

# 1. Definitions

## What is preaching?

Nigel Bernard

*Preaching is rooted in the Old Testament, with regard to both the act of preaching and the content of preaching. There are two main Greek words for preaching in the New Testament, and where these words are used to quote from the Old Testament it is possible to identify some Old Testament background to preaching. Preaching involves manifesting the Word of God and proclaiming the gospel. Besides talking about the joys of the Kingdom, preaching necessarily also involves pointing out the wickedness of this present world.*

**P**AUL WROTE to Titus that God “hath in due times manifested His word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour” (1:3). So preaching is the manifesting of God’s Word. The extent to which we manifest God’s Word when we preach is a measure of how sound that preaching is. The Word of God should be at the heart of our preaching.

The manifesting of God’s Word through preaching is something that we tend to associate with the New Testament. This is understandable, because the English word *preach*, and its variants such as *preached* and *preacher*, occurs only eleven times in the Old Testament in the Authorised Version, compared with 134 times in the New Testament. However, preaching is grounded in the Old Testament, and any study of what preaching is necessarily needs to start in Genesis.

### Genesis 12

In Genesis 12:3 it is written, “and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”. These words spoken to Abraham are an early example of preaching. This is shown by the words of Paul to the Galatians: “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, *preached before the gospel* unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (3:8). In fact Paul combines two prom-

ises in these words, quoting the word “nations” from the promise given in Genesis 22:18 after Abraham had offered Isaac. That Paul should describe these words as *preaching* provides us with an initial basis for finding out what preaching is.

Firstly, we note that the promises made to Abraham are plain and direct. They are a simple, straightforward promise of what would happen in the future, showing that preaching involves the plain use of words about the message. This provides a lesson for ourselves. We sometimes use clever and catchy titles and themes for our preaching, which of themselves give no hint that they are even to do with the Bible, let alone convey an aspect of the Bible message. The promises to Abraham show us that we should be plain and direct with our preaching.

Secondly, we see that the act of preaching is not something that is found just in the New Testament. It goes right back to Genesis. Even before Abraham, preaching had taken place, for Noah is described as “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5). Later, when Israel were in the wilderness, preaching also took place, for the writer to the Hebrews says, “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them [Israel] . . .” (4:2). When we preach we should always be mindful of the Old Testament examples of preaching.

The third point to arise from considering the promises to Abraham is that the gospel we preach is rooted in Genesis. It is not just that the *act* of preaching took place in Genesis, but the *message* then remains the same today. Abraham lived nearly two thousand years before Paul, but the gospel preached to Abraham was the same gospel Paul was preaching, albeit with added knowledge. Paul did not attempt to change the gospel for his times. Likewise, we should not be tempted to change the gospel message for our modern world. The promises to Abraham, and other aspects of the gospel, are just as relevant

today as they were then. Indeed, the gospel is “established upon [the] better promises” (Heb. 8:6) made to the fathers of old.

Finally, we note that in Galatians Paul said that “the scripture . . . preached . . . unto Abraham”. This, at the very least, shows that preaching can also be in writing as well as the spoken word. It would also seem to indicate that Abraham had a written record of the promises made to him. James said, “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day” (Acts 15:21). From this verse it would seem that the act of reading from Scripture is, in a sense, a form of preaching.

### Greek words

Paul wrote, “and how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15). According to the concordance, there are several different words in the New Testament sometimes translated by the word *preach*. This verse contains the two main ones. The first “preach” translates the word *kerussō*. This Greek word occurs sixty-one times in the New Testament, and on fifty-one occasions in the AV it is translated by the word *preach*. Other words used include *publish* and *proclaim*. For example, in Revelation 5:2 it is written, “And I saw a strong angel *proclaiming* with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?”. So when Paul asks, “how shall they preach . . . ?”, he is asking, *how shall they publish or proclaim?* This sense of *proclaiming* is brought out in the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 12:3: “Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be *proclaimed* upon the housetops”. Preaching

does not involve speaking in a quiet way so no one can hear, but it is, as it were, a proclaiming from the housetops.

The second main word for preaching in the New Testament is *euaggelizō*. This occurs fifty-five times in the New Testament. It is translated in two main ways: *preach* (twenty-three times) and *preach the gospel* (twenty-two times). In fact, it is very similar to the Greek word for ‘gospel’, *euaggelion*. In Romans 10:15 *euaggelizō* occurs twice. The first time it is rendered *preach the gospel*, and the second time, a one-off translation, *bring glad tidings*, is used. The first of these translations emphasises that this word is related to the word for ‘gospel’. The second translation, with its phrase “glad tidings”, seeks to bring out the well-known sense of the word *gospel*, namely *good news*. This word for *preach* is the verb of the word *gospel*.

In Romans 10:15 Paul quotes from Isaiah. We will now look at this quotation to find out some Hebrew words for preaching.

### Isaiah 52

Isaiah wrote, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” (52:7). The table below provides a breakdown of the way Paul quotes from Isaiah. The numbers used by Strong are included to help show where more than one word is used to translate an original word.

The table shows that “bringeth good tidings” translates one Hebrew word in Isaiah. The Hebrew word is *basar*. One of its earliest uses is in 1 Samuel, where it is used of the Philistines spreading the news about the death of Saul: “And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round

A comparison of Isaiah 52:7 with Romans 10:15	
Isa. 52:7	How beautiful <04998> upon the mountains <02022> are the feet <07272> of him
Rom. 10:15	How <5613> beautiful <5611> are the feet of them <4228>
Isa. 52:7	that bringeth good tidings <01319>, that publisheth <08085> peace <07965>
Rom. 10:15	that preach the gospel <2097> of peace <1515>
Isa. 52:7	that bringeth good tidings <01319> of good <02896>
Rom. 10:15	and bring glad tidings <2097> of good things <18>

about, to *publish* [*basar*] it in the house of their idols, and among the people" (31:9). Later, David urges that this message be not published: "Tell it not in Gath, *publish* [*basar*] it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph" (2 Sam. 1:20). The word *basar*, then, seems to imply *good news*. The news about Saul's death was misunderstood by the Philistines and others as good news. David later wrote, "When one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought *good tidings* [*basar*], I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings" (4:10). The Amalekite wrongly thought he was preaching good news, an error of judgement for which he paid with his life.

The error made by the Amalekite reminds us of the words of Paul: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6-8). It is vital that we ensure that the gospel we preach is the Truth.

As the table shows, Isaiah speaks of "him", but Paul speaks of "them". The Spirit through Isaiah was speaking primarily of Christ. Paul's use of "them" shows how this verse also applies to the apostles who were sent to preach the gospel. Another "him" to whom Isaiah's words refer is Noah. When Noah stepped out of the ark he would have stepped onto the "the mountains" (Gen. 8:4). As a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5) he would have no doubt continued to preach to his family. As such, he exemplified one who preached on the mountains. And truly his feet were "beautiful", for not only did he preach the gospel but he also "walked with God" (Gen. 6:9).

### Isaiah 61

Another example of where the two main words for preaching in the New Testament occur together is found in the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 4:18,19: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to *preach the gospel* [*euaggelizō*] to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to *preach* [*kerussō*] deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to *preach* [*kerussō*] the acceptable year of the Lord". The Lord Jesus is quoting from the words of Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD [Yahweh] is upon me; because the LORD [Yahweh] hath anointed me to *preach good tidings* [*basar*] unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to *proclaim* [*qara'*] liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to *proclaim* [*qara'*] the acceptable year of the LORD [Yahweh], and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn" (61:1,2).

As we have indicated, a comparison of these verses shows us another Old Testament word for preaching, the word *qara'*. This word is the usual word for *call* in the Old Testament, and is translated this way over 500 times. Another common translation is *cried*. The preaching of the gospel involves calling and crying out to people about both the deliverance from the prison of sin and death and that acceptable time when the Kingdom will be established. In fact, the Hebrew word *qara'* is only translated as *preach* on a couple of occasions in the Old Testament. Another occasion is found in the prophecy of Jonah, and we will consider this example next.

### Jonah

At the beginning of the prophecy God says to Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry [*qara'*] against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me" (1:2). After Jonah had escaped from the fish, God again says, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach [*qara'*] unto it the preaching [*q'yr'ah*] that I bid thee" (3:2). The word Hebrew translated "preaching" (*q'yr'ah*) is a unique word in Scripture and is related to the word *qara'*. In Matthew 12 the Lord Jesus quotes this word, using a word derived from the Greek word *kerussō*: "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching [*kerugma*] of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here" (v. 41).

The message Jonah preached was unpalatable: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4); but Jonah had to preach it faithfully in a clear way that left no room for ambiguity. He had to call and cry out to the people. And this is how Jonah did preach, for his preaching was such that even the king heard the message, for the "word came unto the king" (v. 6).

The people of Nineveh repented, and this, of course, was a desirable consequence but one that Jonah did not wish to happen: "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry" (4:1). Our preaching perhaps has the opposite emphasis.

We are happy to preach the need for repentance but underplay crying out to people about the wickedness of the world. In his book *Preaching Today* Brother Graham Pearce wrote the following:

“It is necessary to distinguish two aspects to preaching; what may be regarded as two sides of the same coin. There is on the one hand the bringing of men and women to repentance and the way of salvation; there is on the other hand the defending of the honour of our God, the God of the Bible, the God of righteousness, the God of Israel. Jesus himself illustrates these two sides of preaching. To those who genuinely followed him he gave the gracious words of life everlasting; but he denounced the leaders of the people as whited sepulchres, and deceivers of the people”.<sup>1</sup>

As Armageddon approaches we have a duty to preach to others about the coming judgements of God upon the earth: “But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman’s hand” (Ezek. 33:6).

As the troubles increase in the world, preaching will be come increasingly difficult. Nevertheless, we must “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). The phrase “in season” is also translated “conveniently” (Mk. 14:11). Even if preaching seems “out of season”, or inconvenient, we must continue to preach. Our message is the ultimate inconvenient truth for this present world.

### Teaching and preaching

In Scripture, teaching is inextricably linked with preaching. Consider these examples:

“And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach [kerussō] in their cities” (Mt. 11:1);

“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach [euaggelizō] Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42);

“Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching [euaggelizō] the word of the Lord, with many others also” (15:35).

As the above verses show, teaching and preaching go hand in hand. Sometimes Scripture makes a distinction between teaching and preaching with regard to the aspect of the gospel being spoken of. For example, Luke says Paul was “preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ . . .” (Acts 28:31). But the overall picture that emerges from Scripture is that, when we start talking to people about the gospel, we will inevitably find ourselves both teaching and preaching.

### Faith

Preaching is a consequence of faith in the word being preached. The psalmist wrote, “I believed, therefore have I spoken” (Ps. 116:10). This sums up the fundamental driving force of preaching. That this verse applies to preaching is shown by Paul: “We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak” (2 Cor. 4:13).

It can surely be implied from these words that the stronger our faith is, the more powerful and convincing our preaching will be. Paul wrote, in the context of preaching, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The faith spoken of here is the faith that develops in the one who hears the preaching. However, the preacher also needs to have faith. The more we ‘hear’ the Word of God, the stronger our faith will be. And the stronger our faith is, the more powerful will be our preaching.

To preach effectively we must, therefore, continually meditate upon and study the Word of God. And if we do this then we will be able to say that we have “manifested His word through preaching”.

---

1. Pearce, G. (1998), *Preaching Today*, Milestones Reprint, p. 16.

Our preaching and our witnessing to the truth of the gospel message are not optional extras of our life in Christ; they are an integral part of what it is to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus. The personal example of the Master himself dictates every disciple’s responsibilities; and he who shirked no opportunity to preach the good news of his coming Kingdom expects no less of those who claim to be his followers.

Reg Carr, “Do we have a preaching commission today?”, *Testimony*, Jul. 1994, p. 266