

## **Preachers should let the bible do the talking!**

As I write this blog I am sitting in front of the TV watching the European Team Championships in Leiria Portugal. Some good performances by Brits, particularly the 4 x 400metre relay team, and Wayne Chambers, of course.

At the end of a busy 6 days in Wycliffe, I do feel a bit like I have come to the end of a marathon. But isn't Christian ministry supposed to be exhausting and energy expending? It requires discipline, self control and a focus on the end game: *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.* (1 Cor 9:25)

But there is also the caution that success will only be awarded to those who do God's work in God's way: *An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.* (2 Tim 2:5).

This blog is not intended to be purely about preaching. But, as I reflect on the last 6 days, it has renewed my conviction that the hope for the future of the Church lies in its preachers.

Monday to Friday this week the students received a sermon from Vaughan Roberts of St Ebbe's Oxford on Daniel 6. I preached on James 4 and gave them a lecture on the Nooma teacher Rob Bell and considered the power of ancient rhetoric. Archie Coates of Holy Trinity Brompton preached on the subject of 'joy' from Philipians 4 and we had two full days of teaching from Greg Haslam of Westminster Chapel which were under girded by his conviction that faithful expository preaching should be carried out with a sense of expectation that God will act when his word is preached, and we should look for divine activity from the Holy Spirit in bible-preaching churches.

On Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June we had the inaugural conference of the Wycliffe School of Preaching, with Greg as well as seminars from Wycliffe Tutors, Michael Green, Justin Hardin and Peter Walker. About 40 delegates from the Oxfordshire area came for a stimulating and challenging day on the subject of Evangelistic Preaching.

Too much happened over these last 6 days to attempt to summarise them in a blog.

However these three convictions were reinforced for me:

### ***Preachers must let the bible speak***

Healthy congregations do not gather primarily to see the preacher display his oratory or rhetoric. For sure, Paul warned that a time would come men and women would gather around them preachers who would titillate their itching ears, giving soothing and comforting words. But this will do congregations no good.

In this passage in 2 Tim 4 there is a warning to congregations. But there is also a warning to preachers: have we heard from God in his word before we dare to stand before the congregation? This requires patient, careful listening to the Bible in all its fullness.

*Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. (Job 38:2-3)*

Job was castigated because he seemed to assume that he knew more than God and could presume to tell God how he should act. Preachers must not be guilty of this sin.

### ***Preachers must let the bible loose***

Apologetics is a key part of Pauline preaching and an important part of our preaching training. We should be able to give compelling reasons for the hope that we have (1 Peter 3:15). However, the preacher's job is not to defend the bible but to preach the bible

Spurgeon's comment on this matter is well known. "Scripture is like a lion. Whoever heard of defending a lion? Just turn it loose; it will defend itself."

I have learnt so much from Dick Lucas' preaching over the years. Most significant for me was the way in which Dick would preach a passage in such a way that whenever I came to read that passage again I understood what it meant and means.

Yes, it is good to learn how to speak articulately, to formulate messages memorably and illustrate and apply the message engagingly (see blog "Make a House a Home" below). All this is needed. But the central task in all this is to "let the bible loose" so that people are confronted by the living God through his living word. It takes time and self-deflecting effort to ensure that the preacher does not stand as a mediator between the living God and God's people. His job is to let God do his work through his word.

### ***Preachers must let the bible convert***

By this I don't just mean the first challenge of coming to faith. I also mean that the bible should ongoingly be converting attitudes, emotions and outlooks. The bible should be confronting and dealing with sin in the life of the preacher and in the life of the congregation.

At the end of 1 Thessalonians Paul prays:

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess 5:23)*

The context of this prayer is significant:

*19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies. 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thess 5:19-22)*

I take it that to be “sanctified through and through” (NIV) is a work of Word and Spirit. I also think that J. I. Packer was right when he said, “The only proof of past conversion is present convertedness. If my preaching is faithfully biblical then over and over again I should be being persuaded by my preaching: “Yes Lord, if I was hearing this for the first time, I would hungrily grasp it for myself!”

There is so much more to preaching than these three things, but I am convinced that preaching is not less than letting the bible speak; letting the bible loose; and letting the bible convert and this is a great place to start!