

THE CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING OF

*MARTYN*  
*LLOYD-JONES*

*Classic Sermons for the Church Today*

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

*edited by* ELIZABETH CATHERWOOD & CHRISTOPHER CATHERWOOD

*The Christ-Centered Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

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# INTRODUCTION

Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) was one of the greatest preachers of the twentieth century and one of the leading evangelicals in that God-given major renaissance of evangelical life and witness that has been continuing worldwide since his death. He was also keen on the works of the Puritans and was instrumental in the renewed interest in their works after 1945, an enthusiasm that has continued to the present day.

But while Dr. Lloyd-Jones was someone who loved history and enthused friends and family alike with his abiding interest in it, this is not essentially a historical tome or retrospect. Some years ago a book of his collected sermons was published so that those who enjoyed his preaching could have their favorites in a nutshell volume. The purpose of this book, however, is very different.

## THE THEME OF THIS BOOK

Dr. Lloyd-Jones (“the Doctor” as he was usually known, and how we shall frequently refer to him here) believed strongly that God’s Word is relevant for all time and in all places. His view of the centrality of Scripture in preaching has guided this book. When we met to decide which sermons would be included here, we soon realized that one could not possibly say that any sermon was worthier of a *Best of Martyn Lloyd-Jones* than any other.

But what was true of all of them was that they remain *relevant*, even though they were preached across his decades-long ministerial life, from 1927 when he began as a young preacher in Aberavon in South Wales to his last sermon, preached for a friend’s gathering in 1980, when he was already suffering from the cancer that took him the following year.

So what we have in this book is selected sermons from that fifty-three-year period chosen:

- Mainly chronologically, in the order in which they were preached.
- But also thematically, illustrating his preaching style and the eternal relevance of his expositions.



- To prove the point that we are making that if you preach in an expository way you always speak to your congregation, and that if you are biblical you are always relevant, so that a sermon on events thousands of years ago speaks as much to the twenty-first century as it did in its own time.

If the new excitement for Reformed theology and for expository preaching—for which we can all thank God—is to continue, it must have a secure base. Otherwise it is but a passing fad whose ending will be of great loss to the evangelical church in the century ahead of us.

The Doctor himself always stressed that his interest in history was not a mere antiquarian fancy but one *with a purpose*: to build up God's people in biblical doctrine from generation to generation.

So this is a book to introduce both the Doctor *and* the truths for which he stood to the twenty-first-century generation. They have, like him, become evangelicals, discovered Reformed theology and expository preaching, and wonder how they can bring those same truths to their own generation as he did to his.

One brief comment is needed about our selection before we enter the biographical part of this introduction.

We have concentrated on *sermons*. No one could have been more enthusiastic about church history than the Doctor, but we have decided that it would be better not to include any of his historical lectures here and emphasize his *preaching* instead. The same also applies to his deeply held views of church government and ecclesiology, which he firmly believed were Scripture based but are perhaps, for the same reason, not appropriate here.

And we also want this book to be irenic. This is very much the case with several core groups in the United States at the moment. For instance, Together for the Gospel is united in its enthusiastic encouragement for the reintroduction of Bible-based, Scripture-centered Reformed theology as the basis for an evangelical renaissance in America today.

## **HIS LIFE AND THE BACKGROUND TO THE SELECTIONS**

So these are sermons with a purpose! We can see how they unfold against the chronology of the Doctor's life because, being the believer in Reformed theology as he was, he knew that all that happened to him unfolded in the

providence of God. And as millions worldwide have been influenced by his ministry, the events of his life have changed all of ours as well.

He was not born to wealth or privilege. His father, Henry Lloyd-Jones, was a village shopkeeper, later moving to London when his business went bankrupt. His mother, Magdalen Evans, was a farmer's daughter. Llwyn-cadfor, the family farm in South Wales, was to remain a focal point for the Doctor the rest of his life as he stayed in touch with the cousins who eventually inherited both the farm and also the successful horse-breeding business based there. One could say that he had his father's considerable intellect—in another age Henry Lloyd-Jones would have gone on to a university and a stellar career—and the dynamism of his Evans forebears.

Significantly though, when he died in 1981 he was buried with his *wife's* family, the Phillipses. Martyn's elder brother, Harold, a gifted poet, survived the horrors of the western front in World War I, only to die in 1918 in the huge influenza epidemic that killed millions worldwide. His younger brother became a distinguished High Court judge—Sir Vincent Lloyd-Jones—and a well-known figure in literary and political circles in Wales. Henry Lloyd-Jones, his beloved father, died in 1922. Decades after his father's death, Martyn came close to tears when American theologian Carl Henry asked him if his father had been a Christian, because he simply did not know how to respond.

The Doctor always said that he was never a teenager in the meaning that we understand that today. He nearly died in a fire in his childhood home in Wales, and his father's bankruptcy gave him a sense of responsibility for his family that weighed heavily on him. The Doctor never made jokes from the pulpit, which caused some people to think that he was a somber person. In fact, his sense of humor was infectious and lifelong, never more so than with his family or a close circle of friends with whom he could relax. When he and his brother Vincent launched into their favorite puns, no one could stay glum!

Except for the humor, which was private, and the very profound love and affection he had for his family and close friends, one could say that the public man and the personal were one and the same. His love for debate, for example, and of verbal repartee was no different in a meeting of ministers than around the intimacy of the family table at mealtimes. He was a man who practiced what he preached in whatever context he found himself.

Despite a lack of money for private schooling, the increasingly gifted Martyn was admitted to one of London's best schools, St. Marylebone Grammar (the Old Philologist), located in Westminster, where he would one day become famous.

He became a medical student at a much younger age than usual at St Bartholemew's Hospital in London, one of the top medical training schools in the country, and one of the very oldest. It was joked that "you could always tell a Bart's man, and you could not tell him much." Here he shone, becoming one of their best and brightest students, and at an unusually young age a full doctor of medicine and also chief clinical assistant to Lord Horder, the royal physician to King George V and the top diagnostic physician of the day.

At Martyn Lloyd-Jones's memorial service in 1981 an amicable dispute broke out between two of the speakers on what had influenced their late friend's preaching the most. One of them, Dr. Gaius Davies, a leading London psychiatrist, was surely right to say that the Doctor's *medical* training was used by God to make Martyn Lloyd-Jones into the kind of preacher that he later became. Sin was diagnosed as the disease, and Christ was the only remedy. When one thinks of his great definition of preaching, "Logic on fire, theology coming through a man who is on fire," one can see this clearly—the diagnostic method that he learned as a medical student at Bart's led him to the logic with which he would dissect sin in his evangelistic message or expound the doctrines so clearly laid out in Scripture. His way of preaching both logically and with great passionate conviction was what made his preaching so unique and persuasive. One can easily see why God sent him to medical school first before he contemplated the ministry.

Being in London changed his life in other ways, too. The Lloyd-Jones family began attending a Welsh chapel in the famous Charing Cross Road, where they met the Phillips family. Thomas Phillips was an eminent eye surgeon with a consulting room in Harley Street. He and his wife, Margaret, and their three children—Ieuan, Bethan, and Tomos John—lived in a big house in Harrow. Ieuan would become a preacher in South Wales; Bethan was a medical student at Bart's great rival, University College Hospital in London; and Tomos John would later follow his father and become an eye surgeon. Ieuan and Martyn became lifelong friends, but it was Ieuan's sister, Bethan, whom Martyn noticed! Beautiful and much admired, Bethan



was eighteen months older than Martyn, and for many years his feelings for her were unreciprocated. But over the course of time things changed, and in January 1927 they married and, as the famous saying goes, “lived happily ever after!”

Significantly the Phillips family had played a role in the great revivals in Wales both in 1859 and in 1904—indeed Bethan and her older brother had witnessed much of the latter revival personally as their father had sent them there to see and experience it for themselves. Revival was to be a major pre-occupation of the Doctor’s life. In 1959, one hundred years after the Great Awakenings both in the United States and in Wales, he was to preach one of his most famous sermon series on the subject of revival itself and how the Bible saw it. He longed to see revival himself, and though he witnessed it on a small scale in parts of his ministry in Wales and believed that Christians should pray for it unceasingly, he was never to experience it on the scale of those great outpourings about which he loved to preach.

Martyn would look back to his early days in medicine and say that he was not then a Christian, but the hound of heaven was after him, convicting him of sin, but also working on his conscience in a manner that showed him how man’s cures were not God’s cures. Many of the Bart’s patients were from the top echelons of British society and led lives that were not attractive to behold.

In due time the Holy Spirit worked in him in two different ways. First, he was converted to his own true faith in Jesus Christ. But second, he realized that while he was mixing with educated and privileged people in London, the poor Welsh folk from whom he had come were living in spiritual darkness.

So at the age of twenty-six the Doctor decided to give up what would have been an immensely prominent medical career in London, the capital not just of Britain but of the British Empire at the time, and return to Wales. He would go, not as a doctor, but as a physician of souls, as a pastor for the Welsh Forward Movement, part of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist group of his childhood.

This move, coupled with his wedding, was so astonishing that it actually made the national press! The newlyweds went to Sandfields in Aberavon, a rundown part of South Wales that after the Great Depression hit was to become poorer still, with many of the local workers—from the steel works and the docks—out of work. Alcoholism was rife among them.

But these were the people in need of the gospel and to whom he had been called. From 1927 to 1938 he had a ministry there that is still spoken of and remembered because of the impact that it made.

Their first child was a daughter, Elizabeth, whose childhood years in such circumstances were to make an impression upon her that has never left her. With the birth of Ann over nine years later, the Lloyd-Jones quartet was completed, giving him the family and emotional security needed as the human base for his God-given ministry, first in Wales and then in London and the world beyond.

What is significant for us now as it was then is that he treated the congregation with the same intellectual courtesy and respect that he would have given his socially eminent patients in London. He knew, as he would often boast, that the ordinary working man (though often unemployed) could, if taught, properly understand God's truth and biblical theology every bit as well as a university professor. He never, throughout his life, condescended or dumbed down the gospel message—something that both students from Third World countries and also children appreciated in later years as he treated all of them as intellectual equals, fully capable of grasping the most complex truths.

If one reflects upon this it is wholly biblical—only Luke and Paul were educated among the writers of the New Testament, and most of the disciples were simple fishermen. Yet it was just such a group of people that turned the world upside down, transformed the Roman Empire, and spread Christianity across the globe.

Note that the sermon we have chosen for this period of time is evangelistic, and then think of the educational background of those listening.

As his wife demonstrates in her small book *Memories of Sandfields*, extraordinary things happened in their time in Wales, with the unlikeliest people becoming gloriously saved. This was no seeker-sensitive church—in fact some of the first things he did was to scrap the choir and abolish the anti drink Temperance League—alcoholics did indeed go on to give up their drunken ways but through being converted and not via well-meaning middle-class good works.

This being a brief summary of his life, we can now say that his fame spread, even across the Atlantic. He came to love the United States, spending as many summers there as possible, preaching in many places. During

his recovery from cancer in 1969, he delivered his master lectures on preaching to the students of Westminster Theological Seminary near Philadelphia, one of which appears first in this book.

In 1938 the then eminent preacher J. Campbell Morgan asked him to become his joint minister at Westminster Chapel, one of the biggest Free Churches in Britain and a place with a global reputation. Largely forgotten today, Morgan was one of the pulpit giants of his time. This would be a major change for the Doctor, leaving his successful ministry in Wales.

He decided to accept, and when Morgan retired in 1943 the Doctor became sole minister, remaining there until cancer forced his retirement a quarter of a century later in 1968. It is for his ministry at Westminster Chapel that he is most famous, and most of the sermons in this book were preached there. It was certainly one of the biggest platforms that a non-Anglican could have. But such was the power of his preaching that he soon became renowned for it not just in Britain but also in the United States and in the world beyond. The Chapel might have been his base, but in reality his ministry was soon global, especially after the war.

After 1945 he was in effect able to build up his own congregation, with folk coming increasingly from all over the southeast of England, some from many miles away, to attend Westminster Chapel. So much so in fact that people had to stay all day, arriving in time for the eleven o'clock morning service and not leaving until coffee after the evening service, which lasted until around eight thirty or later. Temporary wartime lunch facilities became permanent, and hundreds of people both lunched there and had tea after the afternoon Bible classes (the British equivalent of an all-age Sunday school in the United States). The Chapel, while geographically disparate, was a community.

It was of course his preaching that drew people in numbers unique for London—only the ministry of John Stott a few miles away at All Souls Langham Place came anywhere near the congregational size that Westminster Chapel witnessed in these years. Indeed some of those listening to the Doctor on Sundays were young curates from All Souls, including a profoundly impressed young Anglican theologian named James Packer. This period, Packer was later to recall, was Martyn Lloyd-Jones at his peak of unmatched excellence.

The Sunday morning sermons were preached to Christians, and the eve-

nings were essentially evangelistic, though as much Scripture-based and expository as those in the mornings. The Doctor would refuse to let his own sermons be regarded as authoritative. Everything had to be proved from the words of Scripture itself.

However, some of the great sermons he gave during this period were on apologetics and on the great doctrines of Scripture. If one is Bible based, there is no clash between apologetics and exposition, since apologetics flows naturally from the truth of God as seen in Scripture as well as from the world that God has made and that we see around us. It is significant that the sermon we have chosen from this time, from *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*, was one preached in the United States, for he was becoming as well known there as he was back home.

Around this time he also became the first chairman of the executive committee of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), of which he later became the president. IFES was truly global and indeed is more so today than ever, since areas of the world where the gospel was forbidden or unknown are now some of the strongest evangelical regions of the twenty-first century. Studies that concentrate on him as a British figure sadly omit this vital part of his international life and ministry, which was so central to his life for well over a quarter of a century.

The fact that IFES began as a strongly evangelical movement after World War II was very much due to his influence and Bible-centered thinking. While this book concentrates on him as a preacher, one cannot get an overall perspective on the Doctor and leave so crucial a ministry out of the record.

In 1950 he began what in some circles still remains his best-known sermon series, that on the Sermon on the Mount. This was the period during which he was gaining fame as an expositor both at home and overseas. His preaching was intelligent, reasoned, Scripture based, timeless, and also delivered with passion and total conviction. This was in such contrast to many popular pulpit fillers of his own generation in London, most of whom now lie forgotten, their works dated and their theologies, if they had any, long since discredited.

At the same time, he found that many of his congregation knew the basics—they knew they were saved through Jesus Christ on the cross—but they knew very little actual Christian doctrine as such. Faith without depth

is bound to be shallow and is what the apostle Paul described as milk for infants—not the real meat that adults need. So keeping his Sundays clear for straight exposition of particular books of the Bible, he used the Friday night sermons to begin a Scripture-based expository series called Great Doctrines of the Bible.

Sadly, one can argue that we now live in an era in which the serious study of biblical doctrine, or indeed the very thought of doctrine itself, causes so-called evangelicals to shudder. But the need for the study of sound theology is a running theme throughout the New Testament, alongside warnings against ravenous wolves who would devour untaught and theologically shaky believers. In that sense we need Scripture-centered exposition on both *what* we believe and *why* we do so more than ever. So his sermons have even greater relevance more than six decades after they were first delivered to a congregation prepared to often travel many miles into central London on a working day in order to hear someone speak to them on weighty matters for over an hour.

The biblical office is that of *pastor-teacher*. The Doctor was a doctor in more senses than one—both medical and spiritual—and in the case of his congregation and that of the Westminster Fellowship of Ministers (originally Anglican and Free Church and just Free Church later on) he was both. With his acute medical knowledge—which he kept up all his life, reading medical journals for enjoyment to the end of his days—and with his pastoral insights, he could see how a member of the Chapel congregation or a struggling preacher might be run down and depressed *physically and mentally* and therefore more open to *spiritual* attack. He was also aware that while sin sometimes causes spiritual dryness or isolation, it could be that, as with Job, Satan was attacking a faithful and innocent child of God. Maybe God was testing one of his own children for his or her particular good.

All these were possibilities and as a medically trained physician with a deep understanding of human psychology, as well as being a pastor charged by God with the spiritual care of souls, the Doctor knew that the permutations were many and various.

The chapter “Mind, Heart, and Will” shows the Doctor both as an outstanding biblical expositor but also as someone who used the medical training that God had put him through in the 1920s. True preaching appeals, if scripturally understood, to the heart (emotions), to the mind

(intellect), and to the will (application). This unique combination is at the heart of his preaching altogether and not just on this subject. Logic on fire and its application with the employment of our will was all tied in together, so unlike the preaching of his own time, which appealed usually to either heart or head but seldom to both, and which never appealed to the human will to implement what was learned in everyday life.

How true that is today as well! Cerebral sermons, emotionally excessive and manipulative, with no application of what kind of life should be lived on Monday morning, are quite common. The importance of the Doctor's very different combination cannot be emphasized enough since this particular combination—*heart, mind, will*—is as important, in many ways, as his actual words and makes the six decades or more between the original sermon and us as readers of it today immaterial.

As the Doctor began, so he continued.

He is best known in the evangelical world for his epic expository sermons, in particular those on Ephesians, which he preached on Sundays, and those on Romans, which he delivered on Friday nights.

While his exposition was biblical, it was also profoundly practical! One of his series was on life as a Christian in marriage, at home, and at work. That volume has been a wedding present for new couples now for decades. The principles outlined by Paul in Scripture do not alter. Human nature does not change, and so marriage and its joys and requirements are the same too—as indeed are the biblical principles upon which we base every waking minute of every day.

But all this has a deep *spiritual* underpinning—God's work of reconciliation on the cross—without which we would be nowhere. So we have chosen a foundational chapter as the one to be represented in this book.

Remember when you read any of these chapters, it is *unction*, the gift of God, at work, enabling the Doctor to preach with the conviction and power provided solely by the Holy Spirit. There is a world of difference between, say, a history lecture and an unction-filled sermon. A history lecturer, or a speaker on modern physics, may proclaim with passion but with *human* endeavor, whereas a preacher equipped by God to preach to the saints does so with a conviction that comes from God alone.

This is vital to recall since no formula will enable one to preach like Martyn Lloyd-Jones.



# NO SUBSTITUTE

(1969)

From *Preaching and Preachers*

*This is a book about Christ-centered preaching. For that reason the great majority of chapters in our volume will be the sermons of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, as outlined in this book's introduction.*

*However, we do need to know what Dr. Lloyd-Jones actually meant when he employed that term. Thankfully, he has given us a detailed answer in *Preaching and Preachers*, a book still in print well over five decades after the original lectures were given.*

*As he goes into some depth in "No Substitute," there is not as much need for as full an introduction here as will be the case with subsequent chapters. For him, preaching and giving a lecture were two totally different things—one a God-ordained way of proclamation, the other a human institution. This is why he had the very high notion of what he did Sunday by Sunday and on Friday evenings at Westminster Chapel. He was proclaiming God's Word, not just giving a stream of good ideas that had by chance come to him during the week or while reading the news.*

*Pastor-teacher is one of the spiritual gifts of the New Testament, and thankfully it is one of those whose continual validity is never contested. It is as vitally necessary in our time as it was in the time of the apostle Paul! Being a preacher was not a human vocation but a calling from God himself. It was God's means of communication, and that being the case there was no possible substitute for it.*

*Today there is a renaissance in the centrality of preaching, for which we can be thankful to God! But simultaneously there are those who announce that we must find new ways of "doing church" because twenty-first-century people can no longer cope with the supposedly old and outdated methods of the past. A biblically based, Christ-centered defense of preaching has therefore never been more important.*

*No one can speak more eloquently on this than the Doctor himself.*

## THE CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING OF MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

*Let the words that now follow transform you as they did those who heard them spoken in 1969 and the many who have been changed by them since.*



In our first lecture I laid down a proposition that preaching is the primary task of the church and therefore of the minister of the church, that everything else is subsidiary to this and can be represented as the outworking or the carrying out of this in daily practice. What I am doing is to justify this proposition, and I am doing so, particularly, in view of the tendency today to depreciate preaching at the expense of various other forms of activity. Having laid down the proposition, I have tried to substantiate it by evidence from the New Testament and also from the history of the church.

I now want to go a step further and to suggest that this evidence from the New Testament itself, supported and exemplified by the history of the church, leads us to the conclusion that the ultimate justification for asserting the primacy of preaching is theological. In other words, I argue that the whole message of the Bible asserts this and drives us to this conclusion. What do I mean by that? Essentially I mean that the moment you consider man's real need, and also the nature of the salvation announced and proclaimed in the Scriptures, you are driven to the conclusion that the primary task of the church is to preach and to proclaim this, to show man's real need, and to show the only remedy, the only cure for it.

Let me elaborate that a little. This is the very essence of my argument. I am suggesting that it is because there are currently false views with regard to these matters that people no longer see the importance of preaching. Take the question of the need, man's need.

### **NOT A MERE SICKNESS**

What is it? Well, negatively, it is not a mere sickness. There is a tendency to regard man's essential trouble as being a sickness. I do not mean physical sickness only. That comes in, but I mean a kind of mental and moral and spiritual sickness. It is not that; that is not man's real need, not his real trouble! I would say the same about his misery and his unhappiness, and also about his being a victim of circumstances.

These are the things that are given prominence today. There are so many

people trying to diagnose the human situation; and they come to the conclusion that man is sick, man is unhappy, man is the victim of circumstances. They believe therefore that his primary need is to have these things dealt with, that he must be delivered from them. But I suggest that is too superficial a diagnosis of the condition of man and that man's real trouble is that he is a rebel against God and consequently is under the wrath of God.

Now this is the biblical statement concerning him; this is the biblical view of man as he is by nature. He is "dead in trespasses and sins"; that means spiritually dead. He is dead to the life of God, to the spiritual realm, and to all the beneficent influences of that realm upon him. We are also told that he is "blind." "If our gospel be hid," says Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, "it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not." Or as Paul puts it again in Ephesians 4:17ff., man's trouble is that his understanding is darkened because he is alienated from the life of God through the sin that is in him. Another very common biblical term to describe this condition of man is the term "darkness." You have it in John 3:19: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." And in 1 John 2:8 you find the same idea worked out. Writing to Christians he says that "the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." The apostle Paul uses the same idea exactly in Ephesians 5:8. He says, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." These are the terms that express the biblical diagnosis of man's essential trouble. In other words we can sum it up in one word by saying that it is *ignorance*. All the terms such as "blindness" and "darkness" are indicative of ignorance. And according to this biblical view of man all these other things, such as unhappiness and misery, even physical illness, and all the other things that torment and trouble us so much are the results and the consequences of original sin and the fall of Adam. They are not the main problem; they are consequences or symptoms if you like, manifestations of this primary, this ultimate disease.

## **THE KNOWLEDGE THAT SAVES**

That being the picture of man's need, it is not surprising that when you turn to the biblical account of salvation you find that it is put in terms that correspond to this expression of the need. The apostle describes salva-

## THE CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING OF MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

tion in these words: it means “to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). It is the will of God that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Salvation is a knowledge of the truth. In 2 Corinthians 5:19–20 he says that the message that has been committed to the preacher, who is an “ambassador for Christ,” is to say to men, “be ye reconciled to God.” You find it again in the practice of the apostle. We read in Acts 17:23 of him preaching in Athens and saying, “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.” They were ignorant though they were philosophers, and he is the one who can teach them and give them light in this matter.

I am simply showing that the biblical teaching concerning salvation is that it is the result of bringing men to this “knowledge” that they lack, it is dealing with this ignorance. Paul talks about preaching “all the counsel of God,” and Peter had the same idea when he says that Christians are people who have been called “out of darkness into [God’s] marvellous light.” Now these are the biblical terms, and they all, it seems to me, indicate that preaching always comes first and is given priority. If this is the greatest need of man, if his ultimate need is something that arises out of this ignorance of his, which in turn is the result of rebellion against God, then what he needs first and foremost is to be told about this, to be told the truth about himself, and to be told of the only way in which this can be dealt with. So I assert that it is the peculiar task of the church, and of the preacher, to make all this known.

I would emphasize the word *peculiar*—you can use the word *exceptional* if you like or *special*. The preacher alone is the one who can do this. He is the only one who is in a position to deal with the greatest need of the world. Paul says of himself in 1 Corinthians 9:17 that “a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.” That is what he was called for—this “dispensation of the gospel,” this message, had been given to him. And you have the same thing expressed in a very glorious statement in the third chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, verse 8: “Unto me,” he says, “who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” This is his calling, this is his task. He has said before that all this “in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph. 3:5). This is the message: “And to make

all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:9–10).

My whole contention is that it is the church alone that can do this, and it is the preacher therefore who alone can make it known. He is set apart by the church, as I am going to show, to serve this particular function, to perform this particular task. This is the thing that is given primacy and is emphasized, and it must surely of necessity be the case. The moment we realize man’s true need and see the only answer, it becomes clear that only those who are in possession of this understanding can impart this message to those who lack it.

## **THE BUSINESS OF THE CHURCH**

Let me work this out a little. There are other agencies in the world that can deal with many of the problems of mankind. I mean by that things like medicine, the state, other religions and cults, psychology and various other teachings, and political agencies. These are all designed to help and to relieve, somewhat, the human condition, to ease the pain and the problem of life and to enable men to live more harmoniously and to enjoy life in a greater measure. They set out to do that, and it is not part of our case to say that they are of no value. We must observe the facts and grant that they can do good, and do much good. They are capable in a measure of dealing with these things. But none of them can deal with this fundamental, this primary trouble at which we have been looking.

Not only that, when they have done their all, or when even the church coming down to that level and operating on that level alone, has done her all, the primary trouble still remains. So I would lay it down as a basic proposition that the primary task of the church is not to educate man, it is not to heal him physically or psychologically, it is not to make him happy. I will go further: it is not even to make him good. These are things that accompany salvation, and when the church performs her true task she does incidentally educate men and give them knowledge and information, she does bring them happiness, she does make them good and better than they were. But my point is that those are not her primary objectives. Her primary purpose is not any of these; it is rather to put man into the right

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relationship with God, to reconcile man to God. This really does need to be emphasized at the present time because this, it seems to me, is the essence of the modern fallacy. It has come into the church, and it is influencing the thinking of many in the church—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.

I am not saying that it is a bad thing to palliate symptoms; it is not, and it is obviously right and good to do so. But I am constrained to say that though to palliate symptoms or to relieve them is not bad in and of itself, it can be bad, it can have a bad influence and a bad effect from the standpoint of the biblical understanding of man and his needs. It can become harmful in this way: by palliating the symptoms you can conceal the real disease. Here is something that we have to bear in mind at the present time because, unless I am greatly mistaken, this is a vital part of our problem today.

Let me use a medical illustration. Take a man who is lying on a bed and writhing in agony with abdominal pain. Now a doctor may come along who happens to be a very nice and a very sympathetic man. He does not like to see people suffering; he does not like to see people in pain, so he feels that the one thing to do is to relieve this man of his pain. He is able to do so. He can give him an injection of morphine or various other drugs that would give the man almost immediate relief. “Well,” you say, “surely there is nothing wrong in doing that. It is a kind action; it is a good action. The patient is made more comfortable; he is made happier and is no longer suffering.” The answer to that is that it is well-nigh a criminal act on the part of this doctor. It is criminal because merely to remove a symptom without discovering the cause of the symptom is to do a disservice to the patient. A symptom after all is a manifestation of a disease, and symptoms are very valuable. It is through tracking the symptoms and following the lead that they give that you should arrive at the disease that has given rise to the symptoms. So if you just remove the symptoms before you have discovered the cause of the symptoms, you are actually doing your patient real harm because you are giving him temporary ease that makes him think that all is well. But all is not well; it is only a temporary relief, and the disease is there, is still continuing. If this happened to have been an acute appendix



or something like that, the sooner it is taken out the better, and if you have merely given the patient ease and relief without dealing with it, you are asking for an abscess or something even worse.

That, surely, gives us a picture of a great deal that is happening at the present time. This is one of the problems confronting the Christian church today. This affluent society in which we are living is drugging people and making them feel that all is well with them. They have better wages, better houses, better cars, every gadget desirable in the home. Life is satisfactory and all seems to be well, and because of that people have ceased to think and to face the real problems. They are content with this superficial ease and satisfaction, and that militates against a true and a radical understanding of their actual condition. And, of course, this is aggravated at the present time by many other agencies. There is the pleasure mania and television and radio bringing their influence right into the home. All these things persuade man that all is well; they give him temporary feelings of happiness, so he assumes that all is well and stops thinking. The result is that he does not realize his true position and then face it.

Then you have to add to that the giving of tranquilizing drugs and the taking of so-called pep pills and hypnotics. People live on these, and all this, very often, not only has the effect of concealing the physical problem but also, and still more serious, the spiritual problem. As man is content with this temporary relief, he tends to go on assuming that all is well and eventually ends in a crash. The form that the crash is taking so often today is drug addiction and so on, and there are many who cannot continue to do their work without this alternation of pep pills and hypnotics, tranquilizers and stimulants. I suggest that many of these agencies to which the church seems to be turning today, instead of carrying out her primary task of preaching, are ultimately having that same kind of effect. While they are not bad in and of themselves, they can become bad, and truly harmful, by concealing the real need.

The business of the church and the business of preaching—and she alone can do this—is to isolate the radical problems and to deal with them in a radical manner. This is specialist work; it is the peculiar task of the church. The church is not one of a number of agencies, she is not in competition with the cults, she is not in competition with other religions, she is not in competition with psychologists or any other agency, political or

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social or whatever it may chance to be. The church is a special and a specialist institution, and this is a work that she alone can perform.

### THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH AND THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

I want to support this contention by certain other statements. Here, for instance, is one that to me has an almost amusing aspect to it. These proposals that we should preach less and do various other things more are of course not new at all. People seem to think that all this is quite new and that it is the hallmark of modernity to decry or to depreciate preaching and to put your emphasis on these other things. The simple answer to that is that there is nothing new about it. The actual form may be new, but the principle is certainly not a new one at all; indeed it has been the particular emphasis of this present [twentieth] century.

Take all this new interest in the social application of the gospel and the idea of going to live among the people and to talk politics and to enter into their social affairs and so on. The simple answer to that is that until the First World War that was the real vogue in most western countries. It was then called "the social gospel," but it was precisely the same thing. The argument was that the old evangelical preaching of the gospel was too personal, too simple, that it did not deal with the social problems and conditions. This was a part, of course, of the liberal, modernist, higher-critical view of the Scriptures and of our Lord. He was just a perfect man and a great teacher, a political agitator and reformer, and the great exemplar. He had come to do good, and the Sermon on the Mount was something that you could put into acts of Parliament and turn into legislation. So you were going to make a perfect world. That was the old liberalism of the pre-1914 period. The very thing that is regarded as so new today, and what is regarded as the primary task of the church, is something that has already been tried, and tried with great thoroughness, in the early part of the twentieth century.

The same is true of various other agencies that are coming into the life and activity of the church. What is advocated today as a new approach was practiced by what was then called the institutional church; and this, once more, was done with considerable thoroughness. There were all sorts of cultural clubs in the churches, and the church became the center of social life. There were organized games and clubs of various descriptions. All this was given a most thorough trial in the pre-1914 period.

But we are entitled to ask, surely, whether they worked, how effective they were, and what they led to. The answer is that they proved to be failures. I am not so aware in a detailed way of the position in the United States, which I know is somewhat different from that in Great Britain, but I have no hesitation in asserting that what was largely responsible for emptying the churches in Great Britain was “social gospel” preaching and the institutional church. It was more responsible for doing so than anything else. The people rightly argued in this way: if the business of the church was really just to preach a form of political and social reform and pacifism, then the church was not really necessary, for all that could be done through the political agencies. So they left the churches and went and did it, or tried to do it, through their political parties. That was perfectly logical, but its effect upon the churches was most harmful.

That can be illustrated and shown equally well at the present time. There are two preachers in London who are great advocates of this political-social interest of the church in the man of the world and who contend that this is the way to win him and to help him and to make him a Christian. It is most interesting to notice that these two men who are most given to this teaching in Britain have small congregations on Sundays in their churches in the very heart and most accessible part of London. These are facts that can be verified, and that this should be the case is not at all surprising. People say to themselves that there is no need to go to church to hear that kind of thing. You can get it daily in the newspapers and in the political and social institutions that are designed to do this very thing. One of these two men who gets great publicity because of this interest of his has recently even ceased to have a Sunday evening service at all in his own building. He has had to join his evening service with that of another church on the same street.

Now this is more interesting and most important. When you depart from the primary task of the church and do something else, though your motive may be pure and excellent, that is the result. I am not disputing or criticizing the motives, I am simply showing that actually this theory in practice has the reverse effect from that which it sets out to achieve. I argue that in many ways it is the departure of the church from preaching that is responsible in a large measure for the state of modern society. The church has been trying to preach morality and ethics without the gospel as a basis; it has been preaching morality without godliness, and that simply does not

work. It never has, and it never will. And the result is that the church, having abandoned her real task, has left humanity more or less to its own devices.

### FADS AND FASHIONS

Another argument that I would adduce at this point is that the moment you begin to turn from preaching to these other expedients you will find yourself undergoing a constant series of changes. One of the advantages of being old is that you have experience, so when something new comes up, and you see people getting very excited about it, you happen to be in the position of being able to remember a similar excitement perhaps forty years ago. We have seen fashions and vogues and stunts coming one after another into the church. Each one creates great excitement and enthusiasm and is loudly advertised as *the* thing that is going to fill the churches, *the* thing that is going to solve the problem. They have said that about every single one of them. But in a few years they have forgotten all about it, and another stunt comes along, or another new idea; somebody has hit upon the one thing needful or he has a psychological understanding of modern man. Here is the thing, and everybody rushes after it; but soon it wanes and disappears, and something else takes its place.

This is, surely, a very sad and regrettable state for the Christian church to be in, that like the world she should exhibit these constant changes of fashion. In that state she lacks the stability and the solidity and the continuing message that has ever been the glory of the Christian church.

But my objection to the substitution of a sociopolitical interest for the preaching of the gospel can be stated more positively. This concern about social and political conditions and about the happiness of the individual and so on has always been dealt with most effectively when you have had reformation and revival and true preaching in the Christian church. I would go further and suggest that it is the Christian church that has made the greatest contribution throughout the centuries to the solution of these very problems. The modern man is very ignorant of history; he does not know that the hospitals originally came through the church. It was Christian people who first, out of a sense of compassion for suffering and illness, began to do something about even physical diseases and illnesses. The first hospitals were founded by Christian people. The same thing is true of education; it was the church that first saw this need and proceeded to do something about

it. The same is true of poor law relief and the mitigation of the sufferings of people who were enduring poverty. I argue that it is the church that really has done this. Your trade unions and other such movements, you will find, if you go back to their beginnings, have almost invariably had Christian origins.

My argument is that when the church performs her primary task these other things invariably result from it. The Protestant Reformation, for instance, gave a stimulus to the whole of man's outlook on and activity in life. It can be demonstrated quite satisfactorily that the Protestant Reformation gave the greatest possible stimulus to science and scientific inquiry and study, and it certainly did the same to literature and many other activities of man. In other words, when man truly becomes what he is meant to be under God, he then begins to realize what faculties and propensities he has, and he begins to use them. And so you will find that the greatest periods and epochs in the history of countries have always been those eras that have followed in the wake of great religious reformations and revivals. The other people talk a great deal about the political and social conditions but do very little about them. It is this activity of the church that really deals with the situation and produces enduring and permanent results. So I argue that even from the pragmatic standpoint it can be demonstrated that you must keep preaching in the primary and central position.

## **PREACHING IS PERSONAL WORK**

We turn now to the realm of personal problems. This is a familiar argument today as I have already indicated. People say that the preachers stand in their pulpits and preach their sermons, but that there before them are individuals with their individual problems and sufferings. So the argument runs, you ought to preach less and spend more time in doing personal work and counseling and interviewing. My reply to this argument is to suggest, once more, that the answer is to put preaching into the primary position. Why? For the reason that true preaching does deal with personal problems, so much so that true preaching saves a great deal of time for the pastor. I am speaking out of forty years of experience. What do I mean? Let me explain. The Puritans are justly famous for their pastoral preaching. They would take up what they called "cases of conscience" and deal with them in their sermons, and as they dealt with these problems they were solv-

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ing the personal, individual problems of those who were listening to them. That has constantly been my experience. The preaching of the gospel from the pulpit, applied by the Holy Spirit to the individuals who are listening, has been the means of dealing with personal problems of which I as the preacher knew nothing until people came to me at the end of the service saying, "I want to thank you for that sermon because if you had known I was there and the exact nature of my problem, you could not have answered my various questions more perfectly. I have often thought of bringing them to you, but you have now answered them without my doing so." The preaching had already dealt with the personal problems. Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that the preacher should never do any personal work, far from it. But I do contend that preaching must always come first and that it must not be replaced by anything else.

I have often told a story of a remarkable case that illustrates this point. Many years ago I was asked to see, with a doctor and a pastor, a young lady who was said to have been paralyzed in both legs for eight years. I went to see her with them, and I found to my amazement that she was capable of making most extraordinary movements with her legs. This led me at once to diagnose her as a case of hysteria, and so it turned out to be. This supposed paralysis, this functional condition, had come on as the result of a disappointment in her emotional life. She lay there on the bed, and I was not able to help her because she just would not keep sufficiently quiet for the doctor or myself to examine her properly. However, this is what happened afterward. She had two sisters, and her older sister, as the result of this visit of mine, began to attend our church and after a number of months was converted and became a very fine Christian. After a while the second sister began to attend our services, and she in turn became a Christian. Then eventually one Sunday night I saw the so-called paralytic being half-carried into the church by her two sisters. She continued to attend, and in due course she became a Christian. Now the point I want to emphasize is this: I never had another conversation with her about her so-called paralysis; it was never mentioned, it was never discussed, but it completely disappeared. Why? How? As the result of the preaching of the gospel. As she became a Christian this matter was dealt with by the application of the truth by the Holy Spirit without any personal counseling or psychological analysis or treatment.



Now I am not arguing that this will happen every time. My contention is that if the gospel is truly preached, in a most astonishing manner it can be so applied by the Spirit to these individual cases and problems that they are dealt with without the preacher knowing it at all. I could tell you numerous stories to illustrate this very thing and how sometimes even a mere aside by the preacher has been the means of dealing with some person's problem.

In any case I have often found that the preaching of the gospel brings people to talk to the preacher and gives him an opportunity of dealing with their particular condition. It is the best means of introducing them to one another; it forms the link. Something that the preacher has said either gives them the impression that he will be sympathetic and understanding or that he has an insight into their particular difficulty. It is the preaching that brings them to the preacher for this personal help.

Moreover, by doing it in this way, you are able to deal with dozens, and perhaps hundreds, of people at one and the same time. It is quite astonishing to find that in expounding the Scriptures you are able to deal with a variety of differing conditions all together in one service. That is what I meant by saying that it saves the pastor a lot of time. If he had to see all these people one by one, his life would be impossible, he could not do it; but in one sermon he can cover quite a number of problems at one and the same time.

But in any case—and this to me is a very important argument—it is preaching that lays down the essential principles by which alone personal help can be given. Let me illustrate briefly. Someone comes into your room, into your vestry, and wants to consult you about a problem. The first thing you have to do is to discover the nature of the problem. You have to discover whether this person is a Christian or whether he is not a Christian, because that will determine what you are going to do. If a man is not a Christian you cannot give him spiritual help. If he is not a Christian the first thing you have to do is to help him to become a Christian. That is essential first, and it is only then that you can apply your spiritual teaching to the particular problem. If he is not a Christian, it is idle for you to try to apply spiritual teaching. You are wasting your time as a minister of the gospel in dealing with such a man's particular problems and difficulties. I suggest that your duty in that case is to hand him over to someone else whose professional work is to deal with such problems. Your business as a Christian minister

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is this specialist business of dealing with spiritual problems, so this is the first question you have to decide. It is no use talking to people in a spiritual way unless they have spiritual understanding, and such understanding is the result of a spiritual rebirth, which is generally produced by the preaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 2:10–16; 1 Pet. 1:23). If in your preaching you have brought these people to see that they are not Christians, they will come to you about that, and you will be able to show them that the particular symptom that had worried them was due to the fact that they were not Christians, that they were in the wrong relationship to God. So they come to you, and you can then counsel them and help them and show them the way of salvation. If that does not in and of itself deal with the particular problem, you are now in a position to reason it out with them in a spiritual manner. I maintain that ultimately the only true basis for personal work, unless it is to degenerate into purely psychological treatment, is the true and sound preaching of the gospel.

My contention, then, is that personal counseling and all these other activities are meant to supplement the preaching, not to supplant it, that they are the “carrying on,” “follow-up” work if you like, but must never be thought of as the primary work. The moment you get these into the wrong relationship, you are not only asking for trouble in a personal sense, but I suggest also that you are not interpreting the mandate of the church in a true and right manner. So I would sum up by saying that it is preaching alone that can convey the truth to people and bring them to a realization of their need and to the only satisfaction for their need. Ceremonies and ritual, singing and entertainment, and all your interest in political and social affairs and all the rest cannot do this. I am not denying that they can produce effects, I have granted that they can, and that this is where the danger sometimes comes in. What men and women need is to be brought to “the knowledge of the truth.” If this is not done you are simply palliating symptoms and patching up the problem for the time being. In any case you are not carrying out the great mandate given to the church and her ministers.

### **BUT HAVEN'T TIMES CHANGED?**

But let me deal with a few objections to this contention and point of view. Someone may say, “Have not the times changed? All you have been saying might have been correct, say, even twenty years ago, still more so, perhaps,

a hundred years ago, but have not times changed? Is your method right now in the light of our new conditions?" Or perhaps some in the United States might say, "Well, all you are saying may be all right for Britain, but it does not work in America. Conditions are different here; there is a different background, different cultures, different circumstances, and so on." What is the answer to that? It is quite simple. God has not changed, and man has not changed. I know there are superficial changes—we may dress differently, we may travel at four hundred miles an hour instead of four miles an hour—but man as man has not changed at all, and man's needs are exactly and precisely what they have always been. Not only that, there have been dead and lifeless times in the history of the church before in past ages, as we saw in the first lecture.

There is nothing new about this condition of ours; one of the central fallacies of today is to think that because we are living in the mid-twentieth century we have an entirely new problem. This creeps even into the life and the thinking of the church with all the talk about postwar world, scientific age, atomic age, post-Christian era, etc. It is just nonsense; it is not new at all. God does not change. As someone put it, "Time writes no wrinkle on the brow of the Eternal." And man does not change; he is exactly what he has always been ever since he fell and has the same problems. Indeed I would go so far as to say that never has there been a greater opportunity for preaching than there is today, because we are living in an age of disillusionment. The Victorian age was an age of optimism. People were carried away by the theory of evolution and development, and the poets sang about the coming of "the parliament of man and the federation of the world." We would banish war and all would be well, and the world would be one great nation. They really believed that sort of thing. Nobody believes it by now apart from an odd representative here and there of the old "social gospel" of the pre-1914 era. We have lived to see the fallacy of that old optimistic liberalism, and we are living in an age of disillusionment when men are desperate. That is why we are witnessing student protest and every other kind of protest; that is why people are taking drugs. It is the end of all the optimism of the liberals. It was bound to lead to this because it was wrong in its basic conceptions, in its origin, in its very thinking. We are seeing the end of all that.

Is not this then the very time when the door is wide open for the preach-

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ing of the gospel? The age in which we are living is so similar to the first century in many respects. The old world was exhausted then. The flowering period of Greek philosophy had come and had gone. Rome in a sense had passed her zenith, and there was a kind of tiredness and weariness with consequent turning to pleasure and amusement. The same is so true today. Far from saying that we must have less preaching and turn more and more to other devices and expedients, I say that we have a heaven-sent opportunity for preaching.

### **BUT AREN'T THERE OTHER WAYS?**

Then let us look at a second objection. People may say, "Surely with man as he is now, educated and sophisticated and so on, cannot all you want to do be done equally well by reading books and journals? Cannot it be done by television or radio, through discussions particularly?" Of course reading can help and is a great help, as are these other agencies, but I do suggest that it is time we asked the question as to what extent they are really helping and dealing with the situation. I suggest that the result is a disappointing one, and I think I can give the reasons for this. The first is that this is a wrong approach because it is too individualistic. The man sits on his own reading his book. That is too purely intellectual in its approach; it is a matter of intellectual interest. Another thing, which I find very difficult to put into words, but which to me is most important, is that the man himself is too much in control. What I mean is that if you do not agree with the book, you put it down; if you do not like what you are hearing on the television, you turn it off. You are an isolated individual, and you are in control of the situation. Or to put it more positively, that whole approach lacks the vital element of the church.

Now the church is a missionary body, and we must recapture this notion that the whole church is a part of this witness to the gospel and its truth and its message. It is therefore most important that people should come together and listen in companies in the realm of the church. That has an impact in and of itself. I have often been told this. The preacher after all is not speaking for himself—he is speaking for the church; he is explaining what the church is and what these people are and why they are what they are. You remember that the apostle Paul in the first epistle to the Thessalonians makes quite a point of this. It is something that we tend to neglect at the present

time. He tells those Thessalonians that they as a church had been a great help to him in his preaching; he put it like this in 1 Thessalonians 1:6–9:

And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you.

The very presence of a body of people in itself is a part of the preaching, and these influences begin to act immediately upon anyone who comes into a service. These influences, I suggest, are very often more potent in a spiritual sense than pure intellectual argumentation.

Not only that, when a man comes into a church to a body of people, he begins to get some idea of the fact that they are the people of God and that they are the modern representatives of something that has been known in every age and generation throughout the centuries. This makes an impact on him in and of itself. He is not simply considering a new theory or a new teaching or a new idea. Here he is visiting or entering into something that has this long history and tradition.

But let me put it in this form: the man who thinks that all this can be done by reading or by just looking at a television set is missing the mysterious element in the life of the church. What is this? It is what our Lord was suggesting, I think, when he said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst” (Matt. 18:20). It is not a mere gathering of people; Christ is present. This is the great mystery of the church. There is something in the very atmosphere of Christian people meeting together to worship God and to listen to the preaching of the gospel.

Let me tell you one story to illustrate what I mean. I remember a woman who was a spiritist, and even a medium, a paid medium employed by a spiritist society. She used to go every Sunday evening to a spiritist meeting and was paid three guineas for acting as a medium. This was during the thirties, and that was quite a large sum of money for a lower-middle-class woman. She was ill one Sunday and could not go to keep her appointment. She was sitting in her house, and she saw people passing by on their way to

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the church where I happened to be ministering in South Wales. Something made her feel a desire to know what those people had, and so she decided to go to the service, and did so. She came ever afterward until she died and had become a very fine Christian. One day I asked her what she had felt on that first visit, and this is what she said to me, and this is the point I am illustrating. She said, “The moment I entered your chapel and sat down on a seat among the people, I was conscious of a power. I was conscious of the same sort of power as I was accustomed to in our spiritist meetings, but there was one big difference. I had a feeling that the power in your chapel was a clean power.” The point I am making is simply that she was aware of a power. That is this mysterious element. It is the presence of the Spirit in the heart of God’s children, God’s people, and an outsider becomes aware of this. This is something you can never get if you just sit and read a book on your own. The Spirit can use a book, I know, but because of the very constitution of man’s nature—our gregarious character and the way in which we lean on one another and are helped by one another even unconsciously—this is a most important factor. That is so in a natural sense, but when the Spirit is present, it is still more so. I am not advocating mob or mass psychology, which I regard as extremely dangerous, particularly when it is worked up. All I am contending for is that when you enter a church, a society, a company of God’s people, there is a factor that immediately comes into operation, which is reinforced still more by the preacher expounding the Word in the pulpit, and that is why preaching can never be replaced either by reading or by watching television or any one of these other activities.



# THE NARROWNESS OF THE GOSPEL

(1935)

Matthew 7:13–14

From *Evangelistic Sermons at Aberavon*

*There is a romance about the Doctor's early years in ministry, those spent in the rough, predominantly working-class town of Aberavon (or Port Talbot). He was newly married and launching on what was to be a unique forty-year career as a full-time pastor and teacher. Anyone who reads his wife, Bethan's, *Memories of Sandfields* will see that this was an astonishing time of conversions of unlikely people, of a real sense of the power of the Holy Spirit at work among those whom society had often rejected or ignored. It is a wonderful tale.*

*It is also important because as the Doctor began, so he continued. He was little known when these sermons were preached, although the sheer God-given, Christ-centered strength of them soon made him famous, first in Wales and swiftly in both the rest of Britain and then the United States. Much of what he did there was entirely counterintuitive, both then and now.*

*Drunkenness was a major problem in South Wales, and many churches thought that the answer was to have a Temperance Union—a similar instinct but less draconian than Prohibition in the United States. But just as legal enforcement failed in America, so, too, did the well-meaning middle-class efforts to prevent excessive use of alcohol in Wales.*

*Dr. Lloyd-Jones, while himself a lifelong teetotaler, scrapped the temperance movement in his church, as we saw in the introduction to our book. But what is interesting and should not surprise us spiritually is that countless inhabitants of Aberavon not only gave up alcohol but did so permanently. The reason is that they became Christians through the Doctor's*

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*preaching. It was sermons like this one that stopped them from ever wanting to drink again.*

*Conversion rather than human endeavor changed the lives of scores of people in the chapel in Sandfields in the eleven years that Dr. Lloyd-Jones served there as pastor. Becoming a Christian changes everything, and few things more than lifestyle, since a new believer is a new person in Jesus Christ.*

*The Doctor understood this. Societies and choirs and all the usual paraphernalia of well-intentioned but spiritually lifeless churches could never effect the inward change that conversion brings. To him the clear proclamation of the gospel was all that mattered. God honored that commitment as the Welsh spiritual equivalents of Saul of Tarsus were gloriously saved and transformed.*

*What is also significant is that the Doctor never spoke down to his congregation. Precious few of them were as educated as he had been, yet in London he had seen the moral bankruptcy and inner hopelessness of the capital's elite. Sinners were the same whatever their social class or educational achievement, and they all needed the same message of salvation straight from the Bible itself. He would preach no differently to students at Oxford than he would to his working-class and (after the Great Depression began) frequently unemployed congregation in South Wales.*

*We can thank God that Dr. Lloyd-Jones was faithful to Scripture and to the Bible's answers and ways of evangelism right from the beginning. This sermon shows us why.<sup>1</sup>*



Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matt. 7:13–14)

There is no charge that is quite so commonly and frequently brought against the Christian way of life as the charge of narrowness. It is a charge also that is constantly brought against the individual Christian believer by that type of man who, in his desire to show his own breadth of mind, describes himself as a man of the world. He is so broad that nothing but world dimensions can give you a true impression of the width and large-

ness of his views! He is a man of the world in contrast to this narrow and confined man who calls himself a Christian! I fear at times also it is true to say that there is no charge concerning which the average Christian believer is quite so frightened as this charge of narrowness. To some Christians at the present time, it is more or less immaterial what men may say about them as long as they do not describe them as narrow. Of course, there is a sense in which that is a very good and healthy reaction. God forbid that we should ever really become narrow in the sense that the Pharisees were narrow or that Judaism was narrow. God forbid that we should ever really reduce this glorious gospel of liberty to a mere number of prohibitions and restraints. But that is not our danger at all. Our danger is that in our fear of being thought narrow, we should so swing over to the opposite extreme as eventually to become quite nondescript.

I sometimes feel that a simple, well-known story in *Aesop's Fables* has a good deal to say to many modern Christians. I am referring to the well-known story of the frog and the ox. One day, it says, a little frog in a field suddenly lifted up his head and observed an ox standing nearby. He looked at the ox and began to admire him and wished that he was as broad and as big as the ox. "I am so small and insignificant," he said. "How marvelous it must be to have the breadth and width of that ox." And the story goes on that the frog began to imitate the ox, and he began to expand and to grow larger and larger and broader and broader, and eventually he reached a point at which he just exploded and ceased to be. Now that, unless I am mistaken, is the precise thing that has happened to the so-called faith of many a Christian during the last fifty years. In his desire to become broad and wide, the little Christian faith that man ever had has long since exploded and ceased to be. What the exact explanation of the phenomenon is I am not quite sure, but I think we must recognize that there has been a tendency, particularly during the twentieth century, for the church to pay great respect and regard to the man of scientific knowledge. He has become the last authority on all these questions. The church has gone to very great lengths in order to please him; she has been prepared not to stress certain doctrines in her creed and to delete certain portions of the Bible, and she has in so doing wandered very far from the example set for her by her Lord and Master. I never find Jesus Christ changing his gospel in order to make it suit the people. Rather, I find him changing the people in order to make

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them fit into his gospel. We can be perfectly certain that there will be no true revival in this country, in spite of what may be happening round about us, until we return to the royal pattern.

My commission is this:

Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,  
And publish abroad His wonderful Name.

Whether men like it or dislike it, our business is to preach the truth that was once and for all committed unto the saints. There is a very real danger that we will develop a kind of inferiority complex in the fear of being thought narrow and ultimately make a shipwreck of our faith. But all this is merely an aside.

My text is not a negative text but a very positive text. It tells us that we must not only not be afraid of being called narrow, but it actually goes on to say that if we really want to be Christians worthy of the name, we must go out of our way to become narrow: we must enter in at the strait gate and walk on the narrow way! Now this, surely, is rather a startling and amazing thing. Is it not wonderful that when our Lord came to choose the designation to express his way of life, he selected the very word by which we are most frightened—that the very word of which we tend to be afraid is the very word in which he exults, the very word that he puts upon his flag? I would say also, for the purpose of encouraging and stimulating any frightened Christian, the next time one of these so-called men of the world tells you that you are narrow, instead of trying to run away, just stand your ground, look him straight in the face, and say, “Of course I am narrow, and it would be a very much better thing for you, and for your wife and children, if you also became narrow and ceased to boast of a largeness and a breadth that are in reality nothing but a cloak for laxity and looseness.” He would not worry you quite so frequently in the future!

But why does our Lord speak about entering in at the strait gate and walking on the narrow way? Christ never said anything accidentally. He had all the letters of the alphabet at his command, yet he deliberately chose these words to describe his way of life. He spoke thus because there must be certain respects in which the gospel of Christ is really narrow. I want to try to consider with you some of the respects in which this is so.

The first respect in which we observe its narrowness is this: the gospel

confines itself to one particular subject. The gospel of Christ narrows itself down to one question—the soul of man and its relationship to God. In the Bible there is a good deal of history—history of men and nations—and geography, and some people find in it geology and biology. All sorts of subjects are dealt with in this book, and yet it is not an encyclopedia. It is not a book that gives us a little knowledge about many things. It is a book that gives us much knowledge about one thing. It is the textbook of life, the handbook of the soul. It is a manual dealing with one subject, the reconciliation of man with God. If ever there was a specialist's textbook in this world, it is this book. This is true also of the Master of the book. If ever there was a specialist on the face of the earth, it was our Lord Jesus Christ. There is a sense in which he preached only one sermon, and the theme of this sermon was this—the soul of man and its relationship to the eternal Father. All the knowledge and information he possessed he used in order to illustrate this important and vital subject. Let me give you some instances.

One day our Lord was in the country with his disciples standing round about him. And he observes a farmer sowing seed into the ground. Very clearly our Lord was not only interested in agriculture, but he knew a good deal about it. But the sight of that farmer does not prompt our Lord to deliver an address on agriculture. As he watches that farmer he sees an illustration for his sermon. "You see that man," says our Lord. "He is sowing seed into the ground. There are different types of ground into which it is sown, and the ground will be judged by its response to the seed that the farmer is sowing into it. I am like that farmer: I am sowing the seed of the Word of God that leads to eternal life. Ultimately men will be judged by their reaction to that seed sown in their lives."

On another occasion when in the country our Lord beholds various fruit trees in an orchard. It is quite clear that our Lord knew a good deal about horticulture, but that does not lead him to deliver an address on that subject. "Look at those trees," says our Lord. "They may bear either good or bad fruit. Ultimately they will be judged by the kind of fruit that they bear." And turning to his disciples he says, "You are exactly like those trees. By your lives and by your works you will bear either good or bad fruit. So take heed." On another occasion our Lord was in the country and he observed the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. "If God is so concerned about the lilies of the field that he clothes them, and about the birds of the

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air that he feeds them, how much more is he concerned about you,” Christ says. I could go on taking you through our Lord’s discourses, and you will find how he is constantly making use of things around him to illustrate his one great theme—the soul of man and its relationship to God.

We hear a good deal nowadays about the simple gospel. The secret of the simplicity of the gospel is this: Jesus of Nazareth, being the Son of God and living in perfect correspondence and communion with his Father, had all knowledge. He knew what was important and what was unimportant, and he ignored the unimportant and gave himself solely and entirely to the important things of life. He disregarded the irrelevant and gave himself utterly and only to the relevant and to that which ultimately matters. The secret of the simplicity of the gospel lies in the fact that he brushed aside everything but the one supreme question of the soul’s need. That is clearly an utter contradiction of all our modern ideas and conceptions. We today tend to judge the greatness of a man not by his simplicity but by his complexity. Yet here was the very Son of God, and even little children got something from him, and ordinary fisherfolk followed him—“the common people heard him gladly.” Why? Because he always talked about something that they understood. You, my friend, may be very well versed in many of the arts and sciences. You may be an expert on politics; you may be an authority on quite a number of subjects. But I would like to put a very simple question to you—do you know how to live? “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world” of knowledge as well as wealth, “and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36) “Enter ye in at the strait gate” (Matt. 7:13). Come back to the beginning. The important and vital question is that of the soul.

But the narrowness of the gospel does not end at that point; it is merely a beginning. We discover that the gospel even narrows that. The ancient Greek pagan philosophers were very interested in the soul as a concept, as a thought, and they talked and argued much concerning the soul. But our Lord was not interested in the soul the way the Greek philosophers were. It was the individual soul in which our Lord was interested. Someone says, “I do not like such a gospel—it is so personal.” It is profoundly true that the gospel is personal, and on that account it annoys certain people. We find a perfect illustration of the personal nature of the gospel in the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to John in the story of our Lord’s meeting with the woman of Samaria at the well. Our Lord that afternoon was very

tired, too tired to accompany his disciples into the city to buy food, and he rested by the side of the well. A woman came to draw water, and immediately they had a religious discussion. Did that well really belong to the Jews or to the Samaritans, and where exactly should worship take place? This woman seems to have been very astute; she was certainly an expert in the art of repartee. They were engaged in this religious discussion when suddenly our Lord actually became personal! He turned to the woman and said, "Go, fetch your husband," revealing thereby that he knew all about the kind of life she was living. It was as if he said, "My dear woman, you have really no right, being what you are, to talk about worship and about God. You cannot even manage your own life. You have no right to express an opinion on these great eternal themes. Start with yourself first. Go, fetch your husband. When you put your own life in order, then you will be entitled to speak."

Yes, the gospel is a personal thing. We cannot be saved in families; we cannot be saved as a congregation. We cannot be saved collectively because we are all doing a certain amount of philanthropic work. We are saved one by one. It is a question of you and God. Have you entered in at the strait gate? Are you prepared to meet God face-to-face? Are you ready for the judgment? Do you know in whom you have believed? Is all well with your soul? Have you a personal conviction of sin and a personal knowledge of God?

But the narrowness of the gospel does not end even there. It tends to become still narrower by insisting upon having a say in our conduct and behavior. It is not content merely with bringing the soul into a personal contact with God. It insists upon dictating to us the kind of life we have to live. Someone says, "That is precisely why I have long since finished with organized religion and turned my back upon it. It is too narrow. I maintain that I am entitled to live my own life in my own way. I will not be fettered." Yes, the gospel is very narrow, and it is narrow with respect to this question of conduct and ethics in two main respects: we can call them, if you like, negative and positive. The negative injunctions of the gospel with regard to conduct are perfectly familiar to us all: "Thou shalt not kill." "Thou shalt not steal." "Thou shalt not commit adultery." "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." "Abstain from all appearance of evil." If a thing is doubtful, it is wrong, and you must not do it. The gospel

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goes so far as to say that though a thing may be perfectly right for me, if it is a stumbling block to a weaker brother, I must not do it for his sake. Says someone, "That is exactly why I have no use for such a gospel: it makes life a misery. You have to put on a black suit and walk to church with your head down." But have you realized that if every man and woman were as narrow as the gospel of Christ would have us be, there would be no more drunkenness, no need of divorce courts, no need for the League of Nations? Why? The world would be a paradise. It would be perfect, even as God himself is perfect! The narrowness of the gospel—I speak with reverence—is the narrowness that is in God himself. Oh, that we all became narrow, that we might enter in through this strait gate! "Few there be that find it," says our Lord. It takes an exceptional man to say no to temptation and to restrain and control himself. It takes an exceptional man to deny himself in order to make things easier for others. On the broad way there is a great crowd! "Many there be which go in thereat." It does not take an exceptionally great man to sin. Any fool can sin, and every fool does sin. But that broad way leads to destruction. There is the narrowness of the gospel in its negative injunctions.

But I also want to show you its narrowness in its positive injunctions. This, of course, is the great theme of the Sermon on the Mount. If you would really see the narrowness of the gospel, you must come to the Sermon on the Mount. One of the great words of this generation is the word *love*. But if you really want to see the greatness of the word *love*, you must narrow it down, you must focus it. You do not know what love really means until you love your enemies. The great task that is set before the Christian is to love ugly people until they are made beautiful. Another great word today is the word *brotherhood*. We believe today in doing good and in helping others but if you want to see how great that word really is, you must narrow it down. You must bless those who curse you and pray for those who spitefully use you. The task set before the Christian is to "do good to them that hate you." Another great word is the word *happiness*. There are those who say, "I want to enjoy myself, and I have no use for religion. Why should I bury myself alive?" Again you have a great word, but you must narrow it down and focus it if you would discover its real size. You know not what happiness means until you can "glory in tribulations," until you can be happy even in the midst of persecution. The task for the Christian is



to be happy even when the clouds have gathered and the sun has ceased to shine and everything has gone wrong.

There, then, we see something of the essential narrowness of the gospel. It is, in other words, this narrowness of the expert, or if you like, the narrowness of the highest circle of achievement. You are all familiar with the saying that there is always plenty of room for a good man at the top. The higher the circle of achievement, the smaller will be the number found in it. For instance, there are many who can sing remarkably well, but very few Carusos; there are many who can play the violin amazingly well, but very few Kreislers; there are many who paint extraordinarily well, but comparatively few Royal Academicians. That, it seems to me, is the very point that our Lord makes in this text. He says in effect, "Do not be content with living on the ordinary level of life. Come up to the top. Ascend the mount. Live life tremendously; live life as an expert. Live as I live; yea, come to the very summit. Be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

But, lastly, if you would see the narrowest and straightest point of all, you must confront the gospel at that point at which it tells you that salvation is only possible in and through one particular person and especially in his death. There is the point at which perhaps the majority tend to object. "I have agreed with you entirely so far," says someone. "I liked your emphasis upon the soul, your emphasis upon personal decision, and your emphasis upon ethics and conduct. But when you tell me now that I can only be saved by believing that Christ died my death, I find it impossible to follow you. The conception is too narrow. I cannot understand it. It seems to me to be almost immoral. I cannot accompany you any further." What has the gospel to say to such a man? It does not argue with him. It challenges him. It turns to him and says something like this: "If you can find God without going via Calvary, do so. If you can find liberation from your besetting sin without the power of the cross of Christ, carry on. If you can find peace and rest for your troubled conscience without believing in the death of the Son of God for you and for your sins, go ahead. If you can lie on your deathbed and think of facing a holy God without fear and without alarm, I really have nothing to say to you. But if ever you should feel lost and miserable and wretched, if ever you should feel that all your righteousness is but as filthy rags, if ever you are filled with terror and alarm as you think of God and his holy law, if ever you feel utterly helpless and hopeless, then turn back

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to him, the Christ of the cross, with his arms outstretched, who still says, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth' (Isa. 45:22). It is there that the whole of humanity is focused. He is the representative of the whole of mankind. He died for all. But still more wonderful, according to Paul it is also true to say that, 'in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.'" Complete man and complete God and all in one Person! The God-man! In him God and man are indissolubly linked, and through him and in him the way is opened from hell to heaven, from darkness to light, from despair to hope.

Let me show you, as I close, how perfectly this text and all I have tried to say with respect to it can be illustrated from the story of our Lord's earthly life and pilgrimage. Consider his birth and the self-emptying that it involved. Try to think of the narrowness and straitness of Bethlehem, when the Word was made flesh and eternity came into time—"strait is the gate." Then think of him in the wilderness at the commencement of his earthly ministry, tempted forty days and forty nights. Then watch the scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees and Herodians as they spread their net round about him and gradually draw it in—"strait is the gate, and narrow is the way." Then look at him in the garden of Gethsemane—the very Son of God, by whom and through whom all things were created, confined to a garden surrounded by soldiers. And then, in a few hours, in the police court, with a soldier standing on each side. In the garden he could at least walk backward and forward along the path; now he is not allowed to move—"strait is the gate, and narrow is the way." But still it is not finished—see him on the cross nailed to the tree—the Son of God, the Creator of the world—fixed there, unable to move hand or foot. He dies. They take down the body and place it in a grave. Peer into that grave—can you see any light there? Do not the very sides seem to fall in and collapse? "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way." It leads to death, the grave, darkness, utter desolation.

And there we should have to end if we but believed what so frequently passes as gospel at the present time. But—blessed be the name of God—the gospel goes on. It does mean Bethlehem, it does mean the wilderness and temptation, it does mean enemies and persecution, it does mean Gethsemane, trial, cross, death, yea and the grave. *But* on the morning of the third day, behold, the resurrection! He bursts asunder the bands of death and rises triumphant o'er the grave! The darkness leads to dawn and to

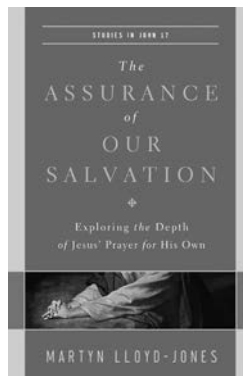
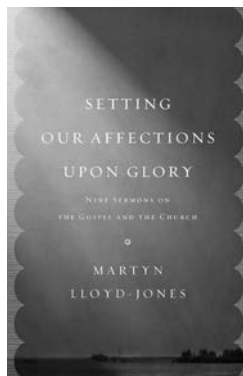
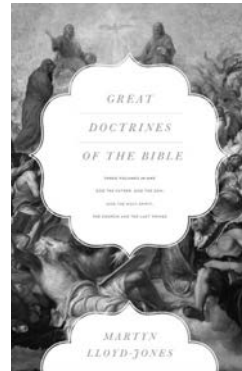
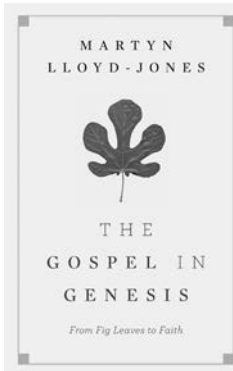
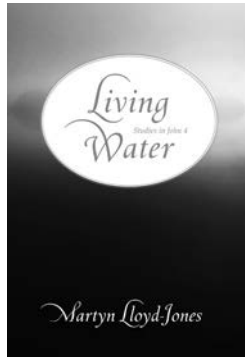
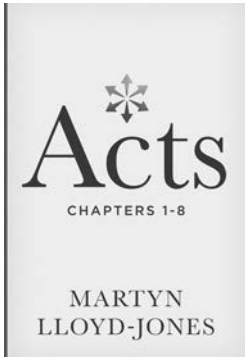
the light of endless day! “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way”—but it “leadeth unto life.”

If you accept the gospel and yield yourself to it, it will mean another birth for you. It will mean trial and temptation; it will mean persecution; it will mean the crucifixion and death of an old man that is in you. But it will lead to life that is life indeed, life more abundant, yea, the very life of God himself.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate.” Come onto the narrow way!



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