

# ***Preaching the Gospel***

**A monthly magazine for preachers and those who want to preach.**

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## **The Depressed Preacher**

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Elijah must have felt pretty good. He had successfully arranged a challenge between Jehovah and Baal to take place on the top of Mount Carmel. Hundreds of prophets of Baal were present for the face-off, as well as plenty of spectators. What more could a prophet (or preacher) want? Of course, some might contend the odds were severely stacked in Baal's favor, but they would only be counting on human fingers. Elijah was counting on Jehovah, and he trusted Him to follow through.

Baal's team went first, to make sure it was a completely fair fight. After hours of passionate pleading to a god who was not a god, it was Elijah's turn. After Elijah prayed before the people, Jehovah made Himself known in a mighty way by consuming Elijah's water-logged sacrifice, including the stones it rested upon, with fire from heaven. No one could contest the result – Jehovah had won! The people said, "*The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God*" (1 Kings 18:39 NASB). They even helped Elijah slaughter those 450 prophets of Baal!

The overwhelming response of the people was more than the "Great job," or "You really stepped on my toes that time," or even "You really motivated me today." This response was tangible, immediate, and decisive. The people were moved to action.

Elijah must have felt pretty good at that moment. But in just a matter of days (perhaps even the next day) his countenance changed. "*He was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba*" (1 Kings 19:3). He asked God that he might die! How quickly this great man fell into the depths of depression. The Israelite kingdom, as a whole, did not turn toward God. Jezebel still sought his life. Elijah was still a wanted man. How could he press on if, after God's mighty demonstration, nothing really changed among the people?

Perhaps there are some lessons for preachers today. I suggest the following:

**1. Don't assume to understand God's purposes.** Sometimes we feel that we KNOW what God is doing in our lives. After all, we are spiritually-minded; we can read the signs better than anyone else, right? Perhaps we should get it through our thick heads that we MIGHT understand AS MUCH as everyone else. Who are we to know the mind of God? We only know what is revealed, as is the case with all Christians. We might flatter ourselves to have figured out God's intentions on a matter, only to be thrown into a deep pit of doubt and puzzlement

when things don't work out the way we divined. You probably know of preachers who are constantly discouraged because they "know" what is needed in a certain situation and it never happens. They spend much time trying to motivate people to move to such-and-such a continent or such-and-such a state to preach the gospel. Or they've been trying for years to get so-and-so to start a class in his home. Or they've been working with an unrepentant soul for months with no visible signs of surrender. We seem to be beating our heads against a wall sometimes. Perhaps we should step back and think: Maybe it's not God's plan for that to happen right now. We should accept God's purposes, whatever they might be. We should accept the fact we don't KNOW what His purposes are in many cases. Let's just work with what we have been given and let God fill in the gaps.

**2. Don't expect too much from people.** Effective, positive change comes slowly with most people. The human mind can't deal with great, sweeping, comprehensive change very well. We study for months or years on a passage and finally come to a startling conclusion. We think, "Why did I not see that before?" Then we try to preach it to a church in a single sermon and expect everyone to latch on to the thought immediately. You've heard of the three keys to teaching: "Repetition, repetition, repetition." People need time to wrestle with an idea. After all, didn't we take months to come to it ourselves?

**3. We are not alone.** Elijah thought he was the lone servant of God in a world of filthy pagans. God, who sees the big picture, came to Elijah, not in a mighty and fearful way, but in the sound of a gentle blowing. He assured Elijah there were still 7,000 in Israel not bowing to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Sometimes we are blind to all those who are faithfully following Jehovah. Perhaps they even walk with us in our church families, but all we see are side-tracked, apathetic, unfocused people who would scatter at the drop of a hat. But that's our limited perspective. Let's remember we are NOT alone. There ARE those who are faithful. Let's keep preaching to strengthen and motivate those good hearts!

**4. Just keep working.** The first thing God did for Elijah was to provide him with food to cheer him up and strengthen him (1 Kings 19:5-8). The second thing God did was to give him another task to accomplish (1 Kings 19:15-16). God did not say, "Okay, you are tired so you can stop, hide somewhere, and rest for a few years." God sent him right back to work. Perhaps one of the best remedies for depression is to refocus and start working again. Put everything else behind, and don't look back. Remember, he who is constantly looking back cannot plow a straight line. Look forward.

We have been entrusted with a task to steadily preach the whole counsel of God. Let's not let Satan side-track our work by depressing and discouraging us. God has given us great promises, among which is, "*Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you*" (1 Tim. 4:16).

May God bless us all in our labors and strengthen our hearts and hands!

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## What It Means to Preach Christ

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In Acts 8:5 we read, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them." Later, the text records, "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12).

Sometimes, when we preach on a controversial topic, people object by asking, "Why don't you just preach Christ?" It is most assuredly essential to preach Christ. Even though some dishonest preachers were trying to increase Paul's persecution while he was in prison, he rejoiced "that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached" (Philippians 1:15-18).

What, then, does it mean to preach Christ?

### **One True God**

When the apostle Paul went to Athens, the center of human philosophy of the Roman world, "he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18). What was the content of his sermon? In contrast to their multitudes of idols, the apostle informed them of the one true God, who created and rules the world, and of Jesus, whom God had raised from the dead (Acts 17:22-31). That certainly seems inoffensive, but "when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter'" (verse 32). You see, to those Greek philosophers, who were enthralled with human wisdom, the preaching of the cross was foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:22-24). It was offensive to them. Try preaching about God the Creator and the resurrection of His Son from the dead to an audience of "educated elite" today and see if you don't get the same reaction.

### **Jesus the Son of God**

Years earlier the same apostle "preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). Surely, no one would object to that! Don't be too sure! "Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him" (Acts 9:23). A Jewish audience today probably wouldn't be so violent, but they would certainly be angry, and a Muslim audience might react the same way the first century Jews did.

### **The Name of Jesus**

When Philip preached Christ in Samaria (Acts 8:5), he proclaimed "the name of Christ" (verse 12). The name of a person stands for that person and all that he is. What does the name of Christ mean to us?

It means salvation is through Him alone (Acts 4:10-12). While this is not offensive to evangelical Christendom, it certainly is to the billions of people who do not even consider themselves Christians as well as the millions who nominally consider themselves Christians but are too "broad minded" (lacking in conviction) to think that there is only one right way to God (cf. John 14:6).

It means that religiously we just call ourselves "Christians," that is, followers of Christ, thus glorifying God (1 Peter 4:16, **American Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, English Standard Version, International Standard Version**) rather than some sectarian name that demonstrates loyalty to a denomination over Christ (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). Of course, preaching this is offensive to all denominations.

Furthermore, preaching the name of Christ includes announcing the necessity of having authority from Him for all we do (Colossians 3:17). This even angers the majority of our brethren, who shamelessly assert, "We do lots of things without Bible authority."

### **One Faith**

The apostle Paul only proclaimed one message, the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6-9). This is the same thing as preaching Christ (verses 15-16) or preaching the faith (verse 23). Thus there is but one faith (Ephesians 4:5), that is, one body of teaching we must impart to our hearers (Jude verse 3). Of course, members of virtually all denominations take exception to this truth, since they assert, "You have your faith, and I have mine." No, there are many opinions of men, but only one faith revealed by Jesus Christ.

## Necessity of Obedience to the Faith

To fully preach Christ we must announce the necessity of obedience to the faith (Romans 16:25-27). Of course, none of our Protestant friends want to hear this, since they contend for salvation by faith alone.

The necessity of obedience includes the fact we must repent of our sins to be saved (Acts 17:30). To proclaim Christ means to announce the necessity of putting off the old man of sin and putting on a life of true righteousness and holiness that reflects the moral nature of God (Ephesians 4:17-24). How many people want to continue living in adultery yet consider themselves Christians? To preach to them that they must repent is certainly no way to "win friends and influence people"!

And preaching obedience to the faith means we inform people they must be baptized. Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans, and, as the result, they were baptized (Acts 8:5,12-13). How did they know to be baptized unless preaching Christ includes commanding people to be baptized? How can I preach Christ fully and not tell the audience that the Lord promised, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16)? Yes, that's offensive to virtually all denominations, but I can't preach Christ fully without including the fact that immersion in water is a requirement for salvation.

## Kingdom of God

When Philip proclaimed Christ to the Samaritans, he preached "the kingdom of God" (Acts 8:5,12). To do that, he had to inform the people that the kingdom was in existence on the earth at that time, and they could be citizens of that kingdom (Colossians 1:13), which was spiritual rather than material in nature (John 18:36; Romans 14:17). Of course, that is highly offensive to our many premillennial friends, who are looking for a future, material kingdom.

## Conclusion

Preach Christ and don't be offensive? I'm sorry, but it's not possible to do both. You see, while we must do our best not to be unnecessarily offensive to anyone (1 Corinthians 10:32), Christ Himself is an offense to those who disbelieve and disobey (1 Peter 2:7-8). But to those who believe, He is the precious Savior (1 Peter 2:4-8). What about you my friend, are you offended by the message of Christ, or is He your precious Savior?



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## [Online With Joel](#)

### [BrassTacks.org](#)

Gary Henry is an American preacher in Tennessee. He is very well-known especially for his daily devotional book, *Diligently Seeking God*. He has put this book online at <http://www.diligently-seeking-god.com>. I own the book and highly recommend it, although it is not geared to preachers specifically.

Gary has had a website at <http://brasstacks.org> for many years which is good resource for sermon outlines. He also has a few websites for series of lessons he preaches that are more than just outlines. On these websites, you download the lessons as PDF books. These websites are linked to from the "Series of Lessons" link on the main page next to "Sermon Outlines."

You may notice that Gary spends a lot of time talking about personal sacrifice. He understands it quite well because he has done it. He divorced his wife for adultery about 10 years ago and after that made a vow to God that he would remain celibate for the rest of his life. He has a good article about that on his blog at <http://christiandailydevotion.com/blog/2009/04/28/i-took-the-vow-ten-years-ago/>.

As you can see, Gary has many resources for Christians, some of which are particularly useful for preachers. I recommend them.

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