

Protestant Reformation

What Characterized the Reformer's Preaching?

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Part 7 of a series. [Read part 6.](#)

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Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it well: Can you imagine John Knox on television?

As Martyn Lloyd-Jones continued his address of fifty years ago, *Remembering the Reformation*,¹ he spoke of the power and authority of the Protestant Reformers' preaching. In this part of his remarks he was wonderfully prescient about the agenda behind much of present-day radio and television "preaching" —

This brings me to the last point: their preaching. We have been reminded that the Reformers re-introduced preaching and that they put preaching at the centre instead of ceremonies and sacraments.

Yes, but let us remember that there is preaching and preaching. Merely to speak for twenty minutes is not necessarily preaching. Though you may have taken a text and divided it up very cleverly, it is not necessarily preaching. Oh, there is preaching and, preaching!

The Test of Preaching: Power

What is the test of preaching? I will tell you; it is power! 'Our gospel came unto you', says the apostle to the Thessalonians in the First Epistle, chapter 1, verse 5, 'not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance'. Who had the assurance? The preacher! He knew something was happening, he knew God was using him, he knew that he was the vehicle and

channel of divine and eternal grace. 'Much assurance!' And that was the sort of preaching you had from the Protestant Reformers. It was prophetic preaching, not priestly preaching. What we have today, is what I would call priestly. Very nice, very quiet, very ornate, sentences turned beautifully, prepared carefully. That is not prophetic preaching!

The Need in Preaching: Authority

No, what is needed is authority! Do you think that John Knox could make Mary Queen of Scots tremble with some polished little essay? These men did not write their sermons with an eye to publication in books, they were preaching to the congregation in front of them, anxious and desirous to do something, to effect something, to change people. It was authoritative. It was proclamation, it was declaration.

Is it surprising that the church is as she is today; we no longer believe in preaching, do we? You used to have long sermons here in Scotland. I am told you do not like them now, and woe unto the preacher who goes on beyond twenty minutes! I was reading in the train yesterday about the first Principal of Emmanuel College in Cambridge, Chadderton, who lived towards the end of the sixteenth century. He was preaching on one occasion, and after he had preached for two hours he stopped and apologized to the people: 'Please forgive me, I have got beyond myself, I must not go on like this.' And the congregation shouted out, 'For God's sake go on!' You know I am beginning to think that I shall not have preached until something like that happens to me. Prophetic! Authoritative! Proclamation! Declaration!

Today's Preaching: "A Friendly Discussion"

Their view of preaching was certainly not our modern idea of having a friendly discussion. Have you noticed how we have less and less preaching on the [radio]? Instead we have discussion. Let the young people say what they think, let us win them by letting them speak; and we will have a friendly chat and discussion, we will show them that after all we are nice, decent fellows, there is nothing nasty about us; and we will gain their confidence; they must not think that we are unlike them! If you are on the television...you show that you are like the people, one of them!

Can You Imagine John Knox on Television?

Was John Knox like one of the people? Was John Knox [when he entered the pulpit] a matey, friendly, nice chap with whom you could have a discussion? Thank God he was not!... Can you imagine John Knox having tips and training as to how he should conduct and comport himself before the television camera, so as to be nice and polite and friendly and gentlemanly?

Thank God prophets are made of stronger stuff! An Amos, a Jeremiah, a John the Baptist in the wilderness in his camel-hair shirt — a strange fellow, a lunatic, they said, but they went and listened to him because he was a curiosity, and as they listened they were convicted! Such a man was John Knox, with the fire of God in his bones and in his belly! He preached as they all preached, with fire and power, alarming sermons, convicting sermons, humbling sermons, converting sermons, and the face of Scotland was changed...

Next: What was the "secret" of the Reformation?

References:

1. Quotations in this article are from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Remembering the Reformation" in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions, 1942-1977* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth. 1989).

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