

Preaching Is an Act of Worship

In today's church culture, it is often assumed that worship refers primarily, if not exclusively, to singing. However, this limited view misses the heart of biblical worship, which encompasses the entire corporate gathering of believers and, most significantly, the preaching of God's Word. While singing is indeed a beautiful expression of worship, it is preaching that stands as the high point of the worship service. In this article, we will explore the biblical and theological foundations of why preaching is an act of worship, calling both pastors and congregants to regard it with the reverence and honor it deserves.

What Is Worship?

To understand why preaching is an act of worship, we must first clarify what worship is according to Scripture. The English word "worship" derives from the Old English "worth-ship," meaning to ascribe worth or honor. Worship, then, is fundamentally about acknowledging the supreme worth of God. It involves reverence, adoration, and devotion to God as He reveals Himself to us.

Biblically, worship is not confined to singing or emotional expressions; it is a holistic, life-encompassing response to God's revelation. Romans 12:1-2 famously exhorts believers to present their bodies as a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Here, Paul describes worship not as a particular activity but as a whole-life offering in response to God's mercy. Worship is responding to God's self-revelation in obedience, awe, and reverence—whether through prayer, service, singing, or listening to His Word preached.

Throughout Scripture, true worship occurs in the context of encountering God's truth. When God reveals Himself through His Word, His people respond in worship. This is evident in both Old and New Testaments. For example, in Nehemiah 8:5-6, as Ezra reads from the Law, the people stand in reverence, bow their heads, and worship the Lord. Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:23-24) reveals that true worshipers "will worship the Father in spirit and truth," suggesting that worship must be grounded in the truth of God's Word.

Preaching as Worship

If worship is fundamentally a response to God's revelation, then preaching must be seen as an act of worship. Preaching is the primary way that God's Word is proclaimed and His truth revealed to the congregation. When a preacher faithfully expounds the Scriptures, God speaks to His people, calling them to respond in faith, repentance, and obedience. This act of proclamation and hearing is itself a profound encounter with God, deserving of reverence and awe.

1. Preaching as Proclamation of God's Glory

Preaching, at its core, is an act of declaring God's glory. Psalm 96:3 says, "Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples!" In a worship service, the preacher's role is to lift up the glory of God through the exposition of Scripture, pointing the congregation to the beauty, majesty, and holiness of God. The preacher's task is not to entertain or merely inform but to lead the people in beholding the glory of God in His Word.

The Apostle Paul underscores the sacredness of preaching in 1 Corinthians 1:21, where he writes, “For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” God has chosen preaching as a means by which His Word is brought forth in power, transforming hearts and minds and drawing His people closer to Him. The act of preaching itself glorifies God, as His Word is exalted and reverently proclaimed.

2. Preaching as a Response to God’s Command

Preaching is also an act of obedience to God’s command. In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul commands Timothy to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” This command is not a mere suggestion but a divine directive, given for the edification of the church and the glory of God. When the preacher steps into the pulpit to expound Scripture, he is obeying God’s command, and that obedience itself is worship.

This view is grounded in a high view of God’s Word. Hebrews 4:12 reminds us that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.” Preaching is not just the dissemination of information; it is the delivery of God’s living Word, which has the power to convict, comfort, instruct, and transform. When the church gathers to hear the Word preached, it participates in an act of worship by submitting to God’s command and opening itself to the transformative power of His Word.

3. The Role of Congregants in Worship through Preaching

Preaching is not only an act of worship for the preacher but also for the congregation. In Nehemiah 8, as Ezra reads the Law, the people are actively involved, standing, listening, and responding with reverence and joy. Similarly, when a pastor preaches, the congregation’s role is to listen actively, engage with the Word, and respond with faith and obedience. James 1:22-25 urges believers to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only.” True worship through preaching involves a heart ready to receive, believe, and apply the truths of Scripture.

Refuting the Notion that Worship Is Synonymous with Singing

In many modern churches, the term “worship” has become almost exclusively associated with singing. While music is certainly a means of worship, Scripture shows that worship is much broader. In fact, the New Testament rarely mentions musical worship compared to the preaching of the Word. While we are commanded to “sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Colossians 3:16), preaching is given primacy as the means through which God’s Word is proclaimed and His people are taught.

One of the clearest examples of worship encompassing more than singing is found in Acts 2:42. The early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Teaching, fellowship, and prayer are explicitly named as aspects of the church’s worship life, showing that worship includes the proclamation of God’s Word, prayer, and communal practices.

Jesus Himself emphasized the primacy of God’s Word over ritual acts. When He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He replied, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). This underscores that the foundation of worship is not ritual but the reception of God’s Word.

Why Preaching Is the Pinnacle of Worship

If preaching is indeed an act of worship, then it is essential to understand that it holds a unique and central place in the corporate worship gathering. Preaching is not one worship element among many; it is the pinnacle of the worship service because it is the moment when God's voice is heard with clarity and authority through His Word.

1. The Transformative Power of the Word

Romans 10:17 states, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." Faith itself is born from the hearing of God's Word, underscoring the vital role of preaching in the life of the church. Unlike any other element of the service, preaching brings the congregation face-to-face with God's truth, convicting of sin, comforting the brokenhearted, and calling sinners to salvation. This transformative power is why preaching stands at the center of worship.

2. The Centrality of Christ in Preaching

In true preaching, Christ is exalted as the only Savior and the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:23, "but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." In other words, preaching is uniquely designed to bring Christ to the forefront of our worship, reminding the congregation of the gospel and calling them to behold Christ. No other worship element consistently calls the church to gaze upon Christ as directly as preaching does.

3. Preaching Must Not Be Replaced

Given the biblical view of preaching as worship, it is both unbiblical and detrimental to replace preaching with other elements like drama or extended musical worship. While these elements may have a place in worship, they must never supplant the preaching of the Word. The Reformers, who sought to restore biblical worship, went to great lengths to prioritize preaching, emphasizing that it is through the proclamation of Scripture that God's people are fed, nurtured, and sustained.

In 2 Timothy 4:3-4, Paul warns that "the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions." This sobering warning reminds us that replacing preaching with entertainment is a dangerous path, one that leads away from God's truth and sound doctrine.

Holding Preaching in High Regard

Preaching is not merely a part of the worship service; it is the heart of worship because it is the moment when God speaks to His people through His Word. Far from being merely informative, preaching is a sacred act, designed by God to draw His people into a deeper understanding of His glory, grace, and gospel. To regard preaching as an act of worship is to honor God's design and to give Him the reverence He deserves.

Let us, therefore, approach preaching with hearts prepared to worship, minds ready to engage, and lives eager to respond. Let pastors preach with reverence and congregants listen with expectancy, for in preaching, we encounter the living God and are transformed by His glorious truth.

The Summarized Transcript of Pastor Pieter Smith's Sermon on 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The Power and Priority of Preaching

Introduction

Today, many Christians hold a limited or even mistaken view of worship. Too often, worship is equated primarily with singing—while it's true that worship includes singing, it also encompasses praying, reading Scripture, sharing our faith, edifying one another, and, importantly, preaching. Yet, in many modern churches, singing can overshadow preaching. It's not uncommon for a church service to have 40 or even 60 minutes of worship music, followed by a sermon that barely lasts 20 minutes.

A fellow preacher recently remarked, "We sing more than we preach because, in heaven, there won't be preaching, only singing." This might sound reasonable on the surface, but it's worth digging deeper. While it's true that in heaven, preaching will come to an end, this doesn't mean we should prioritize singing over preaching now. If the same logic is to be applied to missions or evangelism we should not be doing missions or evangelism now since in heaven there will be no need of it. Worship is comprehensive, and it is essential that each component—whether singing or preaching—serves its purpose in glorifying God and building up His people. And among these components, preaching stands central because God Himself has made it the cornerstone of worship, salvation, and spiritual growth.

Why Preaching Must Be Central

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 presents us with five key reasons why preaching is to be prioritized in the life of the church. Through preaching, **God reveals His power, His wisdom, and His purpose.** Preaching doesn't compete with other aspects of worship; rather, it stands as **God's ordained means of proclaiming the gospel and transforming lives.**

1. Preaching Reveals the Power of God (1 Corinthians 1:17-19)

Paul warns us against idolizing him or any other preacher; our focus must be on Christ, the one proclaimed. Preaching isn't about the preacher but about the one being preached. In verse 18, Paul speaks of "the word of the cross," the message of the gospel. To those who are perishing, this message sounds absurd, but to those who are being saved, it is "the power of God." The gospel creates a dividing line: to some, it is foolishness; to others, it is salvation.

The idea of a crucified Savior—the message of the cross—might seem ridiculous to the world. The Greek word Paul uses for "folly" is *mōria*, meaning foolishness or absurdity. For those without faith, a humble, suffering Messiah on a cross resembles a symbol of failure, not triumph. But for believers, this "foolishness" is the very power that saves.

This power of God in preaching doesn't just justify us but also sanctifies us. As we continually hear and respond to the gospel, we are gradually freed from sin's grip. As Martin Luther said, "Christianity is a theology of the cross." The gospel may seem unimpressive to human eyes, yet it's the display of God's powerful love for us. We must ask ourselves: do we hunger to hear the gospel preached, or do we dismiss it as repetitive? Our attitude toward preaching reveals much about our spiritual state.

2. Preaching is God’s Ordained Method (1 Corinthians 1:20-21)

In every era, people have attempted to change the world with politics, wars, philosophies, and human ingenuity. Yet, time and again, human methods fail to bring lasting change. For instance, in the 1950s, China launched a campaign to eliminate sparrows to combat food shortages, only to find that their absence led to even more devastating locust plagues. This shows that even the best human intentions are flawed.

Many churches today are tempted to “reinvent” themselves to attract the world. They emphasize entertainment, self-help, or social relevance, believing that these will draw people in. But if the church mirrors the world, it loses its unique power and message. God’s chosen means for changing hearts and the world is through preaching. The 12 apostles, armed only with the gospel, left a far greater impact than any politician, empire, or philosophy.

Paul contrasts human wisdom with divine wisdom: humanity, despite its pursuit of knowledge, couldn’t arrive at the truth of God through its intellect alone. God, in His wisdom, chose a simple method—preaching—to make Himself known. As Paul writes in Romans 10:14-15, “How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?” The church doesn’t need gimmicks; it needs preachers who proclaim Christ crucified without compromise. As David Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it, “God had one Son, and He made Him a preacher.”

3. Preaching Transcends Human Wisdom and Demands (1 Corinthians 1:22-23)

Paul observes that “Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom.” The Jews wanted miraculous displays of power, while the Greeks sought intellectual rigor. But the gospel doesn’t cater to these human demands. The cross, rather than displaying worldly power or wisdom, is a “stumbling block” to the Jews and “foolishness” to the Gentiles.

Even today, people seek experiences, signs, or philosophical arguments that seem profound. Many churches fall into the trap of softening or embellishing the gospel to make it more appealing, fearing that people will not accept the raw truth of Christ crucified. But preaching is not a performance, and the gospel is not a spectacle. The cross stands as an eternal reminder that God’s ways are higher than ours. As Spurgeon boldly declared, “We shall not adjust our Bibles to the age, but by God’s grace, we shall adjust the age to the Bible.”

4. Preaching Calls All to Christ (1 Corinthians 1:24)

Paul emphasizes that the gospel calls everyone—Jews and Gentiles alike—to Christ. Yet, only those who are “called” by God respond to it as the power and wisdom of God. When they hear the gospel, they recognize its truth and life-giving power.

Our mission is to preach Christ to all, without discrimination. As C.S. Lewis said, “I believe in Christianity like I believe in the sun, not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else.” The gospel enlightens and guides all who are drawn by God to respond in faith. We are not responsible for converting people—that is God’s work. Our job is to faithfully proclaim Christ, leaving the results to Him.

5. Preaching Exalts the Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:25)

Paul concludes with a profound paradox: “God’s foolishness” is wiser than human wisdom, and His “weakness” is stronger than human strength. To the world, the cross appears weak and foolish, yet it embodies God’s wisdom and strength. Through the apparent defeat of the cross, God achieved the ultimate victory over sin and death.

By prioritizing preaching, we submit to God’s wisdom and reject worldly strategies. Preaching honors God’s chosen method, ensuring that His power—not our ingenuity—is at work in His church. The gospel is not just another moral teaching; it is God’s declaration of who He is and what He has done in Christ. In Isaiah 55:8-9, God reminds us, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.”

Conclusion

The preaching of the gospel is God’s primary means for saving and sanctifying His people. Though it may seem foolish to the world, it is the power of God to those who are being saved. In worship, we must **not** pit preaching against singing, prayer, or fellowship, but we must recognize that God has chosen preaching as His unique instrument to reveal His power.

Let us, as a church, make preaching central. Let us not fall into the trap of making worship entertaining or accommodating human demands. Instead, let us faithfully preach Christ crucified, trusting that God will use this “foolish” method to accomplish His glorious purposes. Through the preaching of His Word, God transforms lives, builds His church, and displays His wisdom to a watching world.



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