

WBNP #5

Good Evening. A Puritan's Mind brings you The Wild Boar News Podcast from Sunny South Florida. Welcome, I'm Dr. Matthew McMahon.

Ministers never worship, so some say. They are never the recipients of their message, and are not lead, but lead in the congregation. This however, is grossly inaccurate.

Scripture states in Nehemiah 8:4, "And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose..."

The minister who preaches is ministering to saints and sinners; those needing encouragement and edification, and those needing conversion. The hearers listen, and are ministered to through Christ effectuating his Word as it is preached; and obviously this ministry is effectual if Gospel doctrine is preached. It is often observed that those who hear the sermon are present in worship as they listen; and this completely true. The privilege given to the hearer is to receive the words spoken as "the oracles of God." But what can we say of the preacher? Is he simply ministering? Is the pulpit only a vehicle for God to minister to the saints in the pew, or is there a dimension of worship for the minister in the pulpit? Is preaching worship?

Any true minister of the Gospel would shout with a resounding "AMEN" to the unavoidable fact that Gospel preachers enter into a dimension of worship from the time they set their eyes upon the pulpit (and arguably sooner), to the time they retire from the pulpit (and arguably later). The preacher, as he works through his sermon in the place of the pulpit, is worshipping while in the act of preaching.

We must ask and answer an elementary question before proceeding: Is the "pulpit" important? Does the Bible say anything about a "pulpit?" Charles Spurgeon, in the church he ministered at Park Street had a wooden pulpit, but at the Metropolitan tabernacle he had no pulpit. Does this mean that in one place he, as a minister preaching the Gospel, worshipped, and in another he did not?--certainly

not. The absence or appearance of a physical pulpit does not determine whether a preacher is worshipping or not. Peter in Acts 2 did not have a pulpit, through the Gospels we do not find Christ using a pulpit, and most of the prophets did not use one. A physical pulpit merely makes the experience of worship easier for the preacher and less distracting for the hearers.

Nehemiah 8:3-5 says, "He [Ezra] read from it [the Law] before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose." Ezra was easily seen behind the pulpit which probably covered most of his body, and the pulpit was used to hold the scrolls he was reading to the people. There was a focal point for the hearers (Ezra behind the wooden pulpit), a remedy for distractions (the pulpit shielded him—they were not focused on what he was wearing or if he dressed well), and an aid for preaching (it held the scrolls, and possibly any other parchments he had). Physical pulpits are useful, but the act of preaching in that pulpit is what holds our concerns today.

The pulpit is that sanctuary where a truly called minister of the Gospel exercises his God-given giftedness to the aim of glorifying Christ. In the act of the preaching, this "glorifying of Christ" is the essence of his worship, though at the same time his Gospel preaching ministers to needful people. It is here that the preacher's feet bring the good news of the Gospel of peace, and while he is doing this he acts as God's divinely appointed herald, reflecting the image of Christ as the living Word in the message he brings. The preacher ought to be exceedingly gripped with a sense that he is delivering *Christ* to the people *through* his preaching. If he is intellectually or emotionally enthralled with a sense of this, then he is often conscious of the nearness of God around the words of God as they are preached. This "nearness" and mode that the preacher travels through is the exact definition that God himself gives those who worship, "I will be sanctified by those that draw near to me." (Lev. 10:3) Though this passage describes the unhappy death of Aaron's sons while offering a strange fire to the Lord, we do find a principle here

which cannot be avoided: the ministry of the herald (whether that be the priest or preacher of the Old or New Testament) worships God as he performs the duties God requires of him. Preaching is worship. It is the vehicle that draws the minister closer to God during that hour.

Preaching is not just morally edifying speech. It is not simply a pep-rally to excite the listeners to a day or two of penitential service. It is taking the dominion of God and placing it within the deepest reaches of the soul of those he is ministering to. It is screwing truth into men's minds in such a way as to enthrall the heart with more of Jesus Christ. Preaching is a spiritual infection which ought to impregnate the hearer with the life of God and Christ. If the preacher is intimately aware that he is doing this through the unction and temperance of the Spirit of Truth, he is aware that God is delighted in the work being dealt with. He knows this is nothing he has accomplished, though he spends long prayerful hours in the study exegeting the Word and seeking God for every line of the sermon. Yet, he appreciates the fact that he is simply the vessel that has been prepared to pour forth Christ into the mouth of those waiting for rivers of living water. In that instance and that act of preaching he worships God with all his heart. His heart is poured forth and every fiber of His being screams forth the majesty of Christ and the holiness of God as He addresses the saints. The explanation of the Excellencies he is depositing into the ears of the hearers is the immediate fruit of his personal ownership of those sublime truths. Preaching, for the preacher, is worship.

It is without a doubt that worship begins sooner than in the pulpit. It begins in the study; both in study of the Bible and in prayer. Like pouring a soda into a glass the carbonation fizzes and bubbles so much that it splashes a bit out of the glass. The preacher is intimately aware of this "fizz" while preparation is under way, but once the preacher reaches the pulpit, the fizz is electrified a million times; it explodes! He knows he is not simply his own man; he is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; a holy fizz. The puritan divines would call this the "unction" of the Spirit. This "unction" is the motioning and moving of the Spirit unto the ends for which the Word is directed. Here the preacher is confident of the work he

is about. He knows that the Word going forth is not going to return to God void. (Isa. 55:11) It will accomplish all it is set to do. Here the preacher rests in a quiet assurance. He is backed by the promise that God is at work while he is about worship. In this he knows he is a planter. Seeds are sown and fruit will result. Yet, the fruit may not be seen for weeks, months or even years. Still, the preacher rests confident in who God is and what He has promised. God is at work and the preacher glories in that work like a vessel that is used by the hand to be lifted to the thirsty mouth. The preacher is worshipping in all of this. He is experiencing the pleasure of God upon himself as the Word of God rains down upon the people.

Preaching as worship also gives something away. Preachers give away what they have and what they know. Jesus told the apostles in Matthew 10:8, "Freely you have received, freely give." They were to preach Christ to the peoples, towns and cities; preaching is giving. What were they giving? They were giving forgiveness of sins in the power of the Lord Christ. Not that a preacher "gives up" what he has, but his exaltation of God in preaching by the Spirit gives the hearing soul the illumination it needs to respond to Jesus Christ, the enthroned God on high. As he is edifying the congregation of saints in preaching, he is running over onto them with doctrines, commands, rebukes, exhortations, and the like, with a joy and concern for the souls of his hearers through his own worship. He desires that they take their cup and fill it up from that God which pours forth from his own soul, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The ultimate end of this worship is to glorify God. As with all things, preaching is seen as that which ought to glorify God, yet specifically as God's special means of revealing himself through the Bible. Romans 10:14 makes this apparent, "How shall they call on him whom they have not believed?" The answer is through hearing the Word of God in the act of preaching; "...And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Sinners are commonly converted by means of the preached Word. In the act of worship, the preacher gains worshippers for the Father. He is used as the instrumental means whereby the Spirit of God will effectuate the instrumental cause of conversion in the soul of the hearer—the preached Word, the Word of truth. Then in verse 15, quoting Isaiah 52:7, we find the preaching

already has the mindset of "glad tidings and good things" and is sharing, giving away, those things to the hearers in the joy of his worship with knowing this about God.

1 Corinthians chapter 1 shows the progression of this idea of preaching as worship, if one understands what worship is about. In verses 18-25 we see Paul stating that when the "power of the cross" is preached, it is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks. Paul identifies the power of the cross as Christ crucified—that truth he knows intimately through conversion, and experimentally as a preacher. He then moves from preaching Christ to the application of Christ's redemption to base and lowly "things" (which are those converted sinners), in verses 26-31. Yet in verses 30-31 we see that one of the ends of preaching is the glorification of God by debased converted sinners. Preaching Christ ultimately brings forth the fruit of glorifying Christ by converted people. Then Paul quotes Jeremiah 9:23-24 in verse 31, "He who glories let him glory in the Lord." This is the expression of worship. The preacher does this while preaching Christ, and converted sinners do this following conversion. One knows of the glories already and is expressing them, and the other receives the glories, is changed by the glories of God, and then now expresses them thereafter.

To summarize the idea, worship in the pulpit is exercised by those who know the saving power of Christ, and express that power through the spoken word, molded by the written revelation of God in the Bible. No preacher has the market on new doctrine. New doctrine is nothing more than heresy. Preachers are really God-appointed plagiarists. The preacher, in his act of preaching, communicates the Bible (the knowledge he has gained of God) to the hearers. His worship becomes their worship. Preaching is worship.