

“Jesus Was a Preacher”

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There are many wonderful sentences in the Bible, statements full of wisdom and insight. Many of these statements reveal human nature. There’s a great line in the Old Testament book of Micah. Micah 2:6 says, “‘Do not preach’—thus they preach.”¹ That’s the way the English Standard Version translates that verse. The Christian Standard Bible puts it this way: “‘Quit your preaching,’ they preach.” You don’t even need to know the context of that verse to appreciate the irony. That verse reveals two important truths: one, that some people don’t like certain messages to be preached; and two, that preaching is inevitable. Some people don’t like to hear the word “shouldn’t,” as in “You shouldn’t do that,” and they basically say, “You shouldn’t say ‘shouldn’t.’” You can’t get around saying “shouldn’t” or “don’t,” and you can’t get around the fact that people will preach.

The first truth I mentioned—that people don’t like to hear certain messages—is obvious in our antiauthoritarian age. We don’t want people telling us what we should do. We don’t want government officials telling us how to live. We don’t always want scientists telling us that this is better for the planet, or that is better for our bodies. We certainly don’t want people telling us what is right and wrong in some areas of our lives, whether it’s how we spend our money or what we do in the bedroom.

And yet, people continue to preach. It seems like a lot of our politicians are preachers of a kind. Every time I hear our senator, Elizabeth Warren, speak, it sounds like she’s preaching. And it’s not only elected officials who preach. We have celebrities of all kinds preaching different messages, a new kind of moral law, about what we should believe and how we should live. It’s just that this new moral law has shifted. I would argue that people have always made moral judgments, even if they don’t agree on the content of those judgments.

Even though we live in an antiauthoritarian age, we still do listen to certain authorities. We may listen to doctors, because we trust them and realize that they know more about the human body than we do. Or, we may trust mechanics—at least reliable, honest ones—because they know more about cars than we do. For some of us, if we have computer problems or

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

smartphone problems, we may trust others—whether it’s a tech-savvy relative, someone from Best Buy’s Geek Squad or Apple’s Genius Bar, the employee working at the cell phone store, or the guy from the IT department. There are times when we realize we do need to go to an authority for help, to give us information that we think we need to have.

We also tend to listen to people who confirm what we already believe. We don’t mind preaching if it affirms who we are and doesn’t challenge us or call us to change.

There will be preaching in this life, and there will be people who don’t want to hear certain messages. Still, we do listen to certain messages. All of this seems inescapable. The question for us is, which message should be preached? What kind of preaching should we all be listening to?

This morning, as we continue to think about who Jesus was—and who he still is—I want to point out something that is fairly obvious: Jesus was a preacher. This morning, I will show that he was a preacher, why he needed to preach, how he preached, what he preached, and how his preaching affects our lives.

First, Jesus was a preacher. Last week, I talked about how Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil. Shortly after that, we read this, in Matthew 4:17: “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” In Mark’s Gospel, we get a little more information. Mark 1:14–15 says, “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” Jesus began his public ministry by preaching. He proclaimed a message concerning the gospel, which means “good news,” and the kingdom of God. The Greek word translated there as “preach” and “proclaiming” means “to announce, to make known, to proclaim aloud, to declare” much like a town crier or herald.”² Jesus had something important to announce. He had a message to share.

Sometimes people focus more on Jesus’ deeds, like his miracles and his death on the cross. Other people focus more on his words. But we must not divide the two. Imagine if Jesus were mute, if he couldn’t speak. If he just performed some miracles, died on the cross, and then rose from the grave, we wouldn’t know exactly who he is. We wouldn’t know the meaning of

² The verb is κηρύσσω. It is related to another word, κήρυξ, which means “herald.” See Gerhard Friedrich, “κήρυξ (ιεροκήρυξ), κηρύσσω, κήρυγμα, προκηρύσσω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 3:683–718.

those acts. And we wouldn't get to know Jesus as a person. We wouldn't know what he expects from us. However, if Jesus only preached and taught, but performed no miracles, we would wonder if his words were authoritative. There would be no evidence that he was telling the truth. And if he didn't die on the cross and rise from the grave, there would be no atoning for our sin. God's wrath would not be satisfied. We would have no hope of being put back into a right relationship with God. We would have no assurance of a resurrection of our own.

Fortunately, we have a Jesus who both preached and performed "signs and wonders." Both his acts and his words were important. We see this in Mark 1. He preached, he healed people, and he drove out demons. After Jesus healed many people, we read this (Mark 1:35–39):

³⁵ And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, ³⁷ and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." ³⁸ And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." ³⁹ And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Jesus performed works such as casting out demons and healing people, but he also needed to preach.

Why did Jesus need to preach? Well, before I explain that, it's important to think about what preaching is. I had already said that the word translated as "preach" can mean "to announce" or "to herald." But I think it's more than just announcing news. I said recently that a lot of what is on the news doesn't really change our lives—it's more entertainment. But preaching isn't just entertainment and it's not just informing. I think all preaching has an informative aspect; we need information. And I suppose preaching could be entertaining in a way, though it might not be. But what separates preaching from just announcing news or informing is that it has an imperative aspect. Preaching either explicitly or implicitly commands us to do something. It's more or less announcing this message: "Here is the news, and now this is what you should do!" Sometimes, the content of preaching is simply something we should believe to be true. "This is what happened; believe it!" Sometimes, preaching is meant to encourage us: "This is what is true; be of good cheer!" Other times, preaching is meant to change us: "This is how things really are, and you need to conform your life to reality!"

Often, that is what Jesus did. He called his audiences to change. That is why the first word of his message is "Repent!" That means to change, to turn, to do a 180. It means, "You're

going in the wrong direction. Turn around now before it's too late." He came to call us to repentance because we—all human beings other than Jesus—need to change. He says that we are evil (Matt. 7:11), and that the world's works are evil (John 7:7).

He also came to preach to give us God's word.³ That's what Christian preaching is; it is a declaration, explanation, and application of God's word. And when Jesus spoke, he spoke the word of the Lord. In fact, Jesus was a prophet.⁴ He is the prophet that Moses predicted would come. Moses said this in Deuteronomy 18:15: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen." And God himself said this, according to Moses, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (v. 18). Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets famously say, "Thus says the Lord . . ." But Jesus never says that. Instead, he says things like, "You have heard that it was said. . . . But I say to you . . ." (Matt. 5:21–22, 27–28, 38–39, 43–44; similarly, vv. 31–32, 33–34). In other words, he was saying God's words. He didn't have to say, "Thus says the Lord," because Jesus is the Lord. He is God.

Jesus came to speak God's words. That's what he says in John 8:28, "I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me." In John 12:49–50, he says, "For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me." And in John 17:8, he prays to God the Father, "For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me." When John says that Jesus is the Word (John 1:1), he means that Jesus is the perfect expression of God.

Jesus preached because he was and is the fullest revelation of God. The book of Hebrews opens with these words: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb. 1:1–2). God has revealed

³ I typically use "word" with a lower-case W to indicate God's written word, and to distinguish it from God's incarnate Word, Jesus (John 1:1).

⁴ Other people refer to him as a prophet in Mark 6:15; 8:28; Luke 7:16; 24:19; John 4:19; 6:14. Jesus seems to refer to himself as a prophet in Mark 6:4 and Luke 13:33.

himself in his Son and in his Bible, and the way that we know Jesus is through the Bible.⁵ In other words, if you want to know God, you need to know Jesus. And if you want to know Jesus, you need to know the Bible. All of this is by God's design.

Imagine you're meeting someone new. Perhaps a stranger comes to church. Meeting new people can be a bit awkward. And, let's admit it, a lot of us can be awkward. But imagine someone new comes to church and we want to get to know him. Let's say we're having some kind of fellowship time after the service and instead of talking to this visitor and allowing him to talk to us, we put him in a corner and talk about him. We guess where he's from, what he does for work and for fun, and what he likes and dislikes. But we never allow him to talk. Is that a way to get to know someone? Of course not! To know a person, you have to let that person talk. You have to hear his words. We can study physical objects in the world without hearing from them because they're impersonal, but to know a person requires hearing from that person.

To know God, we need to let him speak. And Jesus came to speak God's word. That's not all he did, of course, but his preaching was a very important aspect of his ministry.

However, in his day, and in our day, not everyone wants to hear God's word. That can even be true in churches. Michael Green, a British theologian, wrote these words about forty years ago: "The standard of preaching in the modern world is deplorable. There are few great preachers. Many clergy do not seem to believe in it any more as a powerful way in which to proclaim the gospel and change the life. This is the age of the sermonette: and sermonettes make Christianettes."⁶ It seems to me that if you look around, you find a lot of Christianettes. If Green is right, that means there have been a lot of sermonettes, too. John Stott, a long-time pastor, wrote, "Our worship is poor because our knowledge of God is poor, and our knowledge of God is poor because our preaching is poor."⁷

Christian pastors should preach the Bible. The Bible is not a dusty old book. We preach the living words of the living God,⁸ and God acts through his words.⁹ God created the universe

⁵ For reasons why we should trust what the Bible says about Jesus, see my first sermon in this series, "How Can We Know Jesus," available at <http://wbcommunity.org/who-is-jesus>.

⁶ Preface to John R. W. Stott's *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸ Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

⁹ One excellent book that deals with this thought is Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

by his word (Genesis 1; Heb. 11:3). God upholds the universe by his word (Heb. 1:3). God makes promises and covenants with people by means of his word.¹⁰ God saves people with his word.¹¹ For that reason, when I preach, I preach God's word.

However, preaching has become rather unpopular. I have heard pastors give sermons that didn't quote the Bible even once. And there are a growing number of people who call themselves Christians yet who seem to reject all authority. Instead of listening to faithful preachers and theologians who, like the doctor in the first scenario, tell them of mankind's sin sickness, they want endless dialogue. They think that everyone is entitled to an opinion. They assume that everyone's views are legitimate and equal. They call for an open mind and they don't seem to have firm convictions. But we can't keep having open-ended dialogues. We must arrive at truth. G. K. Chesterton, a Catholic writer, once said, "The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid."¹²

Unfortunately, there are some people who treat pastors who warn them that they're breaking God's law like rent-a-cops at the mall, not state troopers. They don't respect any authority other than themselves. And, worst of all, though they say they want a relationship with God, they refuse to let him speak. Instead, they insert whatever they want into his mouth. He's like the visitor to the church that is stuck in the corner. He's made to be like a ventriloquist's dummy, saying whatever the itching ears of the people want to hear. This is the heart of idolatry, to make God something other than he is.

To know God rightly, we must hear his Word, which is the Bible. The Bible is God's self-revelation. He has revealed things that we could never figure out by ourselves in the Bible. He has told us about the meaning and purpose of life, why things are so wrong in this world and in our lives, and how we can be saved. God knows everything, including the condition of our hearts, so we would do well to listen to him. And God is authoritative: he has the power to rescue us from death and hell. No one else has that power. For all of those reasons, I must preach God's Word. But I also must preach because Jesus was a preacher.

¹⁰ Such is the case with Abraham in Gen. 12:1–3; 15; 17; Israel at Sinai in Exodus 19–4; and David in 2 Samuel 7.

¹¹ This concept is all over the New Testament. Salvation is equivalent to receiving new life. When Jesus raises a dead person to life, he does it with his word, as in the case of Lazarus (John 11:43–44). Preaching of the gospel is also connected to salvation, as in Rom. 10:9–15; 1 Cor. 1:21–24; 1 Thess. 1:4–5; 2:13.

¹² G. K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography*, vol. 16 of *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), 212, quoted in D. A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 165.

So, Jesus came to preach in order to reveal in more detail who God is and what his kingdom is like, and to call us to change. As we go through this series of sermons, I'll talk more about the content of Jesus' teachings.

Now, how did Jesus preach? Well, he preached to gathered audiences. That's what preaching is. Jesus also had conversations with people, in which he responded to questions and asked his own questions. But preaching is generally one person addressing multiple people. We see that in Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount," which is recorded in Matthew 5–7.

However, preaching to a crowd isn't uncommon. What was uncommon about Jesus' preaching was that he preached with authority. If you've ever read Jesus' words, you know that he preached and taught with authority. The crowds in Jesus' day certainly thought so. Listen to some of these reactions:

And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes (Mark 1:22).

And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (Mark 1:27).

And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?" (Mark 6:2).

²⁸ And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹ for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes (Matt. 7:28–29).

If you take the time to read Jesus' teachings, you know that he taught with certainty. He didn't speculate. He didn't guess. He taught as one who knew things that others didn't, things that they needed to know. He didn't ask others what they wanted to hear. He didn't form committees to determine what he should preach. His authority and certainty are stunning. He was a man without doubts.

We should also note that Jesus used the word of God when he preached. In Mark 2, we read about the time when Jesus healed a paralytic who was brought to him by four others. We read these words (v. 2): "And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them." It's a bit unclear what "the word"

means here, but it must refer at least to Jesus' message. It could also refer to the Old Testament, which Jesus used in preaching and in his conversations. The message of Jesus is the one we read about in the Gospels, which are the foundation of the New Testament.

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers back to the Hebrew Bible, what we would call the Old Testament. I'll devote a sermon to this, but Jesus clearly believed that the Old Testament was God's word. And the Old Testament was often at the heart of his preaching.

One example of this comes in Luke 4:16–21:

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.

¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Jesus, in a synagogue in Nazareth, his hometown, reads from the Old Testament. The passage is Isaiah 61:1–2, and it clearly refers to an anointed one—the Messiah, from the Hebrew word, or the Christ, from the Greek word, both meaning “anointed one.” This anointed one has the Holy Spirit and is sent to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Then Jesus said that this passage was fulfilled in his audience's hearing, which means that it's about him. So, we see that Jesus used the Old Testament and the Old Testament foresaw a time when the Messiah would come to preach. Preaching was a central part of Jesus' mission.

All of this brings us to the content of Jesus' preaching. What did he preach? Jesus preached about a lot of things: he addressed specific sins such as greed, idolatry, adultery, divorce, anger, and pride. He also taught about salvation. He preached about how to act as God's people. He prophesied about the future. He preached about hell and judgment. I'll look at many

of these topics in upcoming sermons. But for now, I want to talk about two topics: gospel and kingdom.

Let's go back to Mark 1:14–15. We're told that Jesus went to Galilee and preached the good news—the gospel—of God. And he said, “The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel.” There it is: gospel and the kingdom of God. What is the gospel? Mark doesn't spell it out for us. But we should remember that Jesus and the New Testament writers often referred to the Old Testament. “Good news” or “gospel” is a translation of a Greek word that was used also in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was written almost entirely in Hebrew. The same Greek word was used four times in the second part of Isaiah.¹³ Chapters 40–66 of Isaiah look forward to a time when Israel would come out of exile to Babylon. The good news includes God gathering his covenant people out of blindness, prison, darkness, and exile (Isa. 42:6–7; 43:6–7). This gospel includes multiple promises of forgiveness (Isa. 43:25; 44:22; 52:15; 53:5–6) and salvation (Isa. 45:17; 46:13; 49:6; 51:5; 61:10). It is a message of free grace, offered without price (Isa. 55:1–2). It is a time of Jubilee (chapter 61) and it includes an invitation of the Gentiles to become part of God's people and to serve in the temple (Isa. 56:1–8; 66:18–23). It leads to a glorious new, expanded Jerusalem (Isa. 53:1–3; 60:1–22; 65:18), which seems to be synonymous with a new heavens and earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). I believe that when Jesus preached about the “gospel” or “good news,” this is what he meant. He meant that God had come to bring salvation to his people, to bring them out of exile, to forgive them of their sins, to take care of them the way a shepherd takes care of his sheep. He meant that God would gather in all kinds of people—old and young, rich and poor, male and female, Jew and Gentile—into his kingdom.

The “kingdom of God” is a topic that is closely related to the gospel. I would say that the kingdom of God is one of the major themes of the whole Bible. We don't actually see that phrase, or the similar phrase “kingdom of heaven,” until the New Testament.¹⁴ But it's not a new idea. God has always been King, and this idea is present in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms. God is the King, and his kingdom refers to the people he rules and the place he rules in. Graeme Goldsworthy, an Australian theologian, says that the kingdom of God is “God's people

¹³ Isa. 40:9; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1.

¹⁴ The two phrases have the same referent.

in God's place under God's rule."¹⁵ In Daniel 2:44, we're told that God "will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed."

When Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God is at hand, he means that the King has arrived to establish his kingdom. He means that son that was promised to King David so long ago, the one that would reign forever, has come (2 Sam. 7:12–16). He means that the ruler prophesied by Isaiah, the "Prince of Peace," has arrived (Isa. 9:6–7). The Son of Man of Daniel 7:13–14 has come. The King had arrived, and his kingdom is not like the kingdoms of this world. It's a kingdom of justice and righteousness, where the last are first and the humble are exalted. It's a kingdom full of people who lose their life in order to gain it.

And Jesus is a different type of King. He's not a tyrant who takes and takes from his subjects, but one who lays down his life to rescue his people. He dies in the place of people who are evil, who have sinned against a holy God, and who deserve judgment. Jesus' preaching is good news because Jesus is more than a preacher. His perfect life and his atoning death make the good news possible.

What does this mean for us? If you are not a Christian, you need to realize that Jesus is the greatest preacher—the greatest speaker—who ever walked the earth. Pick up a Bible and read what he preached. Start with Matthew 5–7, the Sermon on the Mount. Consider the authority with which Jesus preaches. This is a man who is sure of himself. Consider also that you may not be the ultimate authority, even over your own life. You may not want to change, but if Jesus' message is true, you need to. However, Jesus will also give you the strength to change if you trust him.

If you are a Christian today, are you letting Jesus preach to you? Are you allowing him to speak into all areas of your life? Jesus has a lot to say about all kinds of issues. In fact, the whole Bible consists of Jesus' words. Jesus himself said that the Old Testament was about him (see Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27, 44–47; John 5:39, 46). Before he died, Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come and reveal more of Jesus' message to them. He also said the Spirit would help them to remember what he did and said (John 14:15–26; 16:12–15). The New Testament was written by Jesus' disciples, his brothers, and at least one person, Luke, who knew some of those disciples. Some people try to pit Jesus against Paul or the other apostles. But this

¹⁵ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (1981), in *The Goldsworthy Trio* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2000), 54. I changed the formatting that Goldsworthy used to outline this definition, but the content is the same.

won't do. Their message is a continuation of Jesus' message. That is why Paul said the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20). All of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament are one giant sermon preached by Jesus. And Jesus himself is the subject of this sermon. The whole Bible is about him.

So, again, do you allow Jesus to preach to you. Are you listening? Are you allowing God's word to speak into every corner of your life, and not just what happens on Sunday?

We are not all called to be preachers, and that's fine. God gives us different spiritual gifts. But we all do play some role in proclaiming the gospel. All Christians are royal priests who should declare the excellencies of the one who brought us out of darkness and into light (1 Pet. 2:9). So, let us share this message with others.

Jesus is the greatest preacher ever. Let's not silence him. Let's not debate with him. Let's listen to him.