

L.C.F. 14/8/16

READINGS: NEHEMIAH 8: 5-12 & LUKE 4: 38-44

SERIES: 'THE MUST SAYINGS OF JESUS'

3) "I MUST PREACH..."

This is the third in our series on the 'must' sayings of Jesus.

The first in the series was from Luke 2:49, "*Didn't you know I must be about my Father's business?*" We established that as Jesus gradually became aware of who he was....as he came to know his identity as the Son of God, then he 'must' be about his Father's business.... must here in the sense of being 'inevitable' – where else would you expect me to be, but in 'my Father's house'? We saw the application for ourselves... that as we are born again... as we enter into that new relationship with God... as we see the wonder of now being 'children of God' (Jn.1:12).... as we know our true identity, then our priorities change.... our Father's business becomes our business, not in the sense that we are compelled or forced to do this against our will, but a deep down desire to be about our father's business, placed in us by the Holy Spirit.

Then we looked at John 3:7 'you must be born again'. If Jesus was 'about his Father's business' what exactly is his Father's business? To bring people into the kingdom of God. And how does he do that? 'You must be born again'. We asked the question, Why? Why must we be born again? We established that a result of the Fall in Genesis 3 man (all of us), not only dies physically, but is born dead, spiritually – unable to respond to God, unable even to understand the things of the Spirit. We asked the question, Who? Who needs to be born again? We studied Jesus conversation with Nicodemus and the significance of 'you must be born again' being said to him – the most religious, respectable, responsible man on the planet. In other words, if he needed to be born again, everybody must be born again, no matter how religious, responsible and respectable we think we are. We also asked the question, How? How are we born again? We looked at the steps we need to take – to repent of the sin/the futility/the arrogance of thinking we can save ourselves and then to ask – ask the Holy Spirit to place in our hearts that life from above.

So here is number three in our series on the 'must' sayings of Jesus – Luke 4: 43. "*I must preach...*" to quote it fully, "*I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God in the other towns also, because that is why I was sent*".

This third 'must' saying gives us another insight into what it meant for Jesus to be about his Father's business - "*I must be about my Father's business*" - that was what Jesus said age 12, then in chapter 4, at the very beginning of his ministry now age about 30, we begin to see just what it means *'to be about my Father's business'*. As we said, *it was/is to bring people into the kingdom of God... by people being born again by the Spirit of God. This week we see just how he seeks to do that.... what method he uses.*

Earlier in the same chapter we read of Jesus overcoming the temptation of Satan by being obedient to the will of his Father, resisting the temptation to go for a 'quick fix' approach to bring in the kingdom of God. He identifies himself with the prophecy from Isaiah which he read in the synagogue in Nazareth - *'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'* (Luke 4:21). He drives out an evil spirit showing that he has power and authority over the powers of darkness – the people are amazed... news about him spread (vv.36 & 37)...

Then in the reading of this morning – the heading in the NIV is “Jesus Heals Many.” What other heading could there be?! He heals Peter's mother-in-law from a fever - immediately. No period of recovery needed, she *'got up at once and began to wait on them'* (v.39).

Then we read of people bringing to Jesus *“all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them”* (v.40). On top of that, *'demons came out of many people, shouting, “You are the Son of God!”* (v.41).

This is powerful stuff! This is all very dramatic!. The people had never seen anything like this before... the people had never seen anyone like Jesus before! They didn't want it to end!

In fact they wanted more! So keen were they for him to stay, they went looking for him – at daybreak! Jesus had gone off to a *'solitary place'* (v.42), but the people searched him out.... they wanted to persuade him to stay.

So, picture the scene.... the people are amazed at his teaching.... they are in awe of his authority over evil spirits, over sickness, over disease. There was a real 'buzz' about the place...people were rejoicing over their healing... people were being freed from demonic powers....people were coming from all over the area because of what they were hearing about this Jesus and his healing powers. People were flocking to Jesus.. his ministry had only just begun and people were amazed and impressed (though not all – look at verse 28 – opposition too, already). Jesus was creating a real stir.... people wanted to see him.... people

wanted to hear him... people wanted to be with him. He was immensely popular. What an incredible start to his ministry!

You can perhaps imagine how easy it would have been for Jesus to have remained there... to continue with his healing ministry... to continue to perform miracles.... to build on what he had already accomplished in terms of his popularity. No doubt such suggestions would have been put to him as *'they tried to keep him from leaving them'* (v.42). Intense pressure would have been put on him to stay... no doubt they would have said such things as, 'Look at the impact you are having.... look at the number of people following you... look at the impression you are making on these people – now is not the time to leave!'

It's at this point that Jesus comes out with this surprising statement – *'I must preach... I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.'*

'I must preach... that is why I was sent'. In other words, whilst he was on earth, up until his crucifixion, that was his priority – to preach and to teach. Yes, he continued to heal, yes he continued to perform miracles and yes, he continued to exercise authority over evil spirits, but his priority.... the most important aspect of his ministry was to preach.

Now, why was that? Why not major on the spectacular? Why not continue to impress the crowds? Why not capitalise on his popularity? The answer is that miracles in and of themselves achieve very little. People just want more! People just want another healing.... another miracle. 'Do something we haven't seen before' – impress us again!

Later in Luke's gospel, Jesus said to the crowd as it increased (11:29), *'This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign...'* He rejected their request for yet another miracle – their motives weren't right.... they hadn't understood the purpose of the miracles.... miracles were 'signs'... they had a purpose and that purpose had to be interpreted and understood.

The people in Luke's gospel were experiencing a spiritual high... but they didn't understand the significance of what was happening before their very eyes. They had to be taught... Jesus had to preach.

There is the same pattern in our O.T. Reading. The people of God were experiencing a spiritual high.... they were exiles....they had returned to Jerusalem.... the walls of the city had been rebuilt. They were rejoicing and worshipping the Lord.... the scriptures were brought out... they listened

attentively, but the Levites “*read from the book of the law of God making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.*”

In other words, they preached.... they taught, so that the people could understand. That was their priority too, to preach so the people could understand.

Now if that was priority in the O.T. and if preaching was the priority for Jesus, what was to be the priority of the Apostles? Mark 3:14 - “*He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach*”.

And what was to be the priority of the early church? Look at Acts 6 – the appointing of the seven to be responsible for the pastoral care of the church, so that the apostles could “*give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word*”. The same priority, to preach, so that the people could understand.

And what was to be the priority for those who were to be appointed leaders as the church expanded? In 1Tim. 3 there is a list of requirements, largely that the person should be “*beyond reproach*”, but significantly “*able to teach*”. Then, in Paul's letter to Titus, “*He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*” He must be able to teach and preach – that is to be the priority, so that the people may understand.

Are you getting the message?! The priority of preaching... even today... the importance of biblical preaching and teaching, that people may understand and know the truth.

Now you will say to me, 'Well, you would say that Adrian; you like to preach!' And that is true, but I would say to you that after nearly 35 years in the ministry, I have come to know by experience the importance of preaching in the life of the church.

You will no doubt be saying, 'But Adrian, we have heard some awful sermons', and I would say to you, 'yes, and so have I!' How on earth some people are allowed into some of the churches pulpits, I shall never know!

I remember hearing the story....boring preacher, droning on and on... no sign of the sermon ending... in frustration, somebody lobbed a hymn book towards the

preacher... it missed, but hit an old lady near the front pew. She was heard to say, 'Oh, hit me again; I can still hear him!'

Now it's not easy to preach.... it's time consuming.... it demands a lot of time, prayer, reading and study. Then there is the struggle to get the right structure and to include appropriate illustrations. It's hard work and there is always the temptation to cut corners. Like the clergyman who was being visited in his parish by his bishop. They talked about the service the next day and the bishop asked the vicar what he was going to preach on. The vicar rather smugly said that he hadn't prepared anything as he had made a vow to the Holy Spirit that he would rely on him to give him what to say when he stood up in the pulpit. After the service the bishop joined the vicar in the vestry and said to him, 'I release you from your vow!'

Even though there are, sadly, many poor preachers in many churches, and even though it's time consuming and is hard work to prepare, I still hold to a high view of biblical preaching. It is the vehicle God uses – still – even today, even though many despise it and regard it as an outdated means of communication. Although many may despise it, God still uses it.

Listen to what I read in one of my commentaries on Luke's gospel: 'Let us beware of despising preaching. In every age of the Church, it has been God's principal instrument for the awakening of sinners and the edifying of saints. The days when there has been little or no preaching have been the days when there has been little or no good done in the Church. Let us hear sermons in a prayerful and reverent frame of mind, and remember that they are the principal engines which Christ Himself employed, when He was upon earth. Not least, let us pray daily for a continual supply of faithful preachers of God's word. According to the state of the pulpit will always be the state of a congregation and of a Church.' (J.C. Ryle 'Expository Thoughts on the Gospels. Luke: Volume 1, page 128/9).

I trust that anyone visiting our website will be clear about the priorities we have as a church. Our 'strap line' is 'The word of God for the people of God'... as people read through our web page they will see just how important I believe preaching is for the spiritual health of any church, but especially for our little fellowship here. Look at our website and you can only conclude that we have a high view of preaching!

Never has there been such a need for Spirit anointed preaching – Why? Because we live in an age where people are looking for the spectacular – even and especially in the church. Many people in the church demand the spectacular...

they want dramatic experiences... they want 'spiritual highs'. I remember a vivid example of this. In the mid 90's there was the 'Toronto Blessing'. A lot of pressure on clergy to embrace this movement... I had to check it out because some in my congregation were pushing for the involvement of our church. I went to a meeting that was arranged to promote this movement. Somebody from the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church spoke telling us about what had been happening etc. etc. - a verse from the OT was taken (out of context!) to justify what was about to be experienced. Chairs were cleared... catchers put in place, as it was expected that we would all be 'slain in the Spirit.' Some were.... they were undoubtedly having an experience...there were all sorts of weird and wonderful noises and movements going on. Yes, people were having an 'experience', a 'spiritual high', but they had no understanding of what was happening... no awareness of the dangers of what was happening. There was no attempt at real biblical preaching... no attempt to teach... no attempt to ground or justify the experience in the word of God... no attempt to be obedient to the word of God which exhorts us to '*test the spirits*'. All very dangerous, all because there was no preaching... no teaching. That was I realised afresh the importance of preaching. I came away thinking '*I must preach....*'.

Pray for Bob and me as we seek to preach and teach in this church. In doing so, you are praying for yourselves and the spiritual health of this church - "According to the state of the pulpit will always be the state of a congregation and of a church", to quote Ryle again.

For those who are visitors to us, if you belong to a church where there is good, solid biblical preaching, be very thankful and pray for those who have responsibility for that ministry. If you belong to a church which is not blessed with biblical preachers, pray that God would raise up faithful preachers of his word. But remember, we live in a technological age – make use of it! There are many good preachers out there that you can listen to or read on the internet. One of my favourites is John MacArthur, but there are many others.... John Piper, Tim Keller (all Americans), but then there are the websites of some UK churches ... All Souls, Langham Place... etc. etc. We are, in these days, without excuse – we can always hear good, sound biblical preaching.

It is always possible to hear good, sound biblical preaching... its always possible to hear the word preached so that, as we read in Nehemiah, God can make the scriptures clear to us, '*giving the meaning so that the people could understand.*' That was why Jesus was sent – to preach, to fulfil the scriptures and to make those scriptures clear to us. And that is what we try and do here, week by week, to preach the word, giving the meaning so that we, the people, can understand.