

A Book Review: Preaching & Preachers

I. SUMMARY

Preaching & Preachers, by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, is simply a classic book. It is packed full of timeless truths that are sure to stir up every man of God that reads, or re-reads, this treasure. It is my belief that pastors are often drawn to re-read this book like a magnet draws metallic fragments. It convicts, refreshes, counsels, and educates men of God who are strapped with the duty of preaching the inerrant Word weekly.

One of the basic propositions is that the preacher's central job is to preach God's Word, in other words, 'to be witnesses unto Me' (p. 22). Preachers come as ambassadors and they must come equipped and ready for the high calling. There are pitfalls and dangers lurking around every corner and Lloyd-Jones tunnels deeply to expose these and prescribe the proper remedies.

A highlight comes from the background from which the author has been providentially raised. As a medical doctor, one can really see him talk about dealing with the root issues, and not just with the symptoms. This can be demonstrated with comments like, "this notion that the business of the Church is to make people happy, or to integrate their lives, or to relieve their circumstances and improve their conditions. My whole case is that to do that is just to palliate the symptoms, to give temporary ease, and that it does not get beyond that" (p. 30).

Another high spot is his very motivational style of writing. He not only prods the reader on to "liveliness" and zeal (p. 87), but he writes with vigor as well. He also has the heart of an evangelist, saying, "I believe in using almost any special occasion as an opportunity for preaching the Gospel" (p. 192) and every pastor needs to be reminded of this privilege.

Some of the chapter titles include, “The Primacy of Preaching”, “The Form of the Sermon”, “The Congregation”, “The Preparation of the Preacher”, “The Shape of the Sermon”, “What to Avoid”, and “Demonstration of the Spirit and of the Power”. As you can tell, this is a useful and pragmatic book, steering clear from theory, but actually getting into the realities of preaching an expositional message.

II. CRITIQUE

A. Purpose. The author definitely fulfills the purpose of the book, which is hinted at on the front cover. It says, “To me the work of preaching is the highest and greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called.” Without directly saying it, Lloyd-Jones wants the reader to live up to this calling with devotion and excellence, all for the sake of the Lord. In addition, he says, “... I would say without any hesitation that the most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching...” (p. 9), then combining these two components, you will have an adequate representation of the aim of this book.

B. Credibility. The author’s track record speaks for itself, and this book is not different. He speaks with authority and command. The reader has no doubt about the author’s sincerity and genuineness. This book is an overflow from a long ministry that was untainted by scandal and hypocrisy. His authority can be really felt when he addresses the role of music. Besides authenticity, Lloyd-Jones writes in a very persuasive manner (similar to his preaching).

C. Scholarship. This volume is straight from the Good Doctor’s heart, that is to say, this is a compendium of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of this gifted preacher. The author is not a man known for footnotes. He even says, “What we should be interested in is a man’s quality of mind, his capacity for thinking, and his originality; not the number of footnotes” (p. 220).

Lloyd-Jones practices what he preaches in this book, but at no time does the work seem shoddy, haphazardly done, or ill devised in its nature.

D. Writing Style. This book is very readable and informative. It is basically a series of sermons put to print. I was given a wonderful gift for my seminary graduation and that was the gift of the audio cassettes containing the lectures that were the catalyst for this book. The book comes across with the same richness and fullness of the original lectures. The format of writing varies from confrontation, direction, all the way to coming across as an example of pulpit faithfulness for future generations.

E. Main Strengths. Part of the wonder of this book is the teaching style of the author. He brings out the gravity of the truths as he teaches in a memorable way. Time and time again, I have come back to Lloyd-Jones' discussion on the consequences of 'debating' God and His existence (pg. 46 ff.), when he says, "To discuss the being of God in a casual manner, lounging in an armchair, smoking a pipe or a cigarette or a cigar, is to me something that we should never allow, because God, as I say, is not a kind of philosophic X or a concept" (p. 47). How often this truth is forgotten, and how refreshingly direct the author is. One doubts how politically correct the author would have been.

Real preaching aims at the heart, soul, mind and will. Lloyd-Jones promotes this when he testifies, "Preaching should make such a difference to a man who is listening that he is never the same again" (p. 53). Preaching for a verdict is mandatory and the author correctly stresses that preaching is not lecturing (p. 71), and it is not a running, exegetical digest (p. 72).

The author hits the reader with the force of smelling salts when he says, "A sermon is meant to be a proclamation of the truth of God as mediated through the preacher. People do not want to listen to a string of quotations of what other people have thought and said. They have

come to listen to you; you are the man of God, you have been called to the ministry, you have been ordained; and they want to hear this great truth as it comes through you, through the whole of your being” (p. 222). Lloyd-Jones seems to have pulse on the struggles and difficulties of a herald of the gospel. He comes across as one who has “been there” as a pastor, for instance, “... Prepare, but beware of the danger of over-preparation” (p. 223). Along the same lines, the author says, “... there is a very real danger of our putting our faith in our sermon rather than the Spirit” (p. 230).

F. Main Weaknesses. There are only a few drawbacks to this book. It contains some idiosyncratic oddities like, “tape-recording – as I see it, the peculiar and special abomination...” (p. 18), “All your books such as *The A.B.C. of Preaching*, or *Preaching Made Easy* should be thrown in to the fire as soon as possible” (p. 119), and “I abominate ‘devotion’ commentaries. I do not want other people to do my devotions for me...” (p. 174).

To be nit picky, the author took Matthew 18 out of context when he discusses the television as he erroneously quotes having two or three gathered (p. 43). These are minor Achilles heels that are overshadowed by Lloyd-Jones’ magnum opus on preaching.

G. Value for Preaching. This book’s highest merit is its timeless and relevant advice for expository preachers. In a day of corporate worship dominated by the giving of testimonies, entertainment, counseling, social gospels, hedonism, and letting the pew control the pulpit, this book is a clarion call for pastors to unapologetically preach the Word. This book reads like it was written in 2002 and I predict that it will be applicable in 3002, if the Lord tarries.

With all the dumbing down of theology, Lloyd-Jones demands every pastor’s attention and charges them with the proclamation the riches of Christ.

Each shepherd that reads the rich section on a preacher's "calling" (pg. 103 ff.) will be appreciative to the good Doctor. Lloyd-Jones says, "A preacher is not a Christian who decides to preach, he does not just decide to do it; he does not even decide to take up preaching as a calling" (p. 103) and "I have always felt when someone has come to me and told me that he has been called to be a preacher, that my main business is to put every conceivable obstacle that I can think of in his way" (p. 108). This type of advice is so needy, honest, and encouraging for the truly called man.

This book also contains great practical insights for each and every preacher. Pastors who struggle with the professionalization of ministry, will be jolted into repentance when they read, "Nothing worse can happen to a preacher than that he should reach a stage in which his main reason preaching on a Sunday morning is that he has been announced to do so. That means that preaching to him has just become his job" (p. 253). This book is helpful as the author acts as a pastor to pastors in discussing ministry traps and sins.

He goes to the heart of the matter when he discusses a common pitfall for preachers – pride. The Doctor says, "The best way of checking any tendency to pride – pride in your preaching or in anything else that you may do or may be – is to read on Sunday nights the biography of some great saint... Or take up a biography of David Brainerd or someone like that; and if that does not bring you to earth then I pronounce that you are just a professional and beyond hope" (p. 256).

"The greatest need in the Church today is to restore this authority to the pulpit" (p. 159) is a good way to end this review and encourage every pastor to read this book! On the other hand, if the reader wanted discouragement, he could read, "I can say quite honestly that I would not cross the

road to listen to myself preaching...” (Preface). If this is the case, I wonder how many preachers could do what the author requires?