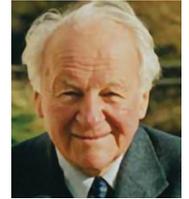


## *A Defense of Preaching*



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Now the first three lectures in this course are devoted, as you know from your analysis, to what I call the argument about preaching. And so far in the first two lectures I've tried to summarize the objections which are being advanced from different quarters against preaching. Of course it is important for all of us to know how unpopular the practice of preaching is becoming in many circles. It's important to be familiar with these arguments in order that we can weigh them and answer them. Just run over them very quickly again.

The first argument we began with was the cybernetic revolution and the whole philosophy of Professor Marshall McLuhan of Toronto; his reading of history past, present, and future; his prophecy of what he called the "retribalization" of man in which everybody will become simultaneously electrically conscious of everybody else. It's a fearsome prospect, and in which the process of verbalization will—in his opinion (I hope his misguided opinion)—the process of verbalization will wither away and die. So that is the first objection: the cybernetic revolution, McLuhan, and all of that.

Secondly, we looked last time at the contemporary situation of mental fatigue and boredom, the malign influence of television, the encouragement which television gives to the disease called "spectatoritis," and the fact that there are many people today who are unable to concentrate, to think, or to follow a logical argument at all; and we've got to fight for their attention.

Thirdly, there is the distaste for dogmatism and the hatred of authority. There's the association of preaching in people's minds with unassailable, unchallengeable authority. The old saying of the preacher who's six feet above contradiction and the concept of sitting under somebody, which was a phrase very popular in olden days: "I sat under so and so for thirty years" or "I've sat under his ministry." The idea of sitting under anybody is, today,

clean counter to modern egalitarianism. “I’m not under anybody else.” “I’m everybody’s equal,” and “I’ve no wish to sit under anybody.” Now this is the sense of rebellion against authority; against governmentism. It’s part of the world we live in today.

Fourthly, there is the decline of preaching in the church and the renewed emphasis on worship and the sacraments: both the influence of the liturgical movement in particular and emphasis on the sacraments at the expense of the preaching of the Word. And I suggest that after there was a fourth dichotomy that worship is evoked by preaching and preaching issues in worship. The two belong together and are not to be divorced. And what God has joined together, man is not to separate.

Fifthly, we looked at what I called loss of confidence in the gospel. There is the most insidious assault on preaching today. An assault which entirely undermines the practice of preaching is the contemporary loss of the gospel which is to be preached. And you cannot perpetuate the practice of preaching when you’ve lost the substance that you are to preach. And I suppose that ought to be pretty obvious. And yet people try to go on preaching when they’ve not got anything to preach about. But secular and radical theology is spreading its tentacles into every section of the Christian church today. And as a result of this, many parts of the Christian church have become unsure of themselves, adolescently insecure, and shy of proclaiming anything. And I have heard leading men in the church say that “I understand my duty is to sit down alongside secular man and have him teach me. I’ve got nothing to say to him.” Now *this* is the loss of confidence in the gospel, and it’s the most powerful attack on the practice of preaching. Well that’s a summary of our first two lectures, and it’s been pretty negative. So now, at last, we begin to be positive.

And my subject today is a defense of preaching. And in view of the strong arguments advanced against the practice of preaching today and its growing unpopularity in many parts of the church—let alone in secular society—we shall need some cogent reasons; and they are not lacking. But let me begin with a rather attractive quotation from the great Thomas Carlyle about the pulpit:

That a man should stand there and speak of spiritual things to me is beautiful even in its obscurity and decadence. It is among the beautifullest and most touching objects that one sees on the earth. This speaking man has indeed in these times wandered terribly far from the point and has alas, as

it were, totally lost sight of the point. Yet at bottom, what have we to compare with him? All such functionaries, all lodged on the industry of modern Europe. Is there one on earth worthy of the board he has? The speaking function, with all our writing and printing functions, has a perennial place could the speaking man but find the point again.

In other words, find something to preach about.

So my first major reason why God's Word must be preached is because the Word is God's chief weapon. God's chief weapon is His Word. Christians are engaged in a battle of ideas. When challenging the gospel today on giants. Giants undoubtedly were able to anatomize them, would have six toes and six fingers and be many cubits high like the old Nephilim of the Old Testament. The kind of giants I'm thinking of are Marxism and existentialism, logical positivism, scientific materialism, humanism, secularism; not to mention Zen Buddhism and other forms of Eastern mysticism becoming increasingly popular. And these ideas we know very well are firing the imagination and capturing the devotion of millions of people in today's world. Now how are we going to conquer these false ideas? Not by force, whether of military weapons or of legislative prohibition; you cannot conquer ideas by force. And the communist world will learn that sooner or later. They cannot forever stifle the truth by legislation and nor can Christians. Nothing can conquer a powerful ideology except a more powerful ideology. Nothing can triumph over error except the truth.

There's another moving example of that in the assembly of the United Nations. A few years ago in a debate on Hungary, just after the fearful suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956 when the Soviet tanks so brutally suppressed the Hungarians in their liberty movement, Mr. Khrushchev was trying to defend what had happened in the General Assembly of the United Nations. And he made a reference to an example that had been set a century earlier by Czar Nicholas I, whose Russian forces had repressed another Hungarian uprising in the year 1848. When it came time for the British delegate to speak in the General Assembly, who was Sir Leslie Munro at that time, he referred to Mr. Khrushchev's analogy between the two Hungarian uprisings and the two quellings of the revolt. And he quoted from what Lord Palmerston said in the House of Commons in 1849 on that previous uprising and its brutal suppression. These were the words: "Opinions are stronger than armies. Opinions, if they are founded in truth and

justice, will in the end prevail against the bandits of infantry, the fire of artillery, and the charges of cavalry.”

Now do we believe in the power of opinions, the power, that is, of the truth? And if this is true of opinions, how much more is it true of God’s Word, His revealed truth? Now let me give you some examples of the apostle Paul’s confidence in the power of the truth which we need to have. And he describes the power of the truth in the light of man’s condition. And I’ll give you an A, B, C here:

A. Man’s ignorance. Because man is ignorant of the gospel, he needs enlightenment. And because he needs enlightenment, he needs the preaching of the Word. Very simple but very logical. And in Romans 10:14-17, Paul deploys his series of logical questions. “How are men to call upon Him in whom they have not believed?” Now he has already said that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Salvation is by calling on the name of the Lord. But how can people call on the name of somebody in whom they haven’t believed? And how are they to believe in somebody of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear of Him unless there is a preacher? And so he goes from step to step to share that preaching is essential if men and women are to believe; if man’s ignorance is to be overcome. Salvation is by faith, and faith is aroused by God’s Word (verse 17): “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.”

B. There is the argument from man’s fallenness. Man needs more than enlightenment. In his ignorance, he needs salvation. You may be interested to know that the motto of the University of Oxford (I was not so benighted as to go to that university but went to the other place of great superiority at the University of Cambridge), but you may know that the motto of the University of Oxford is *Dominus illuminatio mea*, “the Lord is my light,” which is a very remarkable misquotation of Scripture typical of Oxford University—or at least it is only a partial quotation of Scripture if you know your Scripture well enough. But Psalm 27:1 says, “The Lord is my light and my salvation.” But of course the University of Oxford is not interested in salvation but only in illumination and so terminates the quotation “*Dominus illuminatio mea*,” “the Lord is my light.” But man needs more than enlightenment. He needs salvation. And it is through the gospel that God not only enlightens, but saves. You think, for example, of Romans 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.” Why not? Because the gospel of Christ is God’s power, *dunamis theo*, the power of God

unto salvation to everyone who believes.

Now there is the power of the truth, the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ—and in a sense, the gospel. You know sometimes after people have preached, there perhaps a part of the gospel, or if they’ve just preached, what shall I say, the sin of man and the blood of Christ, people will come up to him afterwards and say, “Thank God, you’ve just preached a pure gospel!” as if you can reduce the gospel to one or two formulae. Really, if you want to know what the gospel is, the answer is it’s the Bible. The whole Bible is the gospel. The gospel is the Bible. This is the good news of God in its fullness that He has revealed. And this gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. Or think of the less well-known verse, perhaps, 1 Corinthians 1:21, “After that in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through its wisdom. It pleased God through the foolishness of the kerygma [that is, the proclamation of the Word] to save those who believe.” God saves believers through the kerygma; and the kerygma, that is this proclamation of His gospel, is the instrument through which God saves believers. And it’s a very clear statement of the power of God’s Word. So we’ve thought of man’s ignorance and his fallenness. But I want to spend longer, C, on man’s blindness.

C. While man is more than ignorant and fallen, he is blind through bondage to Satan. The classical passage here that I want to seek to expound is 2 Corinthians 4:4-6. And here, we’re told, is terrible proof about Satan, the god of this world. In their case, that is in the case of the perishing, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers. He’s put out their eyes and stopped them from seeing in order to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the likeness of God. For what we preach is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

Now here the apostle Paul asserts almost more powerfully than anywhere else the potential power of preaching. According to verse 4, unbelievers are blind. Satan has blinded their eyes. According to verse 6, Paul himself, who had once been blind, his eyes closed by prejudice, had been made to see. His eyes had been supernaturally opened. The God who, at the beginning of creation, had caused light to shine out to darkness, he says, “had shone in his heart.” He likens, you notice, this experience of light; which is not just the external flash of light, which came upon him

and knocked him to the ground outside the Damascus gates, but it was an interior illumination. “It shone into his heart,” he says. And he likens it to what happened at the beginning of creation when there was in the primeval darkness, when everything was chaos and dark and dead, suddenly the creative voice of God rang out into the night, “‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” And Paul draws an analogy between that old creation when God created the light and his own experience of regeneration when God said, “Let there be light”; and into the darkness of his heart, which was like the primeval chaos before creation, God shone His light by His sovereign creative Word. Scales fell from his eyes. His closed mind was opened. He saw the truth as it is in Jesus by this sovereign, saving illumination of God.

Now so far we’ve contrasted verses 4 and 6. In this contrast is unfolded for us the unseen conflict behind all evangelism. It’s a warfare, Paul says, between two gods. This is the word he uses: on the one hand, the god of this age, Satan; and on the other, the God of creation, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The god of this age blinds the hearts of unbelievers. The God of Jesus Christ shines into their hearts. This is a contrast—and a very striking contrast it is—that he draws. Now this being the case, you might say to yourself, “What can I hope to contribute to this warfare? Wouldn’t the more modest thing, wouldn’t the more prudent thing be for me to retire from the field of conflict and to let these two gods fight it out between them? What can I hope to contribute in this kind of celestial warfare?” Well people have argued like this. What I might call “the ultra-Calvinist” has sometimes argued like this. Then superficially it sounds reasonable enough, but it’s not the conclusion that the apostle Paul drew. But between verse 4 that speaks of the devil and verse 6 which speaks of God, comes verse 5 which speaks of the preacher. Verse 5 is, “We preach Christ Jesus as Lord.” So let’s look carefully again at these verses and feel the logic of them.

According to verse 4, what the devil blinds people against is the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. According to verse 6, what God shines into men’s hearts is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the place of Jesus Christ. The two phrases are closely parallel to one another. In each case the Greek word *photismos* is used, that is, for light or illumination. And this illumination that banishes the darkness in human hearts is the gospel. It’s the *photismos* of the gospel of the glory of God. Well now, the logic then is this: If the light against which the devil is blinding people’s eyes is the gospel; if the light by which God shines into

their hearts is the gospel by which He banishes their diabolical darkness, then we'd better preach the gospel because the gospel is the divinely appointed means by which God overcomes Satan and his blinding activity and shines into the darkened hearts of men. So far from being (inaudible) or superfluous in the spiritual warfare, preaching is actually indispensable. It is the very means God has appointed by which to overthrow the devil and illumine the darkness of men's hearts.

But to sum up this argument again, there are three actors in the drama of evangelism: There is the devil, there is God, and there is the Christian communicator; and each is given a distinctive activity indicated by a verb. The devil blinds, God shines, and we preach. And God shines through what we preach into the darkened hearts which the devil has blinded. So the gospel preaching is an indispensable activity in the church. I'll say again, it's God's chief weapon.

Now again and again we are assured in Scripture of the power of God's Word in the lives of men. I've talked about man's ignorance. I've talked about man's fallenness (his need of salvation, and his blindness). But many metaphors are used to illustrate and enforce the power of God's Word. I won't give you these references. You might find it good to take your concordance and look them up for yourself and make this list. You'll probably know most of them already. But God's Word is like fire; it burns up rubbish. It's like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. It's like a sword, sharp and two-edged, piercing the mind and conscience. It's like a lamp shining in a dark place and illumining our path. It's like a mirror to reveal to men what they are and what they ought to be. It's like wheat and meat and milk and honey that satisfy our hunger and build us up into maturity with spiritual protein to strengthen, sweeten, and sustain. It's like the seed of plants, which germinates and bears fruit; and it's like human seed (the germ of life; the mysterious instrument of conception and birth by which God begets men again). Both James and Peter use that analogy.

Not, of course, that we are to think of God's Word as existing apart from God Himself or as possessing power in itself apart from the God who speaks it. The Word is powerful only because and precisely because it is God's Word. It is the Word that God has spoken, and God continues to speak through what He has spoken. God's Word issuing from God's mouth accomplishes God's purpose. It's the medium of His authority and His power.

So in the New Testament epistle, the instrument of salvation again and again is the gospel. I quoted Romans 1:16 as “the power of God unto salvation.” In 1 Corinthians 1:18, “The word of the cross is the power of God.” 1 Thessalonians 2:13, “You received the Word of God from us, not as the word of men but as the Word of God which is at work [energetic, it has a divine energy] if you believe us.” For there is the first argument; in a sense it’s enough by itself without the other three I’m going to give you, but this argument should bolster up our weak conviction that we must preach because the Word is God’s chief weapon today.

The second argument for preaching is because it is the presbyter’s chief responsibility or like the pastor’s chief responsibility. I used the word *presbyter* because I think whatever our church background will be, we’ll accept that *presbyteros* (the presbyter or elder) is the word given to the minister in the New Testament. Now I’m assuming, for the sake of argument, that most if not all of you have been called into the pastoral ministry, but let me ask this basic question: What is the ministry? Now in a sense the word *ministry* has no meaning until you give it a more precise meaning than the general word of *diakonia* (means service). I’m grateful to Gustaf Wingren (the Scandinavian theologian) and his book translated with the English title *The Living Word*, which is a great book on preaching for clarifying myths. He said, “There are so many ministries, and we do a great disservice to refer to men entering the ministry.” He said the young man in seminary (or he says of himself), “I hope to enter the ministry,” as if there was only one ministry. There are many ministries, and we’ve got to define more carefully what particular ministry it is that we hope to enter; and I’m increasingly impressed that it is in the New Testament, the *diakonia ta logia*, the ministry of the Word. That is the phrase that the apostles used for the ministry to which they were determined to devote themselves according to Acts 6:4. Mind you, it’s important to know that the social welfare work (the caring of the Christian widows in the Jerusalem church for which the deacons were appointed) was also a God-given *diakonia*; and either the verb *diakoneo* (to serve) or the noun *diakonia* (service) is used of both these ministries. It’s used of the apostles in their ministry of the Word, and it’s used of the deacons in their ministry of tables. So we mustn’t despise other ministries as if they are not ministry.

There are many forms of ministry to which God calls people in the church, but the apostles were convinced that they must choose and that it was not right for them to be sidetracked from

the ministry of the Word to which God had called them, to the ministry of tables—a great lesson that pastors need to learn in every generation. Because there are so many pastors in the Western world who are simply burdened with administration—which they’ve got no business to be doing—their program is cluttered up with committees of this kind and that kind; and I don’t doubt that there are some the pastor must attend, but there are many he needn’t attend. And if we believe in the doctrine of the *charismata* and the word Visser ’t Hooft (the former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches) called the “common market of the charismata”—that we should be sharing, pooling our gifts, our resources—there are many lay people with administrative gifts to whom these tasks should be delegated. And the minister should concentrate on the task to which he’s primarily called, which is the ministry of the Word. Now there are no apostles today; no apostles of Christ today in the sense in which the word is almost exclusively used in the New Testament. There are what you call apostles of the churches, which is almost our equivalent of missionaries, but there are no apostles with anything comparable to the unique authority that Jesus gave to His apostles (the Twelve and Paul, and maybe one or two others). But there are men who are called to teach the doctrine of the apostles. The doctrine of the apostles has been bequeathed to us in the New Testament in its definitive form; and this apostolic doctrine of the New Testament is to be normative for the church of every age and every place, and it is this doctrine that we are to expound to the congregation. For example, Paul’s command to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:13), “Until I come [that is until I come with my own personal apostolic authority] then you, Timothy, must attend to the public reading of Scripture and to preaching and teaching” (to *paraklésis* [exhortation] and to *didaskalia* [teaching]), and *paraklesis* and *didaskalia* (two forms of preaching) are to be based on the public reading of Scripture. Scripture is the basis of it, and from this the minister is to derive his *paraklesis* and his *didaskalia*. It’s still right up-to-date today.

Well, let me put this truth in another way. The Christian ministry (the pastoral ministry) is essentially what we call a pastoral ministry. The *episkopi* (the pastoral oversight entrusted to the presbyter bishop) is the oversight of a pastor or shepherd of God’s flock. So in Acts 20:28, the apostle Paul tells the elders of the Ephesian church to “feed God’s flock” over which the Holy Spirit had given them the *episkopi* (that is, the oversight). It’s not surprising, therefore, to find that the two essential qualifications or two obvious essential qualifications of the ministry of the

Pastoral Epistles relate to this: a) his loyalty to the *didache* (that is, apostolic teaching) in order to instruct and confute. Then if you know that important verse in Titus 1:9, here Paul is giving to Titus a list of qualifications and candidates for the pastoral ministry; and he says after a number of moral qualities—the famous “be self-controlled”— they must be hospitable and lovers of goodness and so on. Then he says that candidates for the ministry must hold firm to the sure Word as taught— *didache*, according to the *didache*—the teaching of the apostles. Why? Well they must hold firm to the sure Word according to the *didache* in order that they may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it. Here is a double responsibility of the pastoral ministry: to give teaching and sound doctrine and to confute (that is to contradict and overthrow) false teachers who contradict it. Now in order to be a teacher and a confounder of false teachers, the man in the ministry has got to hold firm to the sure Word according to the *didache*. He must be orthodox. He must be loyal to the teaching of the apostles; but then b) his second qualification is he must be *didaktikos*, which is translated in the King James Version as “to teach.” You’ll find it, for example, in another list of qualifications of the ministry in 1 Timothy 3:2; and the Revised Standard Version translates it “He must be an apt teacher” (*didaktikos*).

Now this last qualification comes again in the midst of a whole catalog of moral qualities. So it means that the candidate for the ministry has got to have a teaching gift—a gift of communication. He must be *didaktikos*; and further, he must be loyal to the *didache*. He must be *didaktikos* in his handling of the *didache*. Now there is a double qualification with regard to our teaching ministry; and surely this shows quite clearly that the pastoral ministry, in the mind of the apostles, was essentially a teaching ministry. Now I don’t say that only in terms of the pulpit ministry. It will include teaching in groups. It will include personal counseling. There are various forms of teaching, but essentially, the pastor feeds the flock by teaching them; and I long that we should recover this in the church today. See the whole church is confused about the nature and function of the Christian minister today. Book after book is being written in the Western world today on, What is the function of the Christian minister? And there are some people in ecumenical circles particularly, who previously saw the minister’s role in largely social terms, who are now asking whether in the modern welfare state, with its multiplicity of voluntary and statutory bodies, whether the minister has now in fact become redundant. Other people are doing his social work, so what work is

there left for him to do? Biblical Christians need to assert plainly that the pastoral ministry is a teaching ministry. And I would that men in seminary, in training for the ministry, would pray both that God would give them a deeper understanding of the *didache*, that they study the Bible and a greater facility in teaching it, and that He will make them *didaktikos*.

And I would, moreover, that ministry and laity of the local congregation—one of whose tasks is to be watchful for those whom God may be calling to the pastorate—should be looking for signs of a teaching gift and that ministers should so organize their timetable as to give priority to the study and the exposition of the Word. Well, that is the second argument. It's the presbyter's chief responsibility.

My third argument for preaching is because it is the congregation's chief need or, if you like, the church's chief need. Now we've already seen that God has chosen to save people by His Word. But now I want to show you how God uses the same Word to nourish His people, to edify them, and to build them up into maturity. Here I take the liberty of trying to expound to you some verses that are meaningful to me—and should (I think) be meaningful to all of us—at the end of the first chapter of the Colossian letter (Colossians 1:27-29); verses much neglected, if I'm not greatly mistaken. Here Paul refers to the mystery that has been revealed to him, that is, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Paul centers on Christ: the indwelling Christ, the coming Christ, "Christ in you, Christ, the hope of glory." Christ in you, Gentile, the universal Christ, indwelling, universal, coming again. This is the mystery revealed to him. Now then, he goes on, "Him we proclaim." The center of our preaching ministry is Christ. We proclaim Him, warning every man, teaching every man in all wisdom; and we don't just give little simple sermonettes. No, we want to teach Christ in all wisdom, in the fullness of His divine human person and saving work; and we want to proclaim Christ in all wisdom in order that we may present every man mature in Christ. "For this I toil," (Paul goes on, verse 29). "I toil for this, striving with all the energy that He mightily inspires within me." It's a tremendous text; it's about Christian maturity. I want to try and draw it out. Maybe I'll give you a little sermon while I'm doing it.

And now then, first, the goal that Paul set himself. You see Paul's whole ministry: proclamation (Him we proclaim) and admonition (warning every man) and teaching (teaching every man)—his whole ministry, his toiling, his striving, his praying—he mentions

it all in these verses. His whole ministry was directed to this great end: “to present every man mature in Christ.” I wonder if that strikes somebody immediately then, because we’re accustomed to think of Paul as the pioneer missionary. We’re accustomed to think of him as the itinerant evangelist, the intrepid traveler who journeyed over sea and swamp and mountain to win converts and found churches, and then to move on. You think of him primarily as a soul-winner. But no, in his own estimation, Paul’s overriding purpose was not to bring people to Christ and then abandon them, but to present them mature in Christ. It was not that through the new birth men and women should become babes in Christ, but that they should grow into this adult maturity in Christ.

I think this is a great message for the whole evangelical church today. The superficiality of our teaching ministry is appalling. And the superficiality of the average layman’s Christian understanding and Christian maturity are alike, in my judgment, appalling. I’m speaking in averages. I’m only generalizing, but, of course, the congregation reflects the ministry it receives. And I hope when you get in your ministry or set before yourself this goal—to present people mature in Christ—they’re only content when they come to Christ. Now what this maturity is— he’s not, of course, talking about human maturity. People who are not Christians can grow into human maturity physically, psychologically. By God’s common grace they can grow into manhood and womanhood. He’s speaking here of spiritual maturity, maturity in Christ, maturity of stature in relation to Christ. That’s what he’s talking about, and that’s available only through the special grace of God.

Now so much for the goal he set. Let’s look, second, at the means by which the goal is attained. If you want to reach this goal for the congregation, how are we to attain it when he says, “Him we proclaim, warning every man, teaching every man in all wisdom in order that we may present every man mature in Christ”? If Christian maturity is maturity in Christ (in knowing Him, loving Him, believing Him, obeying Him), then essentially to know Christ is the means by which maturity in Christ is reached. We have to teach this Christ (“Him we proclaim”).

So if you glance back in the earlier part of this chapter, you’ll see it’s full of Christ. Look, for example, at who is this Christ he proclaimed. Look at verse 15. He’s “the image of the invisible God.” He’s “the firstborn over all creation.” He’s the one who entered time, space, and flesh to make visible God’s invisibility. He’s the firstborn of creation; its source. He’s an heir. He’s its beginning

and its end. All things were created through Christ and for Christ. They hold together in Christ. He's the principal of cohesion in the universe and so on. And as you read these verses and go on, not just to the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Christ but working through Christ to reconcile all things to Himself—one of the most mind-stretching passages in the whole of the New Testament—and this is what Paul proclaimed: No gentle Jesus meek and mild, no harmless little ethical teacher, no ignorant Palestinian peasant. And I think, as Dr. Wilbur Smith said so rightly this morning, no simple Jesus of the Jesus people who seem to liken Jesus to a syringe that you carry around in your pocket and with which you give yourself a fix when you've had a low and you get a high on Jesus. Well maybe, all right, if you're working among people in the drug culture. But as they (inaudible) or make their Jesus cheers, I ask myself, Who is this Jesus they are talking about? And I want to say to you that the great reason for the mean and paltry Christian experience is that people have a mean and paltry view of Jesus. And it's only when we preach Jesus Christ in the fullness of His person and His work in creation and in redemption, not just the people's minds grow, but their whole personality grows as they grow into maturity in Christ.

That brings me to the third thing: and that is the people for whom—in this text, in Colossians—the people for whom he was concerned, and that is every man, not some elitist group. Paul, of course, was writing against the heretics, who were troubling the Colossian church (who were some kind of Gnostics); and they preached some kind of religious exclusivism. They distinguished between *pistis* and *gnosis* (between faith and knowledge). All Christians are believers (they have *pistis*), but we they say have been enlightened (we have *gnosis*). We are the intellectual elite. We've been initiated into the mysteries. We know the common herd are just believers, but we are knowers. And Paul cuts right under the pernicious teaching, and in this verse three times he uses the phrase “every man.” “Him we proclaim, warning every man, teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ.” Now that is a great goal to set yourself; that by the preaching of Christ in His fullness, every single member of the congregation will be one day presented mature in Christ. So that's my third point. This is the congregation's chief need. It's by preaching, by the preaching of Christ, that the congregation will grow into maturity.

That leads me to the fourth and last point (my last five minutes): because it is the world's chief lack. The fourth argument for

preaching: It's the world's chief lack. There is in Christendom today what Amos called a "dreadful famine." "Not a famine of bread"—I'm quoting from Amos 8:11—"not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." People are woefully ignorant of the biblical gospel even in the Western world, not just in pioneer mission fields. It's partly—I know that they do not and will not listen—but it's partly the church's fault. They're fed up with the church, the establishment, and the hierarchy, because the church seems to have departed so far from Jesus Christ that what I think many of them have rejected is not Christ of whom they really do not know. They don't know the gospel. It's the church they've rejected. And if they should listen to the church, what they would hear (I'm referring to the visible church in general) would be such a babble of discordant voices that they wouldn't know whom to believe or what to believe. They look and listen to religious programs on television (thinking especially in our own country). What they often get is an argument. They get the unedifying spectacle of supposed experts not knowing what they believe themselves; and if they think they do know, then disagreeing with one another about it. And in many churches today (borrowing the vivid word pictures of Jesus), the laity are sheep without a shepherd and the pastors are blind leaders of the blind. And it's in this contemporary confusion in the visible church that biblical Christians are called to speak out with a clear message. It's into the ecumenical fog that the piercing light of the gospel can still shine. So I want to urge you to lift up your voices and to speak the full biblical gospel without fear or favor. And I long that we should recapture the vision of every church as a center for the systematic dissemination of the gospel in the neighborhood. For *this* is God's chosen method; and we can never grow out of it.

Let me talk from our own situation, for just as I close, from UK. Christians have woefully inadequate access to the mass media of communication in the United Kingdom. Comparatively, little time is given to the gospel on radio and television and even less space in the national daily newspapers. But I sometimes say to pastors in the United Kingdom who feel frustrated by this that we already have a ready-made national system for spreading the gospel to the community through the network of local churches. And this is a propaganda machine (if I may use the term without unpleasant overtones), in where plant and people it's widespread and decentralized throughout the country, of which any political party would be wildly jealous. And the truth is, we simply don't take advantage of it. We are neglecting this that we have. If only

every church were a distribution center for the gospel. If only every minister were a faithful teacher of the gospel. If only every church member were an active witness to Christ, why the good news of Christ could still permeate the country!

So I conclude. I began by saying that preaching on a whole is disliked in the world and despised and neglected in the church. We've thought of these many specious arguments advanced against it; but I beg you not to succumb to this popular fashion today. The preaching of God's Word is a vital, permanent feature of the church. It's of that that I long for us to be deeply persuaded so that nothing can shake us in our preaching ministry. It is the medium that God has Himself chosen for the salvation of sinners and for the edification of His people; and God has promised to own it and to bless it. And it is a ministry that He still calls His pastors to exercise. I just pray that we may be given grace to be faithful. And tomorrow I begin a series of three lectures on the nature and the purpose of preaching. Just a prayer as we go out: *Lord, convince us deeply in our minds and our hearts of the indispensable and permanent necessity of preaching in the church, that we may not only never forget it but never doubt it. We ask it for the glory of Jesus Christ our Savior.*