

# Expositional Preaching is 'Empowered Preaching'

September 28, 2018

by David Schrock

## **Expositional Preaching is 'Empowered Preaching'**

This week seven members from OBC attended a Charles Simeon Trust workshop at Del Ray Baptist Church in Alexandria, VA. As a preacher unapologetically-committed to expositional preaching, I was deeply encouraged to join many other 'expositors.

In the three-day seminar, we walked through preaching from 1 Samuel and 'worked out' with a number of hermeneutic tools (i.e., reading strategies) for understanding and preaching narrative. Space doesn't permit me to share all the highlights of seminar, but one thing is worth mentioning: In defining expositional preaching, David Helm reshaped my thinking about exposition with his emphasis on "empowered preaching." He defined expositional preaching as "empowered preaching that rightfully submits the shape and emphasis of the sermon to the shape and emphasis of a biblical text."

Helm's point is that "expositional preaching" is not just limpidly restating the truths of Scripture. Empowered preaching is Spirit-filled preaching that reveals the living Christ through the faithful exposition of God's Word. And this kind of preaching comes not just from solid hermeneutics; it comes from the Spirit of God and prayer—a point he well explains in his compact book on preaching, *Expositional Preaching*.

## **God Reveals Jesus to People as a Consequence of Prayer**

In *Expositional Preaching* Helm shows how prayer is necessary for theological reflection and God's gracious revelation of Jesus Christ. He writes,

The 'work' of theological reflection can only be done through prayer. There is an intimate connection between the revelation of the identity of Christ—seeing him as the fulfillment of the Scriptures—and moments of prayerful quiet.

Luke makes this connection on a number of occasions. When Peter responds to Jesus's question, "But who do you say that I am?" with "the Christ of God," the readers had just been told that Jesus was praying alone (Luke 9:18–20). In other words, Luke wants his readers to know that Jesus was revealed to Peter in the context of prayer. The transfiguration, when Jesus was revealed in his glory as the Son, the Chosen One, follows Jesus taking Peter, James, and John to go to the mountain and pray (Luke 9:28–36). Back in the beginning of the Gospel, aged Simeon and Anna are both identified as pious people of prayer—statements that immediately precede God's revealing Jesus to them (Luke 2:27, 37; cf. Luke 28–32, 38). Even when God reveals the identity of Jesus at his baptism, Luke records that the heavens were opened and the God spoke, claiming Jesus as his Son. Luke records that the heavens opened just as Jesus was praying (Luke 3:21–22). (68)

What should we make of this? David Helm answers directly:

Luke could not have been any clearer: God reveals Jesus to people as a consequence of prayer. And so, if we really want Jesus to be revealed in our preaching—if we really want to uncover Jesus as the very center of all the Scriptures—then we must begin with prayer in our preparation. (69)

Without prayer, proper interpretation will be powerless. Prayerlessness in sermon preparation will be in vain if not begun, continued, and culminated with prayer. As Luke's Gospel emphasizes, God doesn't reveal his Son without prayer. And that is our goal in expository preaching, is it not? That God would reveal himself to us in the face of Christ?

### **Empowered Preaching Requires Prayerful Preparation**

For that reason, preachers of the Word must not only be skilled exegetes but men of prayer. In attending the Simeon Trust workshop and in reading Helm's book on preaching, I was struck by this point. It was a needed reminder, a goad to be more diligent in prayer as I study the Word, so that when I preach God's Word, it would come not only in word but power.

Indeed, for all of us who handle the Word, this meditation on prayer from Luke's Gospel should press us to be more diligent in prayer. For God wants to reveal himself through our preaching, but he has chosen to limit his revelation to those who are praying.

Soli Deo Gloria,

ds