**How to preach**

**Speaking the words of God**

In the NT, the main word that we translate as “preaching” is the greek word KERYSSO (Kerygma). It literally means **"To proclaim as a herald".**

In the ancient world, before newspapers & press releases, the herald was a very important figure. To get the job of a herald, you had to be someone that all the community regarded as a man of integrity and good character.

He was employed by the king to let the people know what the king wanted them to know. For example, if the nation was going to war against an enemy, if there was new building programme, or a festival or more taxes had to be raised, the Herald would go out and tell the town. He would have to go and stand in the squares and at the street corners, and move around the city to touch as many people as possible, and he would announce the message that the King had given him.

Being a Herald wasn’t a job that made you a particularly important person. What was important was THE CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE, and WHO IT CAME FROM. We aren’t preachers to make a name for our self, but just to make known the message of our king.

1 Peter. 4,11 "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God".

If the Herald made up his own message which hadn’t originated from the King, or if he added to the message or left bits out, that was a very serious matter, and the Herald might lose his job or even lose his life.

**Preaching is a channel of God’s revelation**

Preaching is one of the main ways that God uses to reveal Himself to people.

It’s important to understand, though, that all that mankind can ever learn about God has already been revealed. The Bible is the full and complete revelation of God. Your preaching won’t bring any new revelation straight from God that no-one else has ever heard before.

**Through the time of the Bible, God spoke to different characters and appeared to others and gradually revealed more of Himself until, by the end of the book of Revelation the world has the full picture of everything that God wants to reveal to the world.** All the information about what God is like, and how he works with people is all there in the Scriptures and it won’t change or be added to.

Today, we stand at a different point in history, outside of the time frame when God was giving new revelations about Himself to mankind.

However preaching isn’t just **teaching about what God did said in the past**. Preaching has to become a revelation direct from God Himself to the listener today.

That revelation comes **through the scriptures. It’s like the scriptures are a mirror.** As we talk about what God revealed to people long ago, we need that that same revelation that God gave to Abraham or Moses to come into the lives of those listening to our preaching today. For that we need the Holy Spirit.

**Spiritual Preparation**

That’s why the spiritual preparation is much more important than the practical preparation, though both are crucial.

You can divide the spiritual preparation into 3 sections; 1) Praying to get the word, 2) Praying to shape the word 3) Praying to empower the word.

Before I give a talk, especially if it is quite an important one, I usually spend **much longer praying about that talk** than the length that the talk will be.

**Praying to get the word**

I would start by asking the Lord to show me WHAT SUBJECT I should TO SPEAK ON.

It is so encouraging when someone comes up to you at the end of a talk and says; “Thank you, preacher. That word was a message from God right into my current situation”.

However, knowing what is the "**now word of the Lord"** is sometimes quite a problem for preachers.

When I started preaching, I used to struggle to find what was the message that God wanted me to bring. I used to pray "God what word should I bring? God, give ME your word". However I soon found that that approach didn’t work.

Early on in my ministry, God spoke to me & said, "Don't pray for yourself, that YOU would get the word. The word is not for you. It’s for THEM. **Pray for them**".

So I would start praying for the people who I am going to speak to. I picture their faces, I name their names in prayer. I pray for all the human thoughts that come to my mind as I think about them. Then I often pray for them in the spirit. As I pray for THEM, I find that **God starts speaking to me about them and giving me the word that would help them in the situation that they’re in!**

**Praying to shape the word**

Then when I have the subject, I continue praying and asking God what scriptures, what illustrations, what point headings does God want me to use so that the talk makes the maximum impact. I pray as I prepare the word.

**Praying to empower the word**

Then finally, when I have prepared the full message that I’m going to give, I start praying for the Lord to anoint the talk. I go back to praying for the people and I pray that these words that I have prepared would pierce them like a sword. I pray for their eyes and their hearts to be opened and I pray for power. Often before I give a talk, I just spend time praying for the Holy Spirit to come upon me so that I have anointing, so that the words I give come with power and the Holy Spirit.

I often tell the story of when I was a young evangelist, I had to talk to 2 youth groups in the same week. I felt that I should give both groups the identical message. At the first group the talk went quite well it was quite good material, and they all laughed at the jokes, and enjoyed what I said. At the second, half of the group were so deeply touched that they were in tears. WHAT WAS THE DIFFERENCE ? For the second meeting I spent the whole day praying for the group and for God's anointing on my talk.

**How to prepare your material**

**A river or a swamp?**

I want to tell you about the difference between a RIVER and a SWAMP. With both a river and a swamp, water flows from one point to another. You can have a fairly small river and a huge swamp, and they will both have the same amount of water flowing between them.

One is clear and concise. Easy to access and drink from.

The other is messy and hard to make sense of. It’s hard to get any life giving water out of a swamp because the good water is thinly spread between lots of mud.

Some people's preaching is like a swamp.

First they are talking about love, then worship, then holiness, and it isn't possible to follow their train of thought You don't know why they have suddenly gone from love to holiness, and their points are mixed in with so many other things, that you can't really get any clear life giving water from it.

Whereas with a river runs within clearly defined banks. With your talk, it should be clear where you are going and what point you are trying to make.

**Preaching like building a bridge**

When you preach, you are trying to take your audience on a journey – from where they are to where God wants them to be.

A bridge goes from one place to another. It has two sides. The first side is where the people currently are. The second side is where you want to take them to.

The Bridge starts where the people are. That’s where you have to build your first pillar.

**KNOW WHERE YOUR AUDIENCE IS**

That has to be your starting point.

How many of you have been talks where the preacher just talks about issues that don’t have any relevance to your personal life. We’ve perhaps all been in meetings where everyone there has been a believer and the preacher gives a gospel message as if to non-believers.

You have to start in the right place.

It’s important before you start preparing a talk **to think carefully about who you will be speaking to.** Think of the specific people that you know in the congregation. Think of where they are in their spiritual lives and what they need to take them on in their spiritual journey.

If you don’t know the group, try and find out as much information as you can about them before you go there. how many people will be there, of what ages, how mature believers are they, how committed are they, etc.

**If one pillar is where the people are, the second pillar is where you want the people to be.**

**Have a clear aim**

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT YOUR TALK TO ACHIEVE.

What do you want people to learn? How do you want to change their thoughts or the way they live their?

WRITE DOWN WHAT YOUR AIM.

Everything that you say should be something to do with the aim. Every word should take someone further along the bridge from where they are to where you want them to be.

EG, if the talk is about prayer, don't put in a section about a completely different subject. That’s like a path going off at right angles from the middle of the bridge - it leads no-where !

The points that you make should all help to take people further along in that direction.

**Content**

Some people think you shouldn’t prepare for a talk. You should just stand up and say whatever the Holy Spirit gives you.

I agree that we should only say what the Holy Spirit gives you. But I don’t believe that the Holy Spirit wants to give it all to you on the fly.

It’s a bit like when the Holy Spirit anointed Bezalel to make the ornate furnishings for the tabernacle in Exodus 37. I’m sure he didn’t just sit down and start knocking bits of wood together to make the ark. I expect he started with drawings, then worked out the size and planned how he was going to make the joints, what to cover it with etc.

The Holy Spirit inspired all the research and the planning and the gathering and organizing of materials and then anointed him to **craft it all together to** make something that was beautiful.

The Holy Spirit wants to show you what to say. But it most likely won’t come spontaneously at the time when you stand up in front of the people. Most likely, the different elements of your talk will come as you think and pray and search the scriptures or research about a certain topic.

If you just spend about 5 minutes thinking about the first thing that comes into your head, then you jot it down on a scrap of paper then preach it, you won't tell anyone anything that they don't already know. All you will do is to waste a few minutes of everyone's time.

But if you spend several hours on a subject in the Bible, digging deeply into it, thinking and praying about it, working out how your hearers could put those lessons into practice in their daily lives, then you may bring something that is really helpful to people.

**Ratio of preparation time to delivery time**

Even now I usually spend 10-20 times the length of time that the talk takes preparing.

For a half hr talk, I usually spend at least 10 hrs in preparation, and that’s if it’s on a subject I know quite a bit about already.

**Gathering material**

Start early

WRITE DOWN EVERYTHING YOU CAN about that subject. All the verses, jokes, stories, illustrations, all muddled up on the same piece of paper.

Read widely around the subject.

Find out the historical context, read Bible commentaries, check out what others say on the internet.

It’s good to have too much material and have to cut some away.

**Arrangement of Material**

Organise your material in a way so that your line of thought flows clearly from one point to another.

Like a river, not a swamp.

The best way to do this is to use **topic headings**, or a **point structure.**

Look at all the material that you;’ve gathered, then group that material together under different topic headings. eg. Prayer; i) Why pray ? ii) How should we pray ? iii) Praying with faith, etc.

Practical hints in preparing

Organise it so that it flows well.

Work on specific sentences or key phrases that people will remember.

**FIND GOOD ILLUSTRATIONS.**

One of the great enemies of preaching is **boredom.**

If what you say isn’t interesting, people will switch off.

The things that most people like best and remember the most are stories from people’s lives – either your own or others.

Spend time thinking of stories from your own life or from other people’s lives that will help to illustrate the point you’re making.

If you can’t think of any stories, find another way to illustrate the teaching in another way.

**Use of Scripture**

Use scripture like a sword, not a club! When people first start to preach, they tend to put far too many scripture references in. They use scripture like a road roller - to flatten any possible doubts that their interpretation is the correct one. That doesn’t really help the audience to become better disciples.

You should use scripture like a mountaineer uses pitons – The first scripture shows the audience the direction where you are going. Then when the going is easy, you don’t need any piton to help you along the way. But where it’s more difficult or there is any doubt, use your pitons as anchors to keep the fixed to the rock.

**Practical application**

Make sure that you always give practical steps that people can take to achieve what you are talking about.

Often it’s good to end a talk by giving people some practical steps as to what they should do on Monday morning to put into practice what you are talking about on Sunday.

**A picture is worth a thousand words**

If you can, make a Powerpoint to go with your preaching. Or, if it’s more of a Bible teaching talk, prepare a hand-out. If people can read the scriptures it helps them to go in better.

Also some pictures illustrate a point far better than words.

**Prune it**

Cut out all the dross.

How many talks are spoiled by the preacher going on too long, repeating himself or going into something that isn’t really relevant.

People these days have a limited attention span. What you say has to be clear, short and interesting.

Don't overstate a case or make the same point a few times.

**DELIVERY**

The method that you deliver the talk makes a big difference to how much people listen.

• Adopt a “strong stance” - don’t slouch, stand up straight. Think about what you are doing with your hands

* Don’t just read your notes. But stick to your notes. Familiarise yourself with your notes paragraph by paragraph, highlight key phrases or words in each paragraph so that you can see at a glance what that paragraph is about.

• Talk clearly, Talk loud enough so that the person on the back row can hear.

Speak close to the microphone.

• Don’t fidget, and don’t fiddle with your pen, rings or glasses. It is very distracting, though easy to do if you are nervous.

• Maintain eye contact as much as possible with the audience. If you look at people, it makes them listen better. It helps them to think that you are talking to them, and it helps you to assess how well they are listening and how much is going in ! Don’t just read your notes. Try and memorise at least the main points and some of the illustrations, so that you can concentrate on looking at the people as you preach.

* Talk naturally as if you were chatting to a friend. Don’t talk as if you were speaking **to a crowd**. Speak as if you were talking to just one person.

Many people, after hearing **Billy Graham’s** preaching, have commented “It was if I was the only person there, & he was talking straight to me”. Billy Graham explained that by saying even though there are thousands in his meetings, he talks as if he wre in his home explaining something to a friend. He chooses his words as if he were talking just to one person, so to the listener, it seems like everything is just meant for them.

Look at people – talk to them one by one.

• Video yourself. That way, you can hear or see what your preaching is really like for those who hear.