

“In our day of widespread spiritual famine (Amos 8:11), the church desperately needs preachers who address the head, the heart, and the hands in a Christ-centred proclamation of the life-giving and light-giving Word of God. Michael Reeves articulates how such biblical preaching is rooted in theology proper, Christology, ecclesiology, and, ultimately, doxology. May the Spirit use this thought-provoking book to reform his church and raise a mighty army of reformed, experiential preachers in our generation!”

Joel R. Beeke, Chancellor and Professor of Homiletics & Systematic Theology, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Preachers need a robustly biblical vision for the work before them. Any understanding of preaching that reduces it simply to a transfer of theological information has missed the point. In brief compass, Michael raises our eyes to something higher and grander—a truly God-centred vision for preaching. This volume will serve as a valuable primer for the would-be preacher and a timely encouragement for the experienced proclaimer of God’s Word. I commend it warmly to anyone concerned for the cause of preaching in the church today, and especially to those called to this matchless task.”

Jonathan Griffiths, Lead Pastor, The Metropolitan Bible Church, Ottawa, Canada

“I’ve not come across anything like this primer on preaching before. It humbled me as to the enormity of the task I’m undertaking each week, it encouraged me to keep going when I’m feeling weary, and it warmed my heart to the preciousness of the One that I have the privilege of proclaiming. A book for preachers on a Monday morning, as they look back on the day before, and get ready to go again.”

Tom Heasman, Pastor, Widcombe Baptist Church, Bath, UK

“Michael Reeves urges those who have been set apart for ‘Word ministry’ to embrace a high and holy view of preaching: an ‘assault on ... the very gates of hell, trumpeted forth so that sinners tremble and saints quake in wonder.’ The aim of preaching is ‘to reform hearts so that ... [people] love God, enjoy God, and glory in God.’

There are so many gems in the book that it was hard to write a short commendation. This is a timely book, setting forth a vision of preaching that too many of us—preachers and hearers alike—fail to see. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest.”

David Johnston, Minister Emeritus, Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church, Bangor, Northern Ireland

“There is arguably no greater need in the church today than for the pulpit to be restored to its former glory. That is why this book by Michael Reeves is so greatly needed. In these pages, this gifted theologian, educator, and author presents a compelling case for a much higher view of preaching than what exists in most pulpits.

As you read this book, I believe your heart will soar with a greater admiration for this glorious calling to preach the Word. Here is a strong medicine to heal the present-day famine in the land for the hearing of the Word of the Lord.”

Steven J. Lawson, President, OnePassion Ministries; Professor of Preaching, The Master’s Seminary; and Lead Preacher, Trinity Bible Church of Dallas

“There is a great dearth in true understanding of the nature of preaching. Is it a sales job? Is it a lecture? Is it a mere moment of teaching? Other questions also quickly arise: What is ‘expository preaching’?

In this wonderful book, Michael Reeves winsomely, clearly, and persuasively articulates a vision for preaching that is centred on God.”

Josh Moody, Senior Pastor, College Church, Wheaton, Illinois, and President, God Centered Life

Preaching

A GOD-CENTRED VISION

MICHAEL REEVES

**Union
Publishing**

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God Is a Preacher

Why do we preach?

Let's face it, preaching feels very old school. It's not a discussion. It's not a sound bite. The camera angles don't switch to keep our attention. Nobody gets to "like," "repost," or "comment." So why, in this modern age, do we keep at it?

It's not because of tradition or habit. Rather, Christians preach because God is a preacher. God is the ground of all being, and who he is shapes why we preach.

The God who speaks

The Bible opens with God speaking. In the beginning, God said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Gen. 1:1-3).

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God is light (1 John 1:5), and as it is the nature of light to shine, so it is the nature of God to reveal himself. He is a God who delights to make himself known.

But actually, even before Genesis 1, God was speaking already. Before all things, before anything was made by him, God had a Word to speak. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1–2). Here is a God who does not just *happen* to speak; by his very nature he *is* a speaking God. Speaking flows out of who he is.

Jesus gives us a fascinating insight in his Upper Room Discourse in John 16 when he tells us that the Holy Spirit only speaks “whatever he hears” (v. 13). According to Jesus, the Spirit is first of all a listener: he listens as the Father utters his Word.

This is a deep, eternal truth about God. Martin Luther put it like this:

Christ refers to a conversation carried on in the God-head, a conversation in which no creatures participate. He sets up a pulpit both for the speaker and for

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the listener. He makes the Father the Preacher and the Holy Spirit the Listener.¹

It is as if, with the God who is Father, Son, and Spirit, there is in eternity a pulpit. In eternity, the Word was being held forth. The first sermon, then, was not Peter's at Pentecost, nor John the Baptist's at the Jordan. It was not even God's pronouncement of his Word in Genesis 1. God the Father has *eternally* been a preacher, continually speaking out his Word. And the Holy Spirit has eternally been listening. Before the heavens and the earth even existed, the Holy Spirit was enjoying the ultimate sermon.

This is what the living God is like: not silent or speechless, but a God who speaks.

Now, you could wonder if that is anything special, for are not other gods said by their worshippers to have spoken? To be sure, the idols "have mouths, but do not speak" (Ps. 115:5), yet haven't other gods had their prophets? Doesn't Allah have his Qur'an? But the Christian claim is quite different. The Bible does not present a God who just happens to speak. In the triune God of the Bible, we meet a God

1 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 24, ed. J. Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 364.

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who *cannot* be Word-less. Even in eternity, this God is not reserved or unforthcoming; he is so full of light and good news that he would share it.

The proclamatory nature of God is made even clearer when this Word becomes flesh in the incarnation of Jesus. At the very start of his ministry, Jesus reads out Isaiah 61:1–2 as his personal manifesto:

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,
to *proclaim* the year of the Lord's favor.
(Luke 4:18–19, emphasis added)

That is why Jesus then says to his disciples, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out” (Mark 1:38). Throughout his ministry, it would be his word that would bring his life to those around him. At his word, the centurion's servant was healed (Matt. 8:13). At his word, Jairus' daughter and Lazarus were raised from the dead (Mark 5:35–43; John 11:1–44). That is why Peter would

say to him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

This message of eternal life was the very same one that Jesus charged his apostles to preach (Matt. 10:5–7; 2 Tim. 1:11). It was the same message that the apostles then entrusted to others to carry on the work of preaching to the ends of the earth (2 Tim. 2:2; 4:2).

Preaching, then, is not some burden we must shoulder while God sits back in heaven. Human preachers are not the hired hands of a lazy or reclusive CEO. God is the first and primary preacher, the one whose very identity is to make known his life-giving Word. When we preach that Word, we are taking no initiative, but sharing in the life of God: we preach because he first preached to us.

The church: The creature of the Word of God

Christians have another conviction that leads them to preach: God creates his church through his Word. Before the church could exist, God had to speak. No word, no church. Just as in Genesis 1, God first created all things through his word, so it is God’s word that has brought the church into being (1 Pet. 1:23). God’s word comes first and serves as the foundation stone of the church. She is God’s new creation. That, after all, is the story of salvation: the word of God goes out to create a

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people for God. As sin came into being when Adam ignored God's word, so salvation happens when God's voice is heard. His Word is the life-giving manna that feeds and sustains his people (Matt. 4:4).

Following Jesus' statement that "the sheep hear his voice" (John 10:3), Martin Luther gave what is probably the simplest-ever definition of the church: "Thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd."² It is that voice that establishes and guides the flock. This insight led to the most striking practical change to be seen in churches at the time of the Reformation: the rise and prioritisation of biblical preaching.

Seeing the vital importance of God's Word, the Reformers made the sermon the focal point of the church's regular worship, and they emphasised it architecturally by making the pulpit physically central and conspicuous. And while today we tend to think of the leading Reformers as theologians (and therefore not preachers), it was biblical preaching that normally defined and took up the bulk of their ministry. Preaching was the real engine-room of the

2 Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 315.

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Reformation.

Therein lies great comfort. For when we read all those horrifying statistics about current church drift and decline, it is easy to lose confidence in the simple preaching of the Word of God. It is tempting to look elsewhere for the silver bullet. But the Reformation demonstrated the astonishing, transformative power of the regular and clear preaching of God's Word. It stands as historical evidence that there is nothing inevitable about church decline. The spiritual darkness of our day can indeed be checked and turned back. It was, five hundred years ago—and by that Word which has lost none of its inexorable power.