

PREACHING

pure and simple

Stuart Olyott

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EVANGELICAL
MOVEMENT OF WALES
SERVING THE CHURCH

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Introduction

John is in his twenties and Jack is almost fifty, yet they have become good friends. They did not know each other until they met at a series of monthly preaching seminars in a nearby town. These monthly meetings not only gave to each man a new friendship, but they changed them for ever.

Before going to the seminars, John had never preached. It had been on his mind for a long time, but he had not known quite how to begin. After all, what exactly is preaching? What is the difference between a sermon and a 'talk'? Why is some preaching arresting and powerful, and some boring and flat? What are the essential elements of a good sermon? The seminars answered John's questions and put him on the right track. Today he preaches fairly regularly and a good deal of spiritual work has been done through his ministry.

Jack's story is quite different. Before going to the seminars he had been preaching for over twenty years, and yet he felt that he ought to be doing it better. He had read quite a few books on preaching. He had also asked a number of people for advice. Why, then, did his sermons not appear to feed anyone? Why did people switch off when he had been going only a few minutes? Most important of all, why did he know of so few people who had actually been changed by any of his sermons? To his intense relief, the seminars sorted him

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out. Many people now thank the Lord for Jack's powerful preaching of the Word.

The seminars were very modest affairs. Each one consisted of an introductory talk that said nothing new and owed a lot to the insights of others. This was followed by questions from the floor and half an hour of guided discussion. And yet the Johns and Jacks who attended those meetings constantly refer back to them and use their material to evaluate not only themselves, but also each other. They have asked that the substance of what they heard should be put into a brief book. So here it is.

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Part I

What is preaching?

If someone spent a week reading through the Bible, and then a further week getting to grips with the main events of church history, what would they notice? They would notice that God's work in the world and preaching are intimately linked. Wherever God is at work, preaching flourishes. Wherever preaching is devalued or absent, the cause of God goes through a thin time. The kingdom of God and preaching are like conjoined twins who cannot be separated; they stand or fall together.

What does this mean for us? It means that if we have any serious desire to see God worshipped and loved more than He is, we will be passionately interested in the whole subject of preaching. This will be true whether we ourselves are preachers or not. If we preach, we will want to do it better. If we don't preach, we will want to do everything we can to help and encourage those who do.

So what is preaching? It is stunning to discover how very few people can give an accurate answer to this question. This is true even among those who have been preaching for years! The problem is that vast numbers of people have formed their ideas about preaching from what they have heard and read, rather than from a close study of the Bible.