

antidote to such a condition: it is the lesson which rings out loud and clear from this survey of the preaching of two of our Christadelphian pioneers. We must, somehow, revive that same spirit of individual responsibility for passing the Truth on to others; we need a sense of urgency and of 'sacred duty' about our preaching; and we should allow ourselves to be motivated by the example of flint-faced self-sacrifice which those who have gone before us have left. They may have been our 'pioneers', but there is still always 'new ground' for us to break . . .

In the final analysis, of course, we have only one real 'Pioneer': the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the great "forerunner" who has prepared the way for us to enter into the holiest place of all (Heb. 6:19-20). Yet it is no less important that we should take our example also from those who followed their Lord by preaching the Word selflessly in their own day. And it is precisely because their experiences still speak powerfully to us, even though they themselves are now dead, that we should "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (1 Thess. 5:13).

Preaching in the Kingdom

Jeremy Thomas

Just as the gospel has had to be preached up until now, so it will be preached in the Kingdom. As has always been the case, conversions will not be instantaneous, but will take time. The message will essentially be the same, but with different emphases; for example, prophecies about the return of Christ will have been fulfilled. The preaching will be backed up with the power of the Holy Spirit and punishments upon those who disobey.

THE OPENING SECTION of Isaiah chapter 2 is one of the Bible passages I can remember from my earliest childhood: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (vv. 2-4). This is such a wonderfully positive picture, and even quoting the passage now I again feel all the emotions it has stirred in me for as long as I can recall.

Perhaps one of the reasons it became fixed in my mind so early on is because Isaiah 2 featured regularly in the Sunday evening talks

I was taken to every week to hear the gospel preached. It was often used in those talks as a good way of introducing people to Bible teaching about the Kingdom of God. Here was an unambiguous prophecy, which had never yet come true, and which we could therefore confidently look forward to seeing fulfilled at the return of Christ—the one doctrine we must have mentioned (quite rightly)

each week without fail. At the time, the message was more to do with the reality of the coming Kingdom and the importance of *us* being there than with how other people might be occupied when the Lord was here again. But from Isaiah's words it has always been clear to me that some kind of preaching or teaching work would be going on during the Kingdom age. But to whom will the preaching be done, and what might it involve?

The first of these questions has the more obvious answer, because we gather from Scripture that large numbers of those who do not currently know God will survive the judgements poured out at the Second Coming and make up the mortal population of the earth over whom Christ and the saints will reign. We have included this understanding of ours in the BASF, which deduces that "sin and death will continue among the earth's subject inhabitants" (Clause 26), so distinguishing them from the redeemed. Isaiah is describing some of these inhabitants: "many people" from "all nations", apparently eager to travel to Jerusalem to listen to what God has to

say—about Himself, and about them. It is a far cry indeed from the world as we presently see it.

It is a far cry, too, from another picture of the Kingdom, when the world's rulers are anything but eager to heed God's opinions: "the kings of the earth set themselves . . . *against* the LORD, and *against* His anointed" (Ps. 2:2). Rather than flocking to listen, they see Christ's rule as something to be actively resisted: "Let us break their bands asunder", they say, "and cast away their cords from us" (v. 3). But there is no doubt that this is still a Kingdom scene, for God tells them, "Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion" (v. 6). So what changes? What turns the crowd of angry rebels in Psalm 2 into the stream of willing worshippers in Isaiah 2?

Psalm 2 tells us that the presence of the Lord Jesus in the earth again is not sufficient by itself to bring about immediate obedience to God's will. Though the changes that Christ initiates will be great, it appears that they will not all be instantaneous, either globally or individually. We would not expect 'overnight' conversions to the gospel, or the acquisition of basic Bible knowledge without some investment of time and thought; and, given the depths of sin to which many men and women may have sunk by the time the Lord returns, how could such people, with no idea of godly principles, be expected to embrace a man like him as their King on day one? Indeed, we know the initial reaction to expect: "We do not want this man to reign over us" (Lk. 19:14, NASB).

So, whilst turning the world into a place fit for God to dwell in will be no short-term thing, it ought not to surprise us that the Word of God will be central to that task. Revelation 14:6 tells us explicitly that the gospel will be preached at the time of the return of Christ: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth". The testimony of Scripture is that there has only ever been one way of bringing human thinking into harmony with God's ways, and that is by heeding and responding to His Word. It simply cannot be done by any other means. Flesh is flesh, and it is stubborn stuff. As we know, even those who have tried to let God's Word have its effect on them for many years feel the same basic impulses within them, and given the necessary opportunities those impulses are still capable of doing great damage. But exposure to Divine thoughts and principles is the only way of addressing mankind's problems; and consistently preaching the importance of becoming personally

acquainted with God's mind by regular, careful Bible reading has therefore been the Brotherhood's greatest strength.

Frustrated though we sometimes feel by our own ineffectualness in increasing the influence of God's Word, we can draw enormous comfort from the certainty that such will not be the way of things for ever. Both the main passages we have mentioned so far indicate the worldwide reach of the gospel in the Kingdom age; the nations in Isaiah 2 want to learn and keep His laws, and even the rebels in Psalm 2 are aware of them. We are therefore anticipating a time when God's Word receives the attention it deserves, and the nations who turn to God are converted by responding to it basically in the same way as men and women are now. To that extent, preaching in the Kingdom will be no different from preaching today, in that it has the same basic purpose: namely, to save men and women from the fatal consequences of unchecked human behaviour and reasoning.

One thing that may be somewhat different in the age to come, however, is the content of the preaching undertaken, because many of the points we already know the Bible to teach, and which help to distinguish us from other Christian denominations and non-Christian believers alike, will no longer be in any need of explanation. No one then will be in any doubt about the position of the Lord Jesus, for instance; the ex-Muslim will understand the need for one who is Son of God, and the former Trinitarian will no longer mistake him for God the Son. Likewise there will be no uncertainty about issues such as the nature of man, the fate of the wicked, or the role of the nation of Israel. It is a thought-provoking exercise to go through the Statement of Faith and see how many of its clauses will no longer need to be taught in the Kingdom. And one imagines that the atheist is in for the biggest surprise.

This is not to suggest that what we may think of as more 'doctrinal' aspects of our preaching now will be any less important in the Kingdom, simply that many of them will then be very plain and consequently no longer in need of the same emphasis. Spending time persuading someone of the return of Christ once he is here will obviously be no more necessary than discussing the existence of God with an Israelite who could see His glory hovering above the tabernacle in the wilderness.

What is left, then? If we have glimpses of mortal nations seeking (and sometimes refusing) to be taught, what will the teaching consist of? In

pondering this I have found myself most often in some of the Old Testament prophets and Revelation, for perhaps these books contain some of the best indications of what things will actually be like in the Kingdom for those still needing to learn the ways of God. The impression they leave me with is of people learning not merely in an academic sense, but rather *being taught a way of life which is pleasing to their Maker*. That is the point in Psalm 2, for instance. The need is not to convey a doctrinal detail but to show world rulers who is now in charge, and to give them an opportunity to rethink their rebellious ways and “kiss [NASB: do homage to] the Son” (v. 12) instead. The aim is to change their behaviour. We might debate whether to call this preaching in the usual sense of the word, but is this not what our preaching is already all about—bringing people closer to the image of God in the way they live their lives?

Methods of getting this message home may be rather different in the Kingdom, too. Christ will have authority to “break them with a rod of iron” and “dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (v. 9), for instance, if that proves necessary to teach the nations appropriately. The snapshots we have are not all of people sitting and listening while someone else speaks, then; with the powers of the Holy Spirit poured out again, there will surely be numerous ways of teaching that are currently unavailable to us. There was one in our opening passage: the presence of a physical place of worship in Jerusalem (“the house of the God of Jacob”), from where God’s laws will be promulgated—just one way of helping to teach a godly way of life. Zechariah extends the picture of Judah’s former enemies now coming to Jerusalem to worship instead; and for those reluctant

to accept that invitation, other incentives will be offered: first, God’s blessings such as the rain will be withheld; and for countries like Egypt which are already without rain there will remain the option of plague (Zech. 14:16-19).

Perhaps these sound like harsh ways of changing the way people conduct themselves, but we need to remember that Christ will be dealing with human nature. One can hardly imagine these means being employed if the nations prove teachable, and, thankfully, we know there will be more positive options too. Psalm 72 reveals quite different motives for kings coming to honour the Son of David, not now out of fear for the consequences, but because they see under his righteous jurisdiction something they have seen in no human government before, and which they wish to share: justice for the needy and oppressed (and on the oppressor), peace between the nations, and prosperity on an unimaginable scale. Evidently the blessings poured out on the world will be an equally powerful way of teaching the benefits of a life lived to the glory of the Creator. What better way of learning the wisdom of obedience to God than by experiencing His goodness showered down on those who are willing to be taught?

Doubtless we can scarcely begin to comprehend the full range of methods, both positive and negative, which the Lord will use to restrain the power of sin during his millennial reign (Rev. 20:1-3) and take forward the process of teaching the world the way of life which will lead to its salvation. But may it not be lost on us that in the mercy of God we have already been shown this way of life, and that held out to us there is the additional prospect of sharing in the preaching work of that glorious time to come.

After writing, walking out, and resting, I lectured in the evening in the theatre—(that is, the Oddfellows’ hall, which is used as a theatre) [in Wanganui, New Zealand]—to a large audience on “What are Things Coming to?” The mayor and the local newspaper editor were in the audience. It was astonishing to see so large and respectful a company of hearers in so small a town, as it would be reckoned in England. But nothing from nothing springs. Where there is an effect, there is always a cause. If there was a large and curious audience, it was because steps had been taken to bring it together. In addition to *ordinary* wall posters, handbills, and newspaper advertisements, there had been a house to house distribution of invitation cards. Every house in the place received one—Deborah taking a leading part. In addition to this, the newspaper editors had been induced by the same active personality to insert preliminary paragraphs. It is, of course, immaterial as regards God’s view of the action of His servants, whether many or few of the alienated sons of men turn out to hear the truth at their call, but it is more encouraging to said servants to see “a full house” than empty benches. A very fair report appeared in the paper next day—one of the best written by a stranger that has appeared in the course of the tour.

Robert Roberts, *Diary of a Voyage to Australia*, p. 117