

THE PASTOR'S STUDY

EXERCISING THE MIND || IGNITING THE HEART || PREPARING THE HANDS

A free quarterly paper for rural pastors

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WELCOME TO THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Let me introduce you to this issue of *The Pastor's Study*. These few paragraphs will guide you through the articles and help you to get the most out of this issue. We are thankful to Dr. Lawson for kindly writing the guest editorial.

The theme of this issue is Moses at the burning bush, and it is particularly applicable to the work of the pastorate. We pray you will find it both encouraging and helpful. Rev. Calvin Goligher starts us off with "Preaching on Holy Ground" (pages 4-5). Then I will take you through a short commentary on the text, Exodus 2:23-4:17 (pages 6-8). On page 9 you will find an interesting and devotional piece on "The Angel of the Lord" by Henry Law, a writer from the past. On the centre pages you will find the "Preacher's Workshop." Here we try to show preachers how to move from the exegesis of the passage to making preaching notes and then on to explanation and application (pages 10-11). Dr. Nelson Were closes this issue with a devotional from the story (page 20).

In other articles, Dr. Joel Beeke gives us a very helpful article on piety (pages 12-13). This follows on from the previous issue. It will be worth your time to meditate on this. For our pastoral theology article, pastor Tonny Karwa writes again about getting our priorities right (pages 16-17). I include an article on the characteristics of a healthy church (pages 14-15). Knowing Church history is an important part of the pastor's work and for this Dr. Haykin provides us with some helpful points on being good historians (pages 18-19).

Sincerely, Aaron Dunlop

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EDITORIAL: THE PREACHER'S CONFIDENCE

Dr. Steven J. Lawson

Every preacher must have unwavering confidence that God will accomplish the success of the ministry. Though he must rightly handle the word and preach in the power of the Spirit, a pastor knows that nevertheless, God is the one who produces the results. The preacher must plant the seed and water it, but it is God who causes its growth. Such confidence must be rooted and grounded in the sovereignty of God.

The preacher's strong conviction begins with the doctrine of unconditional election—that God the Father chose whom He would save before time began. This was an independent divine choice, based upon nothing good foreseen in the one chosen. Instead, it was solely conditioned by his sovereign will. The Father then, in eternity past, gave his elect to his Son as an expression of his love for the Son to be his chosen bride.

The Father then commissioned his Son to come into the world and lay down his life for these chosen ones. The Son came not to do his own will, but the will of the Father, specifically to purchase the elect entrusted to his care. The Son accepted this assignment and

entered this world on a mission of salvation to redeem these chosen ones. Not a drop of his blood would be shed in vain.

The Father and the Son then commissioned the Holy Spirit to call the elect out of darkness into fellowship with the Son. The Spirit secures this relationship with his effectual, irresistible, triumphant grace, which draws people to Christ and regenerates them. The Spirit grants them repentance and faith. Therefore, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together as one Savior according to one eternal purpose.

This must be every preacher's confidence. The sovereign God is building the church and no forces of darkness can overcome it. God himself guarantees the success of his gospel—and nothing can thwart it.

Steven Lawson is Professor of Preaching at The Master's Seminary, a Teaching Fellow for Ligonier Ministries, and President of OnePassion Ministries, a ministry designed to equip biblical expositors to bring about a new reformation in the Church.

PREACHING ON HOLY GROUND

Rev. Calvin Goligher

There is a simple but serious problem with much of our preaching. The Bible is about God, and our sermons are often about something else. That “something else” may be from the Bible: a story, a law, a promise, even the Gospel promise of sins forgiven and an invitation to eternal life.

We must preach all of these, but if we leave God out then we are not preaching them biblically. This is especially obvious in Exodus 3. If we only wish to preach history, doctrine, duties, and promises—and not God himself—this chapter will be as barren as the wilderness where Moses kept Jethro’s sheep.

*God himself is the
source and sweetness
of everything we
preach.*

These other issues will certainly be part of our preaching, but if we will preach God’s Word correctly, then we will find ourselves preaching from holy ground. This text gives us plenty to preach about God. We will notice just a few points.

God keeps his promises

God’s first description of himself is: “The God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (verse 6). Even after 400 years in Egypt, God has not forgotten his promises to these patriarchs of Israel.

God sees his people

The Israelites in Egypt could see their troubles, their suffering and their harsh rulers. But they could not see God in their circumstances.

But God saw them and their sufferings (verse 7) and had a plan to help them, in keeping with his promise to Abraham that his offspring would inherit the land of Canaan (verse 8).

God reveals his name

God sent Moses to lead Israel and confront Pharaoh. Moses did not feel up to the task (verse 11), but God promised to be with him (verse 12). This prompted Moses to ask God’s name, so that he could tell Israel who had authorized his ministry.

God told Moses the meaning of his greatest name: “I AM THAT I AM,” or “I AM” (verse 14). This is where the name “Jehovah” or

“Yahweh” comes from, which is usually translated “LORD” in our English Bibles. This name gives meaning to the burning bush: as the flame burned on its own without consuming the bush, so God lives without relying on anyone or anything. He gives without needing anything in return. As creatures, we receive everything from our creator. As creator, he receives nothing from us, but only gives and gives.

God equips his servants

God’s name was the reason for Moses’s confidence: “The LORD, the God of your fathers ... has sent me” (verse 15). He was weak (verse 11), but God would make him strong. Israel, too, had no resources for worshipping God in the wilderness (verse 18), but God would supply them in a most unlikely way (verses 21-22). A weak bush is no hindrance to the living God, who “is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29).

Conclusion

We should always preach about God. But this does not mean that we should stop preaching the Bible’s stories, laws, promises, or the Gospel itself. Instead, we should preach all of these “on holy ground,” remembering that God himself is the source and sweetness of everything we preach.

Calvin Goligher is pastor of First OPC in Sunnyvale, California.



THE STORY OF THE BURNING BUSH (EXODUS 2:23-4:17)

Pastor Aaron Dunlop

This story is hugely significant for those in the gospel ministry and as it relates to the message of the gospel. Notice, first, the intractable situation in which the Israelites found themselves. Second, the person and ministry of Moses, the first person in Scripture to be sent on a prophetic mission. Third, the back story of Moses' previous rejection, the forty years of isolation and his chronic insecurities. Fourth, the self-revelation of God as "I AM." Fifth, the mission to which Moses was called, a picture of redemption that has echoed through history (Psalm 81:10, Jeremiah 2:6, Acts 7:40).

God remembers (Exodus 2:23-25)

At the beginning of Exodus, it seemed that God had forgotten his people. He had been silent for four hundred years (Acts 7:6) while the people laboured under the weight of slavery in Egypt. But God had not forgotten. Notice the verbs: "God heard," "God remembered," "God saw" and "God knew." What happened at the burning bush was the beginning of God's exit plan for Israel. God will gather his men: first Moses, then Aaron (Exodus 4:14), and then the elders (Numbers 11:16).

God calls his man (Exodus 3:1-6)

There is some important back story to Moses. The circumstances of his birth and his childhood indicate that he is destined for some great task (Exodus 2:1-10). But he was rejected and exiled. When we meet him here in our story, Moses is geographically and spiritually in "*a dry place*" – Horeb. After forty years in the wilderness, Moses learned that the Lord's work does not need national heroes, it needs men who've met with God. In the end, this dry place in Moses' experience would become "the mountain of God" (verse 1).

God has a purpose for his people (Exodus 3:7-10)

The final goal is that God will dwell among his people (Exodus 29:46), that they would be holy (Exodus 19:6), serving the Lord (Exodus 4:23, 7:16, 8:1, 20, etc.). But he will first have to bring them up out of Egypt and into a new land. Again, notice the verbs: God "sees," God "*hears*" and God "*knows*" (verse 7), and God "*comes down*" in order to "*bring up*" (verse 8). The Lord had not been indifferent to their affliction or deaf to their cries. And he had seen those also who had afflicted his

people (verses 9-10)—they will not go unpunished.

God has answers for Moses' reluctance (Exodus 3:12-4:14)

Like Jonah, Moses was a reluctant leader. Like Jacob, he wrestled with God. Jacob wrestled out of fear of Esau. Moses wrestled out of faithlessness and doubt (Exodus 3:11, 4:10). He had lost his confidence and his ambition to deliver Israel from slavery.

The remainder of the story is taken up with the five objections that Moses raised with God to try to escape his responsibility.

Moses questioned his adequacy (Exodus 3:11-12)

There seems to be an element of surprise in God asking Moses to lead the Israelites. Moses essentially says, right from the start, "I am not the man for the job." Previous failures had left Moses focused on himself and his inadequacy. He had no confidence, but this is a good thing. God was not looking for self-confidence he was looking for God-confidence — faith (Judge 6:15, 1 Samuel 9:21, 1 Kings 3:7, Jeremiah 1:6). God did not tell Moses he was special or gifted, his encouragement was simply to assure Moses, "I will be with you" (compare 2 Corinthians 12:9).

Moses questioned his authority (Exodus 3:13-22)

Moses had no answer for the faithless Israelites the first time

(Exodus 2:14). Now he needs to know on whose authority he will preach deliverance. First, God reveals himself as "I AM." He provided Moses with a theology — a system of thought about God that would echo through the ages, until Jesus picked up on it in the gospels and by which Jesus would assert his own authority as the Son of God (John 8:58).

God follows up his answer (verse 15) and informed Moses that he had already demonstrated his character to Abraham, Issac and Jacob. God was not a distant memory, but a present reality — and he would be the same for the generations to come (verse 15, Malachi 3:6).

Moses questioned his acceptance (Exodus 4:1-9)

This objection adds another layer to Moses' lack of confidence and reveals that Moses had not only lost confidence in himself but that he had also felt totally discredited among his own people. No one would listen to him and no one would believe him again.

God met Moses where he was at and said, "I will show them," with three signs. These "signs" (verse 9) pointed the Israelites (and the Egyptians) to something greater than themselves, that Egypt's power (snake), health (leprosy) and prosperity (Nile) were in the hands of Yahweh.

Moses questioned his ability (Exodus 4:10-12)

After long years in the wilderness, words did not come easily to Moses. He was not quick-thinking enough to face Pharaoh. God's response again is gracious. First, God engaged Moses in a series of questions, causing Moses to think about God as the Creator. Second, God reiterated the simple command, "go." Third, God assured Moses that he would "be with" him, and "teach him."

Moses questioned his availability (Exodus 4:13-17)

By the end Moses was out of excuses, he simply did not want to go, and he begged God to send someone else. Moses may previously have been fearful and God graciously accommodated that fear. Now God sees that Moses is objecting simply out of disobedience. God is angry, the first time in Scripture that we read of God's anger.

Moses' resistance was overcome when God introduced another character who would come along side him. Aaron had already been engaged, and his path would providentially cross with Moses'. All of Moses' excuses are contrasted with Aaron's readiness: he was a good speaker, he was already on his way and he will be glad in heart (verse 14).

POINTS FOR PREACHERS

Some lessons from this story that pastors need to learn.

1. Learn the skills of a shepherd. Moses had all the learning of Egypt, but he needed the skills of a shepherd (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:3-4).
2. Learn that God keeps his promises. God remembers the affliction of his people and his calling on Moses.
3. Learn to make yourself vulnerable and trust God. Moses did this when he picked the snake up by the tail.
4. Learn that God is always present (I AM) to provide, teach, lead, and work.
5. Learn to exercise your authority with humility — Moses was given a staff, not a scepter (1 Peter 5:3).
6. Learn of your own inner corruption. When Moses put his hand in his bosom it became leprous.
7. Learn that God knows your needs and has anticipated them, just as God made Moses path cross with Aaron's.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

Henry Law (1797-1884)

Moses leads his flock to Horeb, the backside of the desert, and as he journeys, his eye is attracted to a bush. It was bright with fire; but though it blazed, it still retained its substance. Each branch, each fibre, was wrapped in flame; but the flame was harmless to destroy. The bush defied the attack. It stood uninjured, as if incapable of losing verdure.

But amazement deepened into awe when in the bush he saw the form of the Angel of the LORD. A voice too addressed him, "Moses, Moses." He replied, "Here am I." The voice continued: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God." (Exodus 3:6)

We here learn that Jesus is the Angel of the LORD. The voice announced, "I am God," and the appearance exhibited a human form. Who can be both God and man but Jesus? Jesus, anticipating the time when He would come to earth as a child, frequently assumed our form. Therefore, without hesitation, we understand the Angel of the LORD to be Jesus the incarnate God.

Here let us pause and ask, What brings Jesus to the burning bush? What feelings move his heart? He gives us the answer: "I have surely seen the affliction of my people ... have heard their cry ... I have come down" (verses 7-8).

Don't miss the tenderness in these words. The Angel of the LORD appeared in the burning bush to comfort the sorrowing. This appearance was deeply engraved on the patriarch's mind. His journey throughout the wilderness was not easy. But in his trials, his thoughts would go back to the bush and he would take comfort.

Forty years would roll on, and Moses would reach the end of his earthly career and he would remember, "the good will of Him who dwelt in the bush." (Deuteronomy 33:16).

Adapted from "Christ is All: Gleanings from the Book of Life" (1877).

Henry Law was the Dean of Gloucester, England, from 1862 until his death in 1884. He is best known for his book "Christ is All," a survey of the types of Christ in the Pentateuch.

PREACHER'S WORKSHOP

EXEGETICAL NOTES

(Notes on the text, words, and grammar)

2:24 When the Bible says God remembered, it is indicating that God is about to do something in a particular situation (see Genesis 8:1, 19:29, 30:22).

3:2 The Angel of the LORD “showed himself to...” (See Judges 6:12, 13:3).

3:3 This word for bush appears only here and in Deuteronomy 33:16 when it refers back to this story.

3:12 The “you” is plural. Moses along with the Israelites, or “*all of you*,” will “serve God on this mountain.”

3:16 Twice God “visits” in the book of Exodus. The same verb is used to speak of God’s visit to love and care for his people, and, in Exodus 32:34, of God’s visit in judgement for sin.

4:9 Signs and wonders (verse 21). A sign points to something and engages the mind, whereas a wonder catches the attention and make one stop and stare.

Snake - was a sign in Egypt of sovereignty and deity.

Leptous hand - leprosy was considered incurable in Egypt.

Nile waters - the Nile pointed to Egypt’s fertile land, its power and prosperity.

PREACHING NOTES

(Points for explanation and application)

God had been silent for four hundred years, but he had been working, listening to and watching the Israelites and preparing Moses for this moment.

God speaks out of a bush that is “burning but not consumed.” God still speaks out of our afflictions (Job 42:5, 2 Corinthians 4:9).

God calls ex-shepherds (Moses, David) and ex-fishermen (Peter, Andrew), and tentmakers (Paul) whom he has trained in the school of life. We discover our gifts in the natural process of living.

The blessings of God are found in our battles for God – “a land flowing with milk and honey...the land of the Canaanites” (3:17 cf. James 4:7-10)

Moses learned that his ministry was not about himself, his adequacy, his ability, his acceptance, or his own authority—it was all about the Lord (see Romans 11:36).

God knows the people you need in your ministry and he will cause your paths to cross just as providence caused Moses and Aaron’s paths to cross.

God has answers for all our excuses (3:11, 13, 4:1, 10, 13).

QUESTIONS

It is a good thing to ask some questions of the text. By doing this you will find applications to yourself and to your congregation as you prepare your sermon. You do not need to mention these in your sermon, but they will be helpful in preparation.

1. What does the story teach about God?

The story of Moses at the bush teaches that God keeps his promises, that he is faithful and he raises up men to teach his Word.

2. What does the story teach us about ourselves?

This story teaches us that we too often depend on our own confidence, rather than in God.

3. What does the story teach about Christ?

This story teaches us that God reveals himself through Christ. Christ is the Word, the communication of God.

4. What does this story tell us to do?

This story tells us that while like Moses, we may wrestle between God and the circumstance of life, we should trust God's Word and follow his leading.

What would you add to these questions and answers?

APPLICATIONS

There are encouraging applications in this story for pastors and servants of the Lord.

For the "successful" pastor

Preparation for service is always found in the presence of God. This principle is evident throughout Scripture (Isaiah 50:5-9, Luke 1:80, Matthew 4:11, Galatians 1:17).

For the suffering pastor

After the initial rejection, Moses lost all confidence, in himself and in his hearers. But the Lord was preparing and teaching him that his identity and ministry were bound up in the Lord, not in himself or his people.

For the stammering pastor

Moses thought he had nothing to say and could not speak. God told him that the Lord would teach him. It was the Word of God that Moses held onto, not the miracles or the phenomenon of the burning bush. Moses did not mention the bush to the Israelites.

For the senior pastor

At eighty years old, Moses was just getting ready for retirement and the Lord gave him the most significant mission of his life (remember Moses wrote Psalm 90:10). God still has work for you at the end of your ministry... don't freewheel into retirement.

CALVIN ON UNION AND COMMUNION WITH CHRIST

Dr Joel Beeke

For John Calvin, piety was rooted in the believer's union with Christ. Union with Christ must always be our starting point. This is possible because Christ took on our human nature and filled it with his virtue. Calvin states, "Not only does he cleave to us by an indivisible bond of fellowship, but with a wonderful communion, day by day, he grows more and more into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us." This union is one of the gospel's greatest mysteries, but because of the fountain of Christ's perfection in our nature, the Christian may, by faith, draw whatever they need for their sanctification.

The flesh of Christ (his perfect life, and death on earth) is the source from which his people derive life and power. If Christ had died and risen but was not applying his salvation to believers for their regeneration and sanctification, his work would not have been effectual. Piety shows that the Spirit of Christ is working in us what has already been accomplished in Christ. Christ administers his sanctification to the Church through his royal priesthood so that the Church may live piously for him.

Communion and participation with Christ

The heartbeat of Calvin's practical theology and piety is communion with Christ. This involves participation in his benefits, for example, the Lord's Supper, which is inseparable from union with Christ. Understanding our communion and participation with Christ helped shape Calvin's understanding of regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification, assurance, election, and the Church. He could not speak of any doctrine apart from communion with Christ.

The Spirit and faith

Communion with Christ is realized only through faith, worked in us by the Holy Spirit, Calvin teaches. It is actual communion, not because believers participate in the essence of Christ's nature, but because the Spirit of Christ unites believers so intimately to Christ that they become flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. From God's perspective, the Spirit is the bond between Christ and believers, whereas, from our perspective, faith is the bond. These perspectives do not clash with each other, since one of the Spirit's principal operations is to work faith in a sinner.

Only the Spirit can unite Christ in heaven with the believer on earth. Communion with Christ is always the result of the Spirit's work—a work that is astonishing and experiential although we may not understand it. The Holy Spirit is thus the link that binds the believer to Christ and the channel through which Christ is communicated to the believer.

Piety shows that the Spirit of Christ is working in us what has already been accomplished in Christ.

As Calvin writes to Peter Martyr Vermigli: “We grow up together with Christ into one body, and he shares his Spirit with us, through whose hidden operation he has become ours. Believers receive this communion with Christ at the same time as their calling. But they grow from day to day more and more in this communion, in proportion to the life of Christ growing within them.”

Calvin stresses that, by his Spirit, Christ empowers those who are united with Him by faith. Being “engrafted into the death of Christ, we derive from it a secret energy, as

the twig does from the root,” Calvin writes. The believer “is animated by the secret power of Christ; so that Christ may be said to live and grow in him; for as the soul enlivens the body, so Christ imparts life to his members.”

The Word and faith

Like Luther, Calvin believed that knowledge is fundamental to faith. Such knowledge includes the Word of God as well as the proclamation of the gospel. The work of the Spirit does not supplement or supersede the revelation of Scripture, but authenticates it, Calvin teaches. “Take away the Word, and no faith will remain.”

Faith unites the believer to Christ by means of the Word, enabling the believer to receive Christ. By faith, God also dwells in the believer. By faith, the believer possesses Christ and grows in Him. Though Christ remains in heaven, the believer who excels in piety learns to grasp Christ so firmly by faith that Christ dwells within his heart. By faith the pious live by what they find in Christ rather than by what they find in themselves.

Joel R. Beeke is a minister of the Heritage Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan (USA), and President of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, where he is also the professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics. He is the author of many books and articles.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

Pastor Aaron Dunlop

A bottle of soda, left open and forgotten about for days will still have all properties of a soda, but it has lost the fizz. Likewise, an unhealthy church, while it may be a true church and hold to true doctrine, still lacks spiritual vitality. It is flat, clichéd and becomes ineffective.

The Lord has provided for all the Church's needs and Scripture identifies certain key elements of a healthy church. Let me suggest some marks of a healthy church.

Strong leadership

Church leadership is no easy task. Pastors, along with elders and deacons, are called to lead. They do not merely supervise, but really lead. A leader moves the people in a chosen direction. He knows where they need to go, and he takes them there. Some will follow, and others will not, but he will lead on regardless if he has confidence in his God-given purpose and goal (Acts 20:28, Ephesians 4:11-18).

Earnest and expository preaching of the Word of God

Expository preaching is the type of preaching that has a high view of the authority of Scripture, is concerned about the flow of biblical

theology (the story of the Bible) and focused on the text of Scripture. All preachers are tempted to ask: "What can I say about this text?" The expository preacher asks: "What does this text say?"

The intention of the preacher must be to bring the Bible to the heart and life of the hearer. He is not simply a herald, he is a pastor. The Word of God must grip him, draw him in, excite his mind, touch his emotions and change his life—this is what he transmits to the congregation. He presses his text on his hearers' hearts.

Church discipline

Broadly speaking, "discipline" simply means the exercise of authority. However, when we speak of "discipline" in the Church, we more often mean the spiritual exercise of dealing with sin in the Church, or in the life of an individual. Discipline is a spiritual exercise. The Church does not punish offenders, it censures and corrects.

Proper church discipline is necessary for a number of reasons:

1. That the Church might live to the glory of God.

2. That the Church would not be polluted by the presence of sin (Titus 3:10).
3. That the offending individual might be admonished, corrected and delivered from the power of sin (Matthew 18:15-17, Galatians 6:1).
4. That open sinners might be shamed and corrected (1 Corinthians 4:14).
5. That others might be warned of the dangers of sin (1 Timothy 5:20).

A healthy church is not a sinless church, but one that knows how to deal with sin correctly.

Discipleship

Closely related to the discipline of the Church is discipleship. Indeed, the better the discipleship is, the less the potential for corrective discipline. Discipleship is focused on building up the people in the grace and knowledge of our Saviour.

A healthy church is not focused on the organization, but on the people within the organization. If the parts of the body are healthy, the body will be healthy. The Lord has given us teachers and pastors in the Church, who can instruct and illustrate the life of Christ for us (Ephesians 4:11).

There are four ways that God uses these teachers and pastors to

discipline us, and we can in turn disciple others in the Church—remember we are “iron sharpen[ing] iron” (Proverbs 27:17).

1. We must be learners. Just as we need to nourish the body with food and we need to nourish the soul with spiritual nourishment, so also, we need to nourish the mind with learning.
2. We must be open to correction. Discipline in church is a form of discipleship.
3. We must be imitators. A biblical disciple is a follower, an imitator, of old and more mature Christians. We follow them in the areas in which they follow Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).
4. We must be inquirers. We are to be interested in learning, pursuing knowledge. We should not be afraid to ask questions, to speak to someone. Seek out a good mentor.

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GETTING OUR PRIORITIES RIGHT AS PASTORS

Pastor Tonny Karwa

“But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).

In many churches in Kenya today, the pastor is expected to be a jack of all trades—a life coach, a wellness professional to help people achieve their dreams and aspirations in life. He is expected to be a professional dating and marriage counsellor and a fundraiser for the church projects. The list is endless. These are just some of the qualifications the modern church is going for when “hiring” a pastor. As pastors who seek to be unashamedly biblical, we need to learn an important lesson from the apostles in Acts 6:1-6. Verse 4 is especially important for our consideration. It clearly spells out the priorities of the apostles—preaching and prayer.

First, the apostles devoted themselves to preaching.

The growth of the church in Jerusalem exposed the limitation of the apostles. They could not effectively serve the ever-growing church in both spiritual and practical matters, so they set their priority on the preaching. Practical matters were important also, and so they led the church in appointing

men with spiritual qualifications to handle such practical ministerial matters as “serving tables”—a phrase denoting general practical matters (v. 3).

There is no ministry in any local church as important and as urgent as the ministry of the Word.

There is no ministry in any local church as important and as urgent as the ministry of the Word. It must be given the priority. Many pastors put the priority on what is popularly known as “praise and worship ministry.”

The first “breakthrough” (very often) for a typical church planter is to invest in a powerful sound system and musical instruments in order to achieve quality music. This, they believe, will attract people to the church. The next milestone is to hire the best praise and worship leaders and instrumentalists who would spend hours of practice to achieve the best

music. For others, the priority is to acquire a church building. For the apostles, however, preaching was at the heart of the Christian ministry—everything else was secondary.

The apostles recognized that the preaching of the Word is the only way by which the church must grow, by which the pastor feeds the flock, guides them, and guards them against wolves. This makes preaching the pastor's primary responsibility.

Secondly, the apostles devoted themselves to prayer.

The apostles knew the centrality of prayer for the minister of the Word. Preaching works in tandem with prayer. They must not be divorced from each other, they complement each other.

How can one preach without absolutely depending on God? And how can a feeble, fallen, and finite man depend on God without prayer? The apostles, having been convicted of this reality and having also been eyewitnesses to Christ's prayer life, devoted themselves to prayer.

A pastor, like Christ, must be a man of prayer. He is not immune to temptation; he must, therefore, pray in order to not enter into temptation. He is not immune to discouragement either; he must draw his comfort and strength from his communion with the Triune

God. He must pray frequently and fervently—both for himself and for his flock.

Preaching works in tandem with prayer. They must not be divorced from each other, they complement each other.

Furthermore, he must not wait for circumstances to compel him to pray. The pastor who constantly prays for his flock demonstrates that he truly loves and cares about their spiritual wellbeing. This is an area in which many pastors struggle, but we can learn how to pray for our flock by gleaning from the intercessory prayers of the apostle Paul in many of his epistles (see for example Colossians 1:3-14, 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

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ARE YOU A GOOD HISTORIAN?

Dr. Michael A.G. Haykin

Though it was written two hundred years ago, Jane Austen's fiction is still popular and so much of it still rings true to human experience. In one of her novels, the main character makes a statement that is amazingly insightful about the modern boredom with history. She says, history "tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome."

Many in the modern world, sadly even Christians, see the past as little more than this: a tiresome account of a few big names with little wisdom to impart for life today.

In the Bible, history is obviously important to God, since it is the realm where God ultimately brings about the salvation of his people by entering into the very fabric of time and taking on our humanity, sin excepted, in the person of Jesus Christ. This divine activity in the realm of history should not be restricted to the Bible. Though it is impossible to trace out his footsteps across the sands of time

in detail, it is blasphemous to deny that God is at work. He is providentially guiding history for the glory of his Name and the good of his people. Richard Baxter, a seventeenth-century Puritan said, "The writing of Church-history is the duty of all ages, because God's works are to be known, as well as his Word."

God's works are to be known, as well as his Word

Life with meaning

Men and women are historical beings, immersed in the flow of time. Without the past, our lives have little or no meaning. When a community forgets its past, it is like a person suffering from dementia: they really cannot function in the world. So we must study history, and as Christians, this means Church history.

Models for life

This reading of the history of God's people can also provide us with models for imitation. For instance, in Hebrews 11, the writer uses the history of God's faithful people in the old covenant to

encourage his readers to run the “foot-race” of faith. He wants them to draw encouragement from the lives of past believers to press on in faith and obedience towards the final goal.

And we soon discover that this story of the past is not simply that of an elite few, but encompasses every believer’s life and that we can learn as much from the so-called minor figures of Church History as from the “big names.”

The study of our past informs us about our predecessors in the faith, those who have helped shape our Christian communities and thus make us what we are. Such study builds humility and modesty into our lives, and so can exercise a sanctifying influence upon us. Jesus put it this way: “Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour” (John 4:38).

Little wonder, then, that the eighteenth-century evangelical Baptist Caleb Evans once said that “every Christian ought to be a good historian.”

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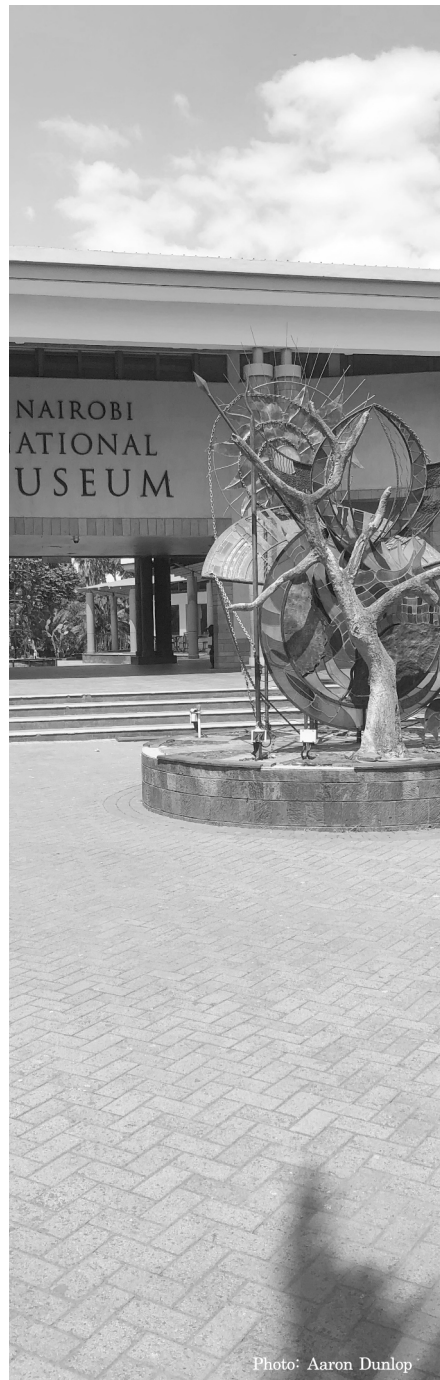


Photo: Aaron Dunlop

DEVOTIONAL: GOD IS STILL AT WORK

Dr. Nelson Were

And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? (Exodus 3:11)

The Christian life is a spiritual walk with God. It is governed by an almighty sovereign God. He is not limited by our circumstances, hampered by human devices, or hindered by our frailties and weaknesses. All of these human elements, as the apostle reminds us, “work together for good.” The life and call of Moses give testimony to this.

From the human perspective, Moses was born at the worst time. He would be put to hard labour under inhuman taskmasters, if he was not first thrown in the river, literally “fed to crocodiles.” Yet God, in his sovereign wisdom, not only delivered Moses from the jaws of death and the burden of slavery, but also led him to be raised in the house of Pharaoh as a prince of Egypt. When he was helpless, God was at work.

But Moses never lost his sense of heritage and correctly saw the situation under which his people were suffering. However, his attempt to set things right ended in

failure, forcing him into exile and forty years in the wilderness. Yet when he had failed and fled, God was still at work.

When God’s time had come, he got Moses’ attention by the burning bush. Moses, who had tried to deliver his people, now would be forced to admit his unworthiness and to watch God work. He would have to rest in God as his sufficiency (like Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:5).

Human circumstances served God’s purposes. Moses was raised peacefully in perilous times. His failures cultivated dependence on God. Human devices highlighted the sovereignty of God. The Egyptians wanted to enslave the Israelites, but God used their efforts to prepare Moses as the Israelites’ deliverer.

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