with power and his arm rules for him. See his reward with him and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd, he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that have young."

Here in the OT we have the command to preach. To go up on the high mountain, to call out the good tidings. Then over in ch. 55 we find one of the finest examples of real Christian preaching anywhere in the Bible. "Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters you who have no money. Come, buy and eat." This would be absolutely meaningless (ch. 55) if it were not that it comes two chs. after ch. 53. God's mercy is not something that can be just taken or spurned. Much preaching gives you the impression—just take it, that's all there is to it. Well, there is nothing we can do to get it, but it cost the Lord an awful lot. to make it possible.

So Isa. 53 is the great message that God has made salvation possible and then ch. 55 gives the call that follows the account of what God has done. That certainly is the purpose of preaching. The purpose of preaching is to call people to repentance and to tell them that salvation is freely available through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now most seminaries today are spreading out and increasing their curriculum constantly. We must have many courses in counselling, courses in youth work, courses in this aspect and in that aspect and in the other aspect. of Christian work, and there's value in all these things. But the primary purpose of the Christian ministry is to preach the message of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Closely related to that is the purpose of presenting the teaching of Scripture. And this is a big book. It's a large book, a book full of truth. A book which I believe contains much truth that no one has fully understood yet because the Bible was given not to meet the needs of any one time, but to meet the needs of God's people at all future times. So I believe we find the answer to all our problems in the Bible. There may be passages in the Bible that 300 years ago were very difficult to understand because they didn't say much to the situation then. Those passages today may seem crystal clear to us. There may be passages that seemed crystal clear then that don't seem to make a great deal of sense of to us.—because the Lord gave us a book intended to meet the needs of His people in all ages. God's truth is there in the Word, but we have to dig it out. We have to study it and find what He has for us at each time. The great central message is the same. But the application, I believe, is to be found primarily in the Word of God.