



You Have Not Passed This Way Before

Raymond Elliott

The great leader Moses had died and the Lord God had chosen the faithful warrior Joshua to be the leader of the children of Israel. They were encamped on the east side of the River of Jordan and the time had come for them to cross over the river and into the land of ‘milk and honey,’ the land of Canaan. God had assured Joshua several times that He would be with him as he was about to enter the promised land (Joshua 1:6-9).

In Joshua 3, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant were to lead the people across the Jordan and into the land that God had promised to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). Joshua charged the people to follow the priests at a certain distance, saying to the people “You have not passed this way before.” The children of Israel were about to enter a land they did not know.

As we enter this new year of 2023, it could also be said of us, “You have not passed this way before.” We do not know what this new year will bring. It might be weal or woe, sadness or happiness, life or death, success or failure. As children of God, we should read what God said to Joshua and apply it to our thinking: “Be strong and of good courage” and again, “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:6, 9). In Hebrews 13:5, we read, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” Because we are children of God, this is the blessed assurance we have in our Lord.

Here are some suggestions that will strengthen you as you enter the uncharted course in this new year of 2023.

1. Trust in the Lord with all your heart (Proverbs 3:5, 6).
2. Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind (Mark 12:30).
3. Love your brethren and your neighbors (John 13:34, 35; Mark 12:30).
4. Do good to all men and especially your brothers and sisters in Christ (Galatians 6:10).

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God Has Spoken: A Look at Hebrews 1:1-3

Andy Erwin

The Hebrew homily begins with a statement of fact. The writer offers no introduction customary to epistles, no word of commendation for himself or the recipients, and no formal greeting. Without hesitation, reservation, or doubt, the writer announces the existence of God and the verbal inspiration of the scriptures He provided.

God has revealed Himself to man through words. God has spoken. With unwavering simplicity and emboldened assurance that God exists, He has spoken, and His Son is Jesus Christ, the writer brings assurance and confidence to the heart of every believer.

That God would communicate to man through the medium of words and languages should be obvious. How else would God have communicated to man if not through human words and languages? Words were needed to teach mankind both in the long ago, as well as in “these last days.” Words were spoken by God to men (the prophets) who then recorded them through the means of writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (to the/our fathers). Thus, we have the inspired written word of God – the scriptures.¹

God spoke to man in ages past by using prophets.² But in these last days, His words have been spoken through His beloved Son.³ The writer wastes no time in placing before the reader a proper consideration of Jesus. God spoke through prophets. Yet no prophet could claim to be His Son. That honor belongs only to Jesus.

In ages past, God spoke *at various times*. The revelation of God’s will to man was given gradually. His word was not entirely revealed at one setting, but rather over a period greater than 1,000 years from Moses to Malachi. The gradual revelation of His will served as a continual guardian or guide to bring Israel to faith in Christ (Galatians 3:24).

God spoke to the prophets when He deemed the occasion necessary for the communication of His will and the instruction of His people. He did so with great brevity, offering only the words He regarded as essential to the conveyance of His will according to His divine wisdom.

God spoke *in various ways*. He spoke historically and prophetically. He spoke by psalms and proverbs. He pleaded with forthright messages intending to stir the human spirit to obedience. God gave both words of comfort and warning, “precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little” (Isaiah 28:10).

The diverse nature of God’s revelation is seen throughout the Old Testament. God allowed His plans to be known and spoken via predictive prophecy using inspired prophets (Amos 3:7). God spoke amidst storms and thunder to Moses (Exodus 19:19; Deuteronomy 5:22). He spoke in a “low whisper” to the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19:12). Our Father also revealed His will to a variety of individuals in their dreams (Genesis 40:8; 41:16; Daniel 2:19-23).

In these last days He has spoken to us by His Son. After God revealed His will to man in various ways through various people, He chose to speak to mankind through His Son. Jesus is the pinnacle of God’s revelation to man. All other words, ways, and means of divine revelation have led to and point to Jesus as the Savior of the world.

God has “from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34) revealed His plan to reconcile man and to save him from his rebellious ways (see Isaiah 46:9-10; Ephesians 3:2-21). Jesus came to reveal the will of the Father through His preaching, by dying for the sin of the world, and in establishing His spiritual kingdom upon earth, thus inaugurating the last days.

The phrase *last days* (Hebrews 1:2) does not imply the world coming to an end immediately. The phrase refers to the last dispensation, or the last period of the world. The periods of human history have included the patriarchal age from Creation to Mt. Sinai and the giving of the Law; the age of the law of Moses and the prophets, which extended until the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2); and now mankind is living in the age of the Messiah and His kingdom which began when the church was established in Acts 2 and will last until His return.

The Christian Age is the accepted (chosen) time (2 Corinthians 6:2; Galatians 4:1-5) in which God has decided to reveal His eternal purpose to us by His Son. God is not speaking to us merely by great and notable men as He once did. He is speaking to us by His

¹ cf. 1 Cor. 2:6-16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 1:19-21

² cf. Jer. 1:9 ff; Ezek. 2-3; Dan. 2:19

³ cf. John 8:12 ff; 12:44-50; 14:10, 24, 31; 17:8, 14

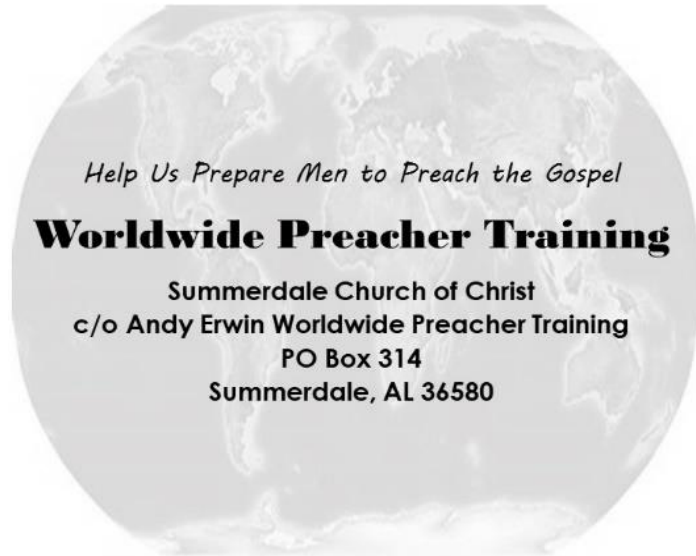
Son, Christ Jesus, and this final age belongs to Him. We are now commissioned to do all that we do in the name of our Savior (Colossians 3:16).

The writer is emphasizing the authority of Christ by contrasting it to the authority of the prophets. If the prophets spoke with authority from God, how much more does His Son speak with authority? The premise of the superiority of Christ to the religious system He fulfilled will run as a golden thread throughout Hebrews. To accept the word of Christ is to accept the Father's offer of reconciliation.

The readers of this message must understand that if Christ be rejected, the only means of reconciliation with the Father is also forfeited. Only Jesus can have the claim made of Him that He is the appointed heir of all things; the creator of the world; the radiance and exact representation of the heavenly Father; the one who upholds the universe by His word; the one who grants purification through His blood; and the one who has sat down at the right hand of God (1:3).

Where and to whom can man go to find what God has provided in Jesus? Truly Peter understood the gravity of turning from Christ when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also, we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68-69).

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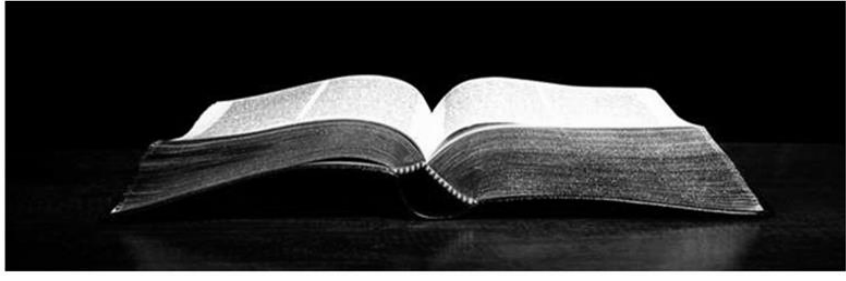

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Mechanical Instruments of Music in the Worship Assembly

Johnny O. Trail

One of the things that many people notice when they attend the services of the churches of Christ is the absence of mechanical instruments of music being used in the worship assembly. In truth, this comes as a surprise to many, and much speculation ensues from those who might not fully understand why no instruments can be found in the context of worship. This absence stands in contradistinction from the denominational groups who use various instruments in their attempt to worship God. What of this practice? Does scripture, biblical language, history, or scholarship offer any insight into this topic?

For most of the twentieth and twenty-first century, religious-minded people have debated the use of instruments in the worship assembly. This discussion is not the source of any small controversy. Suffice it to say that we must determine God's will for His people regarding worship and seek to obey it. John 4:24 says, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." God wants human beings to worship Him according to the standard put forth in scripture.

In addition to outlining the appropriate manner of approaching God in song, Paul underscores the need to find authorization for all that we do in worship or in life. His remarks in Colossians 3:16-17 make these things abundantly clear: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed,

do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Regarding these passages, one wonders if the Holy Spirit, in His omnipotence, did not realize that there would be controversy regarding worship and singing over and against the use of a mechanical instrument. Regardless, one needs God's authority for what he does in worship.

In addition to these words, Paul makes it clear that singing is the appropriate means of praising God in the worship assembly and not by the use of mechanical instruments. Ephesians 5:19 says, "Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." Paul further says in, 1 Corinthians 14:15, "What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also."

In addition to the aforementioned facts, there is no biblical support for the use of the instrument in the worship assembly. When one reads the entirety of the New Testament, it becomes apparent that there is not one single reference to an instrument of music being used in the worship assembly of the church.

Still, there are those who want to offer objections to what the Bible teaches regarding singing in worship. Just recently several large congregations that have been known as "churches of Christ" have come out and publicly endorsed the use of the instrument in the worship assembly.

One of the arguments that is sometimes used is "It doesn't say 'not' to do it." This is part of a potentially deeper consideration when one considers this objection. A better way of considering this argument might be done by asking "How does one treat God when you interpret Him from silence?"

We use arguments from silence all of the time. By expressing what we want, we exclude other things. If one tells a waiter in a restaurant that he wants a hamburger with ketchup, it excludes all other toppings and condiments. If the server comes out with additional items on the hamburger, they have not done according to the request.

This having been said, there are those who want biblical examples of arguments from silence. The Hebrew writer makes an argument from silence regarding Christ and the Levitical priesthood. Hebrews 7:12-14 states "For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests."

Some have tried to argue that the absence of instruments in the worship assembly is unique to the churches of Christ. There is much evidence to prove that this is a false assumption. Did you know that prior to the turn of the twentieth century in the United States a majority of denominations did not have instruments in their worship assemblies?

Why was this the case? In part, the answer is that many of their leaders objected to their use! For a few moments, let us consider some of their arguments.

John Spencer Curwen was a member of the Royal Academy of Music and President of a college in London around 1880. Notice what he says about the history of instrumental music. “Men still living can remember the time when organs were very seldom found out of the Church of England. The Methodists, Independents, and Baptists rarely had them, and by the Presbyterians they were stoutly opposed.”

Adam Clarke wrote about the use of instruments in worship. He says, “I believe that David was not authorized by the Lord to introduce the multitude of musical instruments into the Divine worship of which we read, and I am satisfied that his conduct in this respect is most solemnly reprehended by this prophet [Amos 6:5]. And I further believe that the use of such instruments of music in the Christian church is without the sanction and against the will of God; that they are subversive of the spirit of true devotion, and that they are sinful...I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them productive of any good in the worship of God; and have reason to believe that they were productive of much evil. Music, as a science, I esteem and admire: but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor.”

John Calvin is one of the best-known theological teachers of the past. He was also against the use of the instrument in the worship assembly. “Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps and the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The

papists [Roman Catholics] therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews.”

Charles Spurgeon was perhaps the greatest Baptist preacher who ever lived. Many scholars would support this claim to this very day. His books, writings, and sermons are still published. As a matter of fact, you can still purchase his materials in our age. Many are shocked to learn that Spurgeon was not in favor of instrumental music in worship. The congregation that he preached for in London, the Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle, did not use instruments. He states, “David appears to have had a peculiarly tender remembrance of the singing of the pilgrims, and assuredly it is the most delightful part of worship and that which comes nearest to the adoration of heaven. What a degradation to supplant the intelligent song of the whole congregation by the theatrical prettinesses of a quartet, the refined niceties of a choir, or the blowing off of wind from inanimate bellows and pipes. We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it.”

David Benedict was one of the greatest historians of the Baptists. Notice what he says about the use of the instrument: “Staunch old Baptists in former times would have as soon tolerated the Pope of Rome in their pulpits as an organ in their galleries. And yet the instrument has gradually found its way among them and their successors in church management, with nothing like the jars and difficulties which arouse of old concerning the bass viol and smaller instruments of music.”

John Wesley is also known as one who was in opposition to the use of the instrument in worship. He says, “I have no objection to the organ in our chapels provided it is neither heard nor seen.”

James W. McKinnon, a professor of music at Columbia University, was also against the use of the instrument. He says, “More important than explicit opposition to instruments is the simple fact that they were not used in the patristic period.” The Patristic period deals with the period of time when men wrote about the church four centuries after it was established in AD 33.

What is the implication of this statement? There is no record of the church using an instrument for several centuries after its establishment! Furthermore, there is much linguistic evidence to demonstrate that the instrument is not authorized in scripture. The Greek word under consideration in regards to these pertinent passages is *psallo* (Bauer, 891). The word *psallo* or its derivatives is found five times in scripture. It is used in Ephesians 5:19, 1 Corinthians 14:5 (2 times), Romans 15:9, and in James 5:13. It is translated “making melody” (Eph. 5:19), “sing,” (1 Cor. 14:5; Rom. 15:9), and “sing praises” in James 5:13.

Some have argued that this word means to “play an instrument,” however every reliable English translation renders the word “sing.” Greek Lexicons render the term as “to pluck” (Thayer, 891). What does it mean for the term to be rendered in this fashion?

Let us consider it in Ephesians 5:19. “Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” The Greek phrase is *ψαλλοντες τη καρδια* and it means to “pluck the heart.” In essence, we all play an instrument in worship—our hearts (Lockhart, 34-37). Moreover, there is much to be gleaned from the universal agreement of various scholars regarding the *psallo*. It should be noted also that the one hundred and forty-eight scholars

who translated the American Standard Version and the King James Version have said with one voice that ‘psallo’ in the New Testament means ‘sing.’ That alone should settle the matter.”

In essence, it is hard to get even two scholars to agree much less one hundred and forty-eight. Hugo McCord observed, “Furthermore, if ‘a certain Greek word, *psallo*, demands instrumental accompaniment to the singing,’ one wonders why the Greek Orthodox Church (100 million members) does not use instrumental music in its worship services. One of their members (a graduate student at Harvard University, talking to Everett Ferguson) gave two reasons why ‘we do not use instrumental music: it is not in the New Testament [and] contrary to the nature of Christian worship...Thus one who knows the Greek language says that there ‘is not in the New Testament’ a certain word that demands instrumental accompaniment to singing. Furthermore, if there were a certain word in the Greek New Testament that demands instrumental accompaniment to singing, one wonders why all the popular English Translations have omitted it. One reads through the New Testament (260 chapter, 7,959 verses, 181,253 words in

the KJV) and finds no reference to instrumental accompaniment to singing...In addition, if *psallo* demands instrumental accompaniment, then each worshipper must play on his individual instrument as well as do his own singing. Worship is an individual action between a human being and his God. No one can worship God by proxy, having a choir to do his singing and a piano player to do his playing. If that certain Greek word has two actions wrapped up in it, singing and playing, each Christian is commanded to do both.”

The scriptural, linguistic, and historical evidence is *decidedly against* the use of the instrument in the worship assembly. The true question is, “Will Jesus and His word be the source of authority for what people choose to do in the worship assembly?” Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

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Short-Term & Long-Term Disability for Ministers

Preaching brethren, what if something happened to you that hindered you from being able to preach and make a living? God forbid any of us should suffer a stroke or worse, but these things do happen. My wife, Melanie, told me about disability policies State Farm offers which would protect a minister if he lost his ability to preach. I recently got a policy just to be safe and to protect my family and the church from being burdened to support me if something happened. If you think this is a good idea too, you can give her a call. She can answer your questions and help you to be protected if/when you ever need it. Our prayer is that you never will.

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The Slow Work of God

Matt Wallin

We want things instantly. Imagine the power to speak something into existence. You would never have to wait again. God can do that. He said, “Let there be light, and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). In our world today, we can have a lot of things instantly. We are really blessed! But the best things can’t happen instantly. They take time and that’s by God’s design. Quicker can be better, but it can also be against the nature of God and the natural order He has created for the world. We can learn by what was done in scripture, and also by *how* it was done. Many times God did things slowly.

God’s Slow Work in the Old Testament

Creation

Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:11 tell us that God used six literal days (and a seventh day with no work) to create everything. Why would God take seven days to do something He could do in a millisecond?

Noah

In 2 Peter 2:5, Noah is described as a “preacher of righteousness.” Looking back on Noah’s story, Peter said, “. . . God’s patience waited in the days of Noah” (1 Peter 3:20). How so?

God could have made the ark for Noah. He could have created another way for Noah and other believers to be saved. But He didn’t. God’s plan involved Noah and the slow work of building the ark. God’s plan involved Noah preaching to the people. And it looks like God’s plan involved Noah working for as much as 120 years to do these two things.

How many people were saved from the flood? Eight. Didn’t God know only eight would be saved? Of course, He did. Why would He spend all this time (we might think “waste”), knowing only Noah’s family was going to be saved?

Remember 1 Peter 3:20? “God’s patience waited.” God waited. He gave people time. Years and years and years. They would have seen Noah and his family cutting wood and transporting supplies back and forth. They would have seen the men putting the framework in place and adding to it day by day. Even though no one else took the opportunity, God waited while Noah slowly worked because He wanted people to have the chance to be saved.

Promises to Abraham

In Genesis 12, God made promises to Abraham:

Promise 1: Genesis 12:2 – “I will make of you a great nation.” Abraham waited 25 years.

Promise 2: Genesis 12:7 – “Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” It took more than 400 years.

Promise 3: Genesis 12:3 – “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” It took more than 2000 years.

We might ask, “God, why would you make Abraham wait more than 400 years for the land you promised him? He will be dead and gone by then.” God’s answer is, “You know the evil people that live there right now? It’s not time for them to be punished. I’m long suffering. I’m patient. I want to give them time. Lots of time. Generations. I

want to give them more than enough opportunities to repent” (read Gen. 15:16). God made His friend wait, even past his death, so that the people around him would have the chance to obey God and accept His grace and mercy.

Do you think Peter had this in mind when he wrote 2 Peter 3:9? “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

We might ask, “Why hasn’t Jesus come back yet! It’s been 2,000 years!” Peter wrote these words, about 30 years after Jesus left, and people were already starting to question His return. God’s answer would be the same thing to us. He might say, “I’m giving people more time, plenty of chances, to repent.”

Abraham might have thought, “God, hurry up.” But surely some of the people living there thought, “God, thank you for your patience.” God works slowly and gives people time.

God’s Slow Work in the New Testament

Slow work in Paul

Saul was converted in Acts 9. After his conversion, he preached the gospel in Damascus (Acts 9:22-23), and they tried to kill him. He moved on to a larger city with more danger, Jerusalem, and preached the gospel (Acts 9:28-29). Again, the crowd tried to kill him. Acts 9:30 says, “. . . when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.” Where was Saul born? Tarsus.

They tried to kill Saul everywhere he preached. What did God do? God sent him to his hometown, a smaller city. We don't read about Saul again until Acts 11:25 when Barnabas went to get him. It's estimated that Saul stayed in Tarsus for 7-10 years.

It's easy to read these stories and miss what is happening. Saul was converted, but he didn't instantly become the Paul we know. God spent the next decade of his life getting him ready for what was to come. We can read Acts 9 to Acts 11:25 in ten minutes, but do you think the ten years went that fast for Saul? No wonder Paul could say, "I have *learned* in whatever situation I am to be content" (Phil. 4:11b).

Paul went on three famous missionary journeys, teaching anyone who would listen and helping to establish the church in new areas. On those trips, he traveled more than 12,000 miles. Why didn't God pick him up and move him around from place to place? God could have. It's about more than the destination. It's about the journey that gets us there! We won't be ready for the work where we're going unless we learn from the process it takes to get there. God worked slowly in Paul.

Slow Work in Samaria

Samaria was conquered and carried into captivity for rejecting God (2 Kings 17:1-7). During captivity, God's people intermarried with their oppressors. Those Samaritans were a hindrance to Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 4:2).

Centuries later, when Samaritans initially rejected Jesus, two of His disciples wanted to destroy them (Luke 9:51-56). These interactions between Jews and Samaritans led to hostility and

resentment between the two groups. Jesus, in His patience, loved them both.

Because of God's patience, one Samaritan woman believed in Jesus (John 4:29). This woman's testimony led others to believe (John 4:39). Then, when they saw Jesus, they believed on their own (John 4:40-42).

Later, Jesus highlighted a Samaritan as a hero in a parable (Luke 10:25-37). In foretelling where the gospel would go (Acts 1:8), Jesus mentioned Samaria. Because of His patience and focus, the early church included Samaritans who, "received the word of God" (Acts 8:4-5, 14).

No wonder Jesus looked out over Samaria in John 4 and said, ". . . Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor" (John 4:35b-38).

Where others saw an enemy and a lost cause, Jesus saw the possibility of salvation and He slowly worked to achieve it. Because of what Jesus patiently planted in Samaria, His disciples reaped a good harvest.

What do we learn from the slow work of God?

God worked slowly in creation. He worked slowly throughout history. He worked slowly in Old Testament events. He worked slowly in the life of Paul. He worked slowly in the life of Samaria.

I have good news for you. God has worked slowly in you, and He continues to do so. Thankfully, God is patient with us.

We need to be patient with ourselves. We need to be patient with other Christians, and even other congregations of Christians. We need to be patient with the world.

However, God's patience is not eternal. If you need to become a Christian or rededicate yourself, or if you need to evangelize or repair a relationship, God has been waiting on you. But He won't wait forever. Make it right while you still can.

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Continued from Page 1: You Have Not Passed This Way Before

5. Attend the assemblies of the church to worship God and to exhort/edify/build up one another in the most holy faith (John 4:23, 24; Hebrews 10:24, 25).
6. Be steadfast in prayer (Romans 12:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
7. Increase your knowledge of the word of God by reading and studying it daily (Psalm 1:1-3; 119:97; Matthew 4:4).

Let us close with the words of the apostle Peter as found in 2 Peter 1:10, 11 "Therefore, brethren, be more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

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The Living Context

Barry Jones

Several years ago, I transitioned from full-time ministry to teaching and preaching on a part-time basis. It was hard to do. I couldn't quite put my finger on why it was somewhat the same but different.

I compared it to the beginning of my ministry in college when I was allowed to practice my skills with small congregations on the weekends. Learning how to teach and preach, managing funerals and visitation, along with classes and just growing up. Now with much more experience and skill, Bible knowledge and wisdom from previous mistakes, balancing these tasks today is much smoother than then.

It came to me that the "living" context is missing. As we study the Bible and apply its precepts to our lives, we actually mold our lives with God's word. As a preacher on any given Sunday, as I scan the crowd, I can see a

hundred struggles... of people I know, people I care about, friends, brothers and sisters. It is only natural as I study the scriptures each week to craft a sermon that the needs of my friends come to mind as I fashion the words needed to be said the following Sunday. This needs to be said. Brother or sister needs to hear this. Taking care that the words aren't said to provoke or to shame, a carefully worded sermon to lovingly nudge and spur others to grow closer to God is what I mean by the "living" context. When you live with the congregation, they help you with your presentations. If you really listen, you hear the love.

As a part-time minister this closeness may not be as achievable. Living from week to week on old outlines may satisfy the "Biblical" requirement but (in my opinion) not the "caring" requirement. Someone might ask, where

is your scripture for that? Consider this passage:

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel (Philippians 2:19-22).

It would appear that the work of the gospel is both caring for the saints and proclaiming the scriptures faithfully as did Timothy for the Christians in Philippi. Wouldn't you agree? That is what I miss, the continual, constant, monotonous, caring for the brethren.

Barry Jones has provided a great service through his work in archiving brotherhood periodicals, in addition to his preaching.



Camden Avenue Church of Christ

The Camden Avenue church of Christ is seeking a second full-time minister to help us with our evangelistic efforts.

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What Shall I Preach?

Michael D. Greene

In the life of a preacher, he is asked to answer many questions. Some questions deal with profound and difficult themes such as “What must I do to be saved?” Others deal with more mundane issues, such as “What should be the order of services?” But the most difficult question every serious preacher must ask, and answer is “What shall I preach?”

That question is not to be answered only once a week. In churches of Christ, it must be asked and answered two times every week...Sunday morning and Sunday night. The member in the pew may say that doesn't seem to be so difficult. But if the preacher asks that question for each sermon he will preach every Sunday for a year, he must ask and answer that question 104 times each year. That requires a lot of research, preparation, work, and I might add creativity in putting together all those sermons.

Someone has estimated that the material a preacher generates in a year of sermons is the equivalent of a novel or a dissertation. One sermon, it is suggested, is equal to a college term paper of six to eight pages length. If you add to that to Bible classes taught each week, and sermons prepared for special occasions such as VBS, gospel meetings and even funerals, it is a significant amount of material to be generated every year.

If the preacher stays with one congregation a long time, say five years, the amount of information he must generate almost becomes overwhelming. Every preacher known to this writer understands the challenge and along with that challenge, has the desire to be relevant and fresh in this preaching. One then can see that one of the most difficult, if not the most difficult, question the preacher

will answer and one he must answer every week is “What shall I preach?”

Some may say that the answer is easy. Just preach the Bible. Or do as Paul instructed and “preach the word,” (2 Tim 4:1-5). Or maybe just “preach the gospel” as Jesus did and as He commanded the apostles to do (Luke 4:18, Mark 16:15-16). Maybe one might just say do as the apostles did and preach Jesus as the Christ or preach the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God (Acts 5:42, 28:31). But careful reflection about each of those suggestions tells us that each of those ideas are broad, multifaceted concepts or ideas. One could preach many sermons on each of those ideas. So how does the preacher narrow the focus of each sermon? How does he answer the question twice each week “What shall I preach?”

Every teacher of homiletics, a word defined by Webster as “the art of preaching,” suggests there are two possible starting points, both of which assume a rich familiarity and deep study of the scriptures and a close familiarity with one's audience. The first comes from the preacher's personal study of the scriptures and insights gained from that study. As he studies, he discovers a passage teaches a lesson that would benefit his hearers. Or his study produces a new insight to a familiar passage he had not seen or realized before and that insight serves as the basis of a sermon.

The second source of lesson ideas is the needs of the audience. This of course demands familiarity with his hearers. For example, a congregation appointing new elders may require a lesson on that subject. Does he have knowledge of someone in the audience struggling with a

teaching of scripture or a sin in their life? Or it may be that a passage or topic has not been addressed for a while. Peter spoke to the need to remind the brethren of certain truths though they knew them (2 Peter 1:12-15).

This preacher does not know any preacher worth his salt who does not welcome help and input in answering the question. How can you help? One can help by asking your preacher questions. Enter a dialogue with your preacher and give him helpful suggestions. Encourage him often. Let him know when a sermon was particularly helpful. Ask him to address issues or explain a passage you have been studying or struggling with.

Be understanding and supportive as he seeks to meet the daunting task of preaching two sermons each week. As the preacher strives to meet the needs of a congregation, he recognizes that no preacher, no matter how good he may be, can meet the needs of everyone listening with every sermon. Learn to rejoice if the lesson does meet someone's needs on that occasion.

Finally, encourage your preacher. Appreciate him for his work's sake and take his name (and the names of his family members) to the throne of God in prayer often. Do these things and you will be amazed at how his preaching will improve.

Mike Greene is the Director of the Nashville School of Preaching and Biblical Studies and has also preached the gospel for many years.



Archaeological Evidence for Jesus' Last Week

Garry L. Hill

As one reads the gospel record of Jesus' last week, one is impressed with the tremendous amount of evidence the gospel writers devote to it. It was considered important to emphasize in detail the places, times, and people in God's story of redemption. The great importance in the minds of the early Christians is seen in the later preaching of the early Church. Thus, it is important for us the study the last week of Jesus. Archaeology is a benefit in helping us with this task. Many discoveries in the city of Jerusalem help us understand a little more clearly the events surrounding the last week of Jesus.

The arrest and trial of Jesus were the first act that led to his death on the Roman cross. The high priest, Caiaphas was a leading participant in this event. His full name was Joseph Caiaphas, was the son in law of Annas, and filled the office of high priest from 18-36 AD.

One of the most exciting finds in recent years that have to do with Jesus' last week is the finding of Caiaphas' tomb. The discovery was found in November of 1990 when workers were doing construction work in Jerusalem's Peace Forest. "The discovery was made when the roof the burial chamber collapsed and revealed 12 limestone ossuaries. One of the ossuaries was exquisitely ornate and decorated with incised rosettes." (Price, 305)

Z. Greenhut investigated the tomb to the years before the Jewish War around 60A.D. The six ossuaries found in the cave were in great shape. The most ornate ossuary had an inscription which read; Qufa Yehoseph the son of Qypa and on the narrow side of the box Yehoseph the son of Qpa. These are

translated Caiaphas and Joseph the son of Caiaphas. "This ossuary contained partial remains of six individuals, including a 60 year old male. The remains of this older person perhaps Caiaphas, were too fragmentary to be reconstructed." (Rousseau, 140)

With the finding of Caiaphas' tomb and ossuary, it is interesting that archaeologists have now uncovered evidence of the two main characters of the trial of Jesus. The second find happened much earlier, not in the city of Jerusalem, but in Caesarea. In 1961, Italian archaeologists were excavating at Caesarea. They were working on the theatre built during the time of Herod the Great. "In one of the reconstructions of the theater a stone bearing an inscription mentioning Pontius Pilate was being reused as an ordinary building stone." (Negev, 76)

Pilate had built a temple to honor the emperor Tiberius and this stone was inscribed to commemorate it. The stone is the only known inscription from his lifetime. Millard explains its importance to students of the Bible in these words, "A battered stone naming Pontius Pilate may not seem especially important at first, but this is the only one. No other inscription or document written in the first century AD actually mentions him. This is the only contemporary evidence for the existence of Pontius Pilate." (67)

The evidence from archaeology of both the tomb of Caiaphas and the inscription of Pontius Pilate gives historical evidence of the reliability of the Bible account of Jesus' last week. Rousseau and Arav, both Biblical minimalists have to conclude that such is the

case. "The Joseph Caiaphas tomb and the stone of Pilate from Caesarea Maritima provide archaeological evidence relating to the two individuals most directly involved in the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. The core story of Jesus' condemnation and execution may be rooted in historical reality buried under layer of theological, Christological, and ecclesiastical accretions." (140-1)

A question asked when one visits Jerusalem is where was Jesus crucified and buried? The traditional site is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. When the emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity the site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial was sought out. Hadrian had earlier ordered that a pagan temple be placed over the site of our Lord's death. A statue of Jupiter was placed over the sepulcher and one of Venus over Calvary. Because of Constantine and his mother, Helena who visited Jerusalem the site was found, the temple torn down and a church built on the site. In later years the church was burned, rebuilt, and destroyed again. During the time of the Crusades, it was rebuilt and part of the present church date from this era.

Price tells us that the rock on the foundation of the church building bears evidence of earthquake activity which the gospels speak of happening at Jesus' death (Matthew 27:51).

Magen Broshi, curator of the Shrine of the Book, excavated at the church in 1975. He proved the area was outside the city walls in Jesus' time. He uncovered a portion of the Herodian Wall in the northwestern corner of the church. That means when Jesus was crucified the area where the church was built was

just outside the wall. Broshi also discovered a rock quarry, possibly a good place for executions. He says “from an earlier period (the 7th century BC) we learned that the area was a rock quarry.” (44)

Yamanchi gave another piece of archaeological evidence for the authenticity of the church being the site. “Just to the rear of the rotunda which was built over the supposed tomb of Jesus is a Jewish grave, known as the Tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Tombs like places of execution are located outside the city walls.” (111)

Virgilio C. Corbo, a professor of archaeology at the Franciscan university in Jerusalem has studied the archaeology excavations in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher for more than twenty years. The quarry which the church was built on was used until the first century BC. “At that time the quarry was filled and a layer of reddish-brown soil mixed with stone flakes from the ancient quarry was spread over it. The quarry became a garden or orchard, where cereals, fig trees, carob trees and olive trees grew. As evidence of the garden, Father Corbo relies on the fact that above the quarry he found the layer of gravel soil. At this same time, the quarry garden also became a cemetery.” (Bahat 252)

Thus, the archaeological and historic evidence point to the place of execution and burial of Jesus being at the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. McKay concludes by pointing out “Although absolute proof of the location of Jesus’ tomb remains beyond our reach, the archaeological and early literacy evidence argues strongly for those who associate it with the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.” (216)

Archaeology has helped the Bible student with the illumination of the story of our Lord’s trial before the Jewish high priest and the Roman governor. It also has answered the skeptics in giving evidence that the events of our Lord’s life are verifiable and true.

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Comforting Words

Mike Kiser

Lesson Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Introduction

1. The Bible has a message for us in every circumstance of life (Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 4:2).
2. When friends feel helpless, words seem inadequate. We find our resources failing, yet the Apostle Paul in 125 words, a little over one minute when spoken, wrote and then said, “comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).
3. Here are some great themes he covered to leave us comforted.

Discussion

I. Our Faith Rests Upon Two Great Facts (v. 13).

- A. Jesus died.
 - 1.) Jesus died for our sins. An act of divine love (Romans 5:6-9).
 - 2.) He was our substitute (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- B. Jesus rose again.
 - 1.) Jesus’ resurrection assures us of our victory over death (1 Corinthians 15:22, 23, 51-58).
 - 2.) These are great facts of the gospel. Take them away and we have nothing (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

II. Accepting Christ Brings Us Into A Blessed State (v. 14).

- A. “In” Christ Jesus—twice told (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16).
 - 1.) The only other state for a person is to be “in sin” (Colossians 1:13).
 - 2.) We enter this blessed state by regeneration (John 3:3-5; Galatians 3:26, 27; 1 Peter 1:22, 23).
- B. Death does not rob us of that state (see also Revelation 14:13).

III. Christians Are People of Hope (v. 13).

- A. We define hope as “confident expectation” (Hebrews 6:19).
- B. Hope does not erase our sorrows and tears.
 1. Jesus wept at Lazarus’ tomb (John 11:35).
 2. When a seat is left empty, we have lost someone we loved and who loved us.
 3. But there is a rainbow in our tears when the lost loved one belongs to the Lord.
- C. Hope sustains us and moves us onward. We will not cease pressing on because we have lost a loved one but will press on with more fervor (1 John 3:1-3).

IV. Jesus Is Coming Again (vv.14, 16).

- A. Our text sums up the great promise of John 14:1-3. The time is not stated, and we are not given to speculation. We have no reason to doubt. The same power will bring Him the second time that brought Him the first time.
- B. It will be accompanied with other great events:
 1. The Resurrection of all the dead (John 5:28, 29).
 2. The Judgment of all mankind (2 Timothy 4:1).
- C. This will be a time of reunion—
 1. “We” and “them” – examine the order of the text.
 2. A great change will then take place (see 1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

V. The Grand Conclusion Is Stated (v. 17).

- A. “With the Lord”—with a new glorified body (Philippians 1:20, 21).
- B. “With the Lord”—in heaven (1 Peter 3:22).
- C. “With the Lord”—forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Conclusion

1. This glorious prospect belongs to those who are in Christ.
2. If you are not “in Christ” we encourage you to obey the gospel now.

THE VOICE WITHIN

Ronald D. Bryant

Psalm 42:1-2 – As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

In this passage the psalmist speaks eloquently of the heart of the believer. He speaks of the depth of his faith, of his soul thirsting for God. In *Psalm 63* he again states that God alone can satisfy the longings of his soul. Is it not the case that to long for God, in the things that He alone can provide, is to turn one's heart toward Him? Is it not true that to trust in Him is to embrace one's highest and noblest thoughts and desires? God gave us life, and He gave us those longings and desires. In those longings, has he not also supplied us with evidence and reason to believe; a logic with an eloquence that is not our own?

In life we face troubles and trials, we deal with fears and failings, and in each, because of God's provision we can embrace that which God supplies. We can turn to God! He alone can supply our

needs and satisfy the longings of our souls. He is our only refuge.

When we seek those things which He alone can supply, consciously and unconsciously are we not in reality seeking Him? In our darkest hours is it not to be considered that there is reason within our reasoning; that there is in our seeking Him a logic that has an eloquence all its own? We are in fact assured by Him that He is near and that He cares for us, that He waits to be wanted.

Prayerfully, consider the following: **We were made by God capable of loving and of being loved.** We long to be loved! Every child deeply longs to be loved, and that longing is universal, and no one out grows that need. The desire to be loved is a desire that our Father gave us, and in truly desiring to love are we not desiring God, for He is love? That God is love is central in Scripture. It is His message to us.

1 John 4:8 - He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Romans 5:6-8 - For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

To fail to come to love God is to fail to know God. To fail to love as God desires is to fail to know God.

We long to live. We despair of troubles brought on by infirmities and age, and yet we cling to life. In doing so, are we not in fact longing for God, for it is He Who has given us life? Jesus came that we might have life – abundant life. This fact is central in our response to God.

Acts 17:25 - Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

James 1:17 - Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Is it not appropriate to insist that God gave us life, that in it, we might seek Him and know Him, and be one with Him. It is in Him that we live and move and have our being. We cannot live as we ought apart from Him.

In the life which God has given to us, we long to know acceptance. Family and community are bound up in the experience of acceptance. The entirety of the way of Christ is bound up with knowing and experiencing and communicating acceptance. This longing for acceptance, as God defines it and proffers it, is it not actually a longing after Him? His continued presence is the established fact of His acceptance, and His desire to be accepted that He might forgive and bless us. Paul



declares, that in and by Christ, God makes the redeemed acceptable.

Ephesians 1:3-7 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

The Lord God calls us to His acceptance – to life with Him in Christ. Christ came not to condemn but to save us. He wants us to know the beauty and purpose of life. To fail to come to know His acceptance is the tragedy of rebellion and of indifference.

We long to be comforted, to know a degree of release from trouble and despair. Can it be affirmed that to long for this comfort is finally to be turned to God, for he is the God of all comfort? Paul declared:

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is

steadfast because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

Can we claim the words and the sentiments of the twenty-third psalm as our own (Psalm 23:1-6)? To long for comfort from God is to long for Him. If we fail to know His comfort is to be ruled by despair.

The fact of sin in our lives leads us to long for forgiveness and restoration to God. Release from sin and guilt and restoration to God is essential to peace for our souls. To long for reconciliation is to long for God, for He is the author of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Our restoration to God, and our peace in life is provided by Him. It is restoration to a right relationship with Him. It is provided for us in Christ, in our reconciliation to Him. He invites each of us to be reconciled to Him. To fail to know His forgiveness is to be lost eternally.

We long for eternal life. Is this longing God's voice in us, calling us to Him? His glory fills the heavens (Isaiah 6:1-6). His goodness fills the earth (Ephesians 1:3-14). He alone is our refuge in life. He alone is our soul's portion. He calls us to life eternal. We are eternal beings, and consciously or unconsciously we come to Him – we move toward Him via the deep longings of our souls. We trust in Him. We hope in Him. The longings of our souls have been authored by Him and our higher and nobler thoughts and desires are given to us by Him. Is it not correct to affirm that these desires and longings are His voice within us?

Prejudice, hostility, and psychological manipulation can be followed to produce fanatics. In dramatic contrast to these, that which is good, right, and true must be followed to produce

disciples. The truth of God has been revealed to provide freedom not bondage (John 1:17; 8:31-32). The goodness and the greatness of God leads us to choose repentance (Romans 2:4-5). Godly sorrow leads us to repentance, (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). Yet, in every aspect of our choice to follow Christ, and to honor God, we must make the choice to do so. He must be chosen. One can choose to ignore and reject God and can refuse to accept His revealed will. God invites but does not manipulate or deceive. He desires to be known and honored by those who willingly choose to come to Him.

Ronald D. Bryant has been a faithful gospel preacher for many years. He now lives in Huntsville, Alabama.

Preparing Preachers

Andy Erwin

The great preachers of the restoration movement sacrificed much for the cause of Christ. Their families did too. They went without many physical comforts so that mankind might have spiritual blessings in Christ. The church grew because of their perseverance and sacrifices. These men were crucified to the world and the world to them. If a revival of biblical preaching is to occur in the pulpits of the Lord's church, it will be led by men who have consecrated themselves to God and have devoted themselves to laboring together with Him and others of like precious faith for the greatest possible good – the salvation of the world.

Sincere heavenly goals stemming from the heart of a genuinely spiritual man will produce a truly honorable ministry. However, even chosen vessels must be shaped by Potter's hand. Each of the apostles was selected personally by Christ. Being chosen for ministry did not exclude the necessary preparation for it. Three years were spent preparing the apostles, and still more work was needed.

Peter and John were outstanding evangelists in Jerusalem when the church began. The pair was devoted to speaking those things they had “seen and heard” and worked to “fill Jerusalem” with their teaching. Though threatened, “they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus the Christ.” As a result, “the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

Would these men have accomplished such great things for the Lord had they not first been prepared? What if John’s pride and desire to be great in the kingdom had not been corrected? Would he have been satisfied to allow Peter to take a prominent role in their preaching ministry? What if Peter’s cowardice had not been overcome? Would he have looked steadfastly into the eyes of the Sanhedrin and with a straightened backbone said, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” What would have become of these men had they not been properly prepared for ministry?

Sometimes a preacher’s ministry appears to be nothing more than a little “wood, hay, and straw” loosely constructed upon the foundation laid by Christ and he suffers loss when it is tried by fire. The pain endured through a failing ministry only helps to emphasize the need to be prepared for the work of an evangelist.

A minister’s life will be filled with triumphs and tragedies and every preacher must “take heed unto himself” so that his heart, soul, mind, and body can endure the inevitable trials and temptations, avoid the pitfalls, and contribute something of lasting significance to the kingdom of God. If we are to have faithful gospel preachers possessing a servant’s heart, they must be prepared, molded, and refined by the hand of God.