

# PREACHING

*pure and simple*

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**EVANGELICAL**  
**MOVEMENT OF WALES**  
SERVING THE CHURCH

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## Introduction

John is in his twenties and Jack is almost fifty, yet they have become good friends. They did not know each other until they met at a series of monthly preaching seminars in a nearby town. These monthly meetings not only gave to each man a new friendship, but they changed them for ever.

Before going to the seminars, John had never preached. It had been on his mind for a long time, but he had not known quite how to begin. After all, what exactly is preaching? What is the difference between a sermon and a 'talk'? Why is some preaching arresting and powerful, and some boring and flat? What are the essential elements of a good sermon? The seminars answered John's questions and put him on the right track. Today he preaches fairly regularly and a good deal of spiritual work has been done through his ministry.

Jack's story is quite different. Before going to the seminars he had been preaching for over twenty years, and yet he felt that he ought to be doing it better. He had read quite a few books on preaching. He had also asked a number of people for advice. Why, then, did his sermons not appear to feed anyone? Why did people switch off when he had been going only a few minutes? Most important of all, why did he know of so few people who had actually been changed by any of his sermons? To his intense relief, the seminars sorted him

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out. Many people now thank the Lord for Jack's powerful preaching of the Word.

The seminars were very modest affairs. Each one consisted of an introductory talk that said nothing new and owed a lot to the insights of others. This was followed by questions from the floor and half an hour of guided discussion. And yet the Johns and Jacks who attended those meetings constantly refer back to them and use their material to evaluate not only themselves, but also each other. They have asked that the substance of what they heard should be put into a brief book. So here it is.

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## Part I

# What is preaching?

If someone spent a week reading through the Bible, and then a further week getting to grips with the main events of church history, what would they notice? They would notice that God's work in the world and preaching are intimately linked. Wherever God is at work, preaching flourishes. Wherever preaching is devalued or absent, the cause of God goes through a thin time. The kingdom of God and preaching are like conjoined twins who cannot be separated; they stand or fall together.

What does this mean for us? It means that if we have any serious desire to see God worshipped and loved more than He is, we will be passionately interested in the whole subject of preaching. This will be true whether we ourselves are preachers or not. If we preach, we will want to do it better. If we don't preach, we will want to do everything we can to help and encourage those who do.

So what is preaching? It is stunning to discover how very few people can give an accurate answer to this question. This is true even among those who have been preaching for years! The problem is that vast numbers of people have formed their ideas about preaching from what they have heard and read, rather than from a close study of the Bible.

## **Four New Testament words for preaching**

The New Testament describes preaching in over sixty different ways, but it gives a special place to four great words.<sup>1</sup> In writing about them I shall use their verbal form, but I shall also have in mind other words which are in the same family. For example, when I use *kerusso*, 'to preach,' I shall also have in mind *kerygma*, 'the message preached,' and *keryx*, 'a herald.' So let us look at these four great words and see how they can help us to understand what preaching is. And perhaps some of us should prepare ourselves for a surprise!

### **(1) *kerusso***

There is no word for preaching which is more important than *kerusso*. It crops up wherever preaching is mentioned and is used more than sixty times. It means 'to declare as a herald does.' It refers to the message of a king. When a sovereign has a message for his subjects, he gives it to heralds. These heralds announce it to the people without altering or amending it in any way. They simply pass on the message that has been given to them. Their hearers know that they are receiving an official proclamation.

The New Testament uses this verb to emphasise that the preacher is not to announce his own words. He speaks for Someone Else. The stress is on the given-ness of the message. The preacher does not come on his own authority. He has been *sent*, and he speaks with the authority of the Sender. Words from the *kerusso* family are used to describe the preaching of Jonah (Matt. 12:41), of John the Baptist (Matt.

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3:1), of our Lord Jesus Christ ('to proclaim', Luke 4:18b–19) and of His apostles ('a preacher', 1 Tim. 2:7, 2 Tim. 1:11).

### **(2) *euangelizo***

This is the word from which we get our English verb 'to evangelise'. The Greek verb means 'to bring good news' or 'to announce good news.' When in Luke 2:10 the angel said, 'I bring you good tidings ..', it was this verb he was using. But it is vital to notice straightaway that *kerusso* is not one thing while *euangelizo* is quite another. Many people have picked up the idea that these two verbs are talking about two separate activities. They have held on to this idea without ever studying what the Bible says on the subject. In this way they have developed very wrong views of preaching.

We need to look closely at Luke 4:18–19. In these verses our Lord is speaking in the synagogue of Nazareth, the Galilean town where he has been brought up. He begins his message by reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah. He chooses a passage which for hundreds of years has predicted his ministry. There is no doubt that his public reading was in Hebrew, but Luke's account of it is written in Greek. In verse 18a 'to preach the gospel' is a form of the verb *euangelizo*, while in verses 18b and 19 'to preach' is a form of the verb *kerusso*. Our Lord uses both verbs to describe his ministry. In doing one, he is doing the other. 'To herald' is 'to evangelise', and 'to evangelise' is 'to herald'!

'To evangelise' can even be used of something done to Christians! This can be seen, for example, in Romans 1:15. Having greeted his readers as believers in verse 7, and then

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given some other information in verses 8–14, Paul continues: ‘So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.’ The expression ‘to preach the gospel’ is a translation of the verb *euangelizo*. Paul is coming to Rome to evangelise those who have already been converted! It is clearly time to think again about how we use our various words for preaching.

### **(3) *martureo***

This verb means ‘to bear witness to facts.’ But today when Christian people talk of ‘witnessing’, what do they usually mean? They frequently use the word to describe those moments when they tell others of their personal experience of the Lord. In the Bible *martureo* is not used in that way at all. Very often it is used of giving testimony in court. On other occasions it is used of calling on God (or even stones) to bear witness to something. It is all about *objectivity*, not *subjectivity*; it is telling people about facts and events, not about *my* feelings, or what happened to me.

Anyone who has spent time with the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) knows that what I have just said is true. A study of the New Testament comes very quickly to the same conclusion. When the Samaritan woman uses *martureo* in John 4:39 (‘testified’) she is reporting the content of a conversation. When the apostle John uses *martureo* in 1 John 1:2 (‘bear witness’) he is reporting what he has seen and heard. When Paul uses *martureo* in Acts 26:5 (‘to testify’) it is because he is appealing for witnesses to appear in court.



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But in studying this word there is one passage which is especially important. It is Luke 24:44–48. In these verses our resurrected Lord is telling his disciples what they are now to do. They are to go everywhere in the world heralding (*kerusso*) repentance and remission of sins (v.47, ‘should be preached’), and witnessing (a word in the *martureo* family) to the great gospel facts as they do so (v.48). Those who herald, bear witness; and those who bear witness, herald. And yet if we looked at Matthew 28:20, we would see that those who were given this Great Commission were also told to *teach* (*didasko*).

Where is all this leading us? We have learned that *kerusso* is not something separate from *euangelizo*. We have also learned that *kerusso* is not something separate from *martureo*. And now we have just learned that neither *kerusso* nor *martureo* is something separate from *didasko*—our fourth great word, to which we will come in a moment.

Please note that I am not saying that these words are *interchangeable*. What I am showing is that when you do one of these things, you are doing the others as well—for preaching is *all* of these things! This is a point which cannot be stressed too strongly. We will underline it again later. In the meantime we must come to our fourth word.

### **(4) *didasko***

This word means ‘to spell out in concrete terms what the message means as far as living is concerned.’ It is a grave mistake to separate the *kerygma* (a word in the *kerusso* family) from the *didache* (a word in the *didasko* family). It

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is not just academic theologians who have tried to do this, for there are countless believers in our churches who make a clear distinction between a 'gospel message' and a 'teaching message.' We will say more about this in a few moments.

'Spelling out in concrete terms what the message means as far as living is concerned' is not to be something merely tagged on to our proclamation; it is to be part and parcel of the message that we herald. This is easily proved by reading through the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts 5:42 we read that the apostles did not cease from 'teaching and preaching' (*didasko* and *euangelizo*) Jesus as the Christ. In Acts 15:35 we read that Paul and Barnabas spent time in Antioch 'teaching and preaching' (*didasko* and *euangelizo*) the word of the Lord. In Acts 28:31 we read that Paul used his home in Rome for 'preaching ... and teaching' (*kerusso* and *didasko*). We need to be sensitive to the vocabulary of the inspired record; when someone is doing one of our verbs they are, at the same time, doing another of them!

There is more to be said than that. If we compare Acts 19:13 with 19:8 we see that when Paul was preaching (*kerusso*) in Ephesus, he was also 'speaking boldly', 'reasoning' and 'persuading'. In this way Luke shows that when someone heralds, they are doing very much more than our other three verbs express. To pursue this train of thought would take us into a study which is well beyond such a brief book as this. But before we leave the book of Acts we should perhaps take note of Acts 20:24–25. Here Paul explains to the Ephesian elders that bearing solemn witness to the gospel ('to testify

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to', a word in the *martureo* family) is something that has been happening while he has been 'preaching' (*kerusso*).

### **What this means for us**

We are in danger of not seeing the wood for the trees. What is the real point that we are trying to make? It is this: when someone is preaching, wherever they are doing it and whoever they are speaking to, they are doing *all four* of the things that we have mentioned. In the New Testament we do not have one word for preaching to the lost and another word for preaching to the saved. We simply do not find messages known as 'teaching messages' while others are known as 'gospel messages'. Some readers may find this fact uncomfortable, but we cannot alter what the Bible says. Preaching, *all* preaching, is doing four things at once.

If we can see this, many passages of Scripture will strike us in a new way. A good example is 2 Timothy 4:1–5. In these verses Paul is writing his final words to a younger man who is already an important Christian leader. He solemnly instructs him to 'preach the word!' At that point he uses the verb *kerusso*. But why is Timothy to do this? It is because the time is coming when people will not endure sound 'doctrine' (a word from the *didasko* family) and will heap up for themselves 'teachers' (another word from the *didasko* family). Paul is obviously telling Timothy that to preach (*kerusso*) is the way to teach (*didasko*) the church and to protect it from error.

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But that is not all. Paul also tells Timothy to do the work of an 'evangelist' (a word from the *euangelizo* family). He means, of course, that as Timothy preaches (*kerusso*), and therefore teaches (*didasko*), he is to make sure that the true gospel (*euangelizo*) is kept to the forefront. And so we see in a single paragraph that three of our four words are used to describe Timothy's task. If he is true preacher he will not be doing just one of these things, but all of them. Wherever true preaching is found, several things are happening at the same time.

If we do not take this on board we will never be true preachers. We must get rid of the idea that there are two species of preaching, one of which is suitable for the unconverted, and the other for the converted. From now on we must reject the thought that preaching to the lost and preaching to the saved are two different phenomena. We must not divide a wedge between preaching and preaching. *All* preaching is the proclamation of salvation (in the fullest sense of that term) to men and women, boys and girls. It is true that the audiences may be vastly different. It is true that unconverted audiences and converted ones do not have the same needs. It is therefore true that the way the Word is applied may have to vary considerably. But it is *not* true that the preaching given to an unconverted audience is of a different breed to that given to a converted audience. The idea that there are two distinct types of preaching (and that some people are good at one type, while other people are good at the other type) is stopping people everywhere from understanding what true preaching is.

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### **Our question answered**

So what is preaching? Preaching, *all* preaching, is four things:

1. It is heralding a message given by the King (*kerusso*); this tells us about the *source* of the message and the *authority* with which it comes.
2. It is announcing good news (*euangelizo*); this tells us about the *quality* of the message and the *spirit* in which it is given.
3. It is bearing witness to facts (*martureo*); this tells us about the *nature* of the message and the *basis* on which it is constructed.
4. It is spelling out the implications of the message (*didasko*); this tells us about the *target* of the message (the hearer's conscience) and the *measure* of its success (did it change anyone's life?).

Until we are clear about this, we shall never really preach at all. So, to make things as plain as possible, will you come with me to a local church? There are not many people there and, as far as anyone can tell, they are all true believers. When I stand up to preach to them, what will I do?

First of all, I will get my message for them entirely from the Bible. I will not make it up. I will find out what the King says in his Word, and I will give them *that*. This is *kerusso*.