

CANADIAN SOUTHERN BAPTIST SEMINARY & COLLEGE

BOOK REVIEW

(PREACHING: COMMUNICATING FAITH IN AN AGE OF SKEPTICISM)

SUBMITTED TO DR. GLEN WATSON

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PREACHING 1

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The book under review was written by Timothy Keller, the founder of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. The title of the book, “*preaching*”, itself is an evidence of an author who has the necessary qualification to handle the subject. Timothy Keller was educated at Bucknell University, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Westminster Theological Seminary where he received his Doctor of Ministry. He was director of church planting for PCA and a faculty member of Westminster Theological Seminary. He is the author of several popular books such as *The Prodigal God*, *The Reason for God*, *Making Sense of God*, among others. The number of years of experience as a preacher and author is clearly evidenced in the book as to how it is relevant to post-Christian culture preachers.

This review will focus on the author’s main purpose, and the essay writer’s personal reflection with the book content.

The book was written to help pastors and students of preaching as it has a whole section on how to prepare an exposition sermon. He seems to have his targeted readers in mind, “those who are wrestling with how to communicate life-changing biblical truth to people at any level in an increasingly sceptical age” (p.7).

The book’s main idea is that any text in Scripture cannot be properly preached, unless its themes find their fulfilment in the person of Christ. In other words, Christ is the one being lifted up in the preaching, and not the preacher. This implies that the preacher has a responsibility as well as the Holy Spirit in making Christ the apex of the message. The author asserts that “while the difference between a bad sermon and good sermon is mainly the responsibility of the preacher, the difference between good preaching and great preaching lies mainly in the work of the Holy Spirit” (p.11).

The book begins by making a case for expository preaching as it aligns the interpretation of the text the doctrinal truths of the rest of the Bible teaching. Expository preaching also clearly shows how Christ is the final fulfilment of the text theme. It also helps to put the text into context as to how it fits into the passage, the passage into the book, and the book into the Bible.

Furthermore, the book makes a strong argument for preaching Christ from all of Scripture. This can be done in six different ways, first, in every genre of the bible as the Old Testament looks toward Christ. “He is the true king of Israel-indeed, he’s the true Israel, He fulfils everything Israel was supposed to do and be” (p.71). Secondly, Christ can be preached from every theme and major images form the bible. Major images such as Passover lamb, the bronze snake, the entire Old Testament sacrificial system and the temple, are all pre-incarnate images of Christ. Thirdly, Christ can be preached from every major figure of the bible. He is the true and better Adam, Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Job, David, among others.

Lastly, the book argues that Christ can be preached to every culture to support its main idea of Christ as the apex of every preaching. This can be done through contextualization by identifying the baseline cultural narratives. “This means expressing the gospel in a way that is not only comprehensible but also convincing” (p.99). The preacher has the responsibility both to accommodate and confront the culture, so that he can speak the truth in love, “to care and confront” (p.101).

The entire content of the book affirms the course materials that I have been thought in this class. First, I learnt from this course that a good sermon must be gospel driven. This is seen in the sermon preparation, the redemption question in theological reflections points to Jesus as always the solution and the truth of the text being communicated. In addition, both the exegetical clue and the climax of the sermon points to Jesus. This is the big idea that Timothy Keller is

talking about, “sermons may be nothing but good lectures until we get to Jesus” (p.179). He further emphasizes that every theme such as covenant, kingdom, atonement, among others are all abstract propositions until that theme climaxes in Jesus. I have learnt to make my sermons “Christocentric,” right from the preparation to the delivery. Christ must be the object and focus of the sermon. I also have learnt how to make the application part of the sermon Christ centered as well. As learnt in this course, the sermon must exhaust all human resources and set the stage for the climax which is the Lord Jesus Christ. The book affirms this truth, by pointing to faith in Christ which will enable the hearer to do what the sermon is inviting to do.

Secondly, I have learnt from this course that a good sermon must be well delivered and communicated with passion and purpose. The book affirms the same truth, such that the preacher must be affectionate if he wants the listener’s heart to be affected. “The preacher himself must be wounded, broken, healed, comforted and exalted by the truths you are presenting, and that they have genuine power in your life” (p.167). This will help me as the preacher to grow alongside with the people as I will have my fair share of the sermon. In most cases the preacher is tempted to think that the message is for the people. A.W. Tozer quotes Charles Spurgeon in his pursuit of God book that “nobody ever outgrows Scripture, the book widens and deepens with our years” (p.126). I have resolved to spend time in prayer that God will touch my heart the same way he intends the message to touch the heart of the hearers.

Thirdly, I learnt from this class that homiletical big idea must be written in such a way that it will become memorable in the mind of the hearer. Mark Mitchell in his *five steps to get the big idea*, mentions that Scripture truths are memorable and the story of the Bible are told in memorable ways (p.7). The book also affirms the same truth, that preaching of the gospel to impact the heart of the hearer must be memorable. In doing so the preacher must fill the sermon

with some new concepts unknown to listeners and repeat the sermon themes for listeners to pause and ponder over it. More importantly, to also use culturally appropriate rhetoric, as Jesus did to tell memorable stories of the parables to his primary audience. I have learnt to use common and familiar vocabulary and themes in my preaching so that its memory will stick with my hearers for them to apply it in their lives when necessary.

Lastly, I learnt from this class that a good sermon must be Spirit-empowered. The preacher himself must have the Spirit of God dwelling in him and allows the Holy Spirit to continue to inspire and empower the word. The book also expounds similar truth by using Apostle Paul as an example of someone who allows the power of the Holy Spirit to drive and empowers his sermons. Paul was successful in this because “he lifted Jesus up” in his sermons and showed him to be glorious (p.193). In light of this, I have learnt to lift Christ alone in every sermon that I will preach and by so doing the Spirit of Christ will also penetrate the heart of the hearers with the sharp and active word of God. In order to preach Spirit-empowered sermons, I need to daily allow the power of the indwelling spirit to shape my character to out-live Christ that I am lifting in my preaching. The book affirms that Apostle Paul allowed the Holy Spirit to produce the fruits of the Spirit such as love, joy, peace, in him, which in effect empowered his preaching (p.194).

In conclusion, the book has made several impacts in my life which has affirmed what I have learnt in this course. I believe I will be able serve my hearers well if I implement the book’s big idea of making Christ the center of every sermon that I preach.

