

# IN RESPONSE – THREE *ELEMENTS* OF PREACHING: JESUS (PART 1)

by Dennis Prutow

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Last time I ended with a summary of the three elements of preaching. The prophetic element proclaims the truth of Christ. The evangelistic element pleads the proper response. The pastoral element persuades and teaches. Each element depends upon the corresponding work of Christ. Christ the prophet declares His will by His Word and Spirit. Christ as priest brings men and women to God. Christ the King subdues sinful hearts to himself.

As Christ executes these three offices in His life and ministry, the three elements of preaching coexist in the ministry of the Word. The pastoral influence tempers the prophetic. The evangelistic peppers the pastoral. The prophetic lends urgency to the evangelistic.

I am convinced these three aspects of ministry must always be present. The evangelistic message must carry pastoral and prophetic elements. The evangelist must teach. Prophetic exhortations and pronouncements must be pastoral and evangelistic. The prophet must teach and evangelize. The pastor teacher must declare, "Thus says the Lord," and he must evangelize.

Different messages and different periods of ministry may have different emphases. However, each element of ministry and preaching should always be present. We should therefore remember we are discussing *elements* of the whole. We are viewing *aspects* of one portrait, that of preaching. We are examining *facets* of one gem of gracious means. The teaching elder must be a more self-conscious pastor, prophet, and evangelist *in his preaching*. Our chief exemplar is Jesus Christ.

Christ often taught using parables. After rehearsing several such parables, Matthew 13:34-35 reminds us, "All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 'I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.'"

Christ spoke in parables, in part, to fulfill the prophetic word given by Asaph

in Psalm 78:2. In addition, when the disciples asked Jesus why He taught in parables, our Lord gave this answer.

To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, "You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Matthew 13:11-17).

Christ spoke in parables to apply the doctrine of divine sovereignty, worked out in predestination, under the heads of election and reprobation.

The parables of Matthew 13 are themselves pastoral. With them, Jesus teaches His disciples the nature of His kingdom. He explains why He teaches in parables and He also explains the parables themselves. Our Lord Labors at exploring the kingdom in its inner nature, its outward manifestations, its promised growth, its profound value, and its manner of ingathering. Jesus asked his disciples, "'Have you understood all these things?' They said to Him, 'Yes'" (Matthew 13:51).

At the same time, the parables are evangelistic teachings concerning the kingdom. "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying,

'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15). This was Christ's basic mode of operation. The parables of the kingdom establish the distinction between those who are embers of the kingdom and those who are disciples of the world. The parables call men and women to examine their status before God. By implication, they call men and women into the kingdom. They have a definite evangelistic thrust.

Finally, the parables manifest the prophetic element. Why teach and evangelize using the parables? Part of the genius of the parables is to declare the truth of God to a fallen and reprobate people.

In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them' (Matthew 13:14-15).

On one hand, the sovereign God works His will in the awesome and awful decree of reprobation through the parables.

On the other hand, the Lord Jesus turns to His disciples and says to them, "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Matthew 13:16-17). The prophet of God declares the blessing of God upon His people.

The prophetic element is pastoral. It is also evangelistic. Such should be the case with our preaching and teaching today. The teaching elder is pastoral, evangelistic, and prophetic in ministry. Next time we explore the example of our Lord from Matthew 11.

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## IN RESPONSE – THREE *ELEMENTS* OF PREACHING: JESUS (PART 2)

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Matthew 11:20-30 gives us a good example of Jesus combining the prophetic, pastoral and evangelistic. We begin with Matthew 11:20-24.

Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.

Christ declares the prophetic woe. He pronounces doom upon these cities on the basis of their deeds, their rejection of both the gospel message and the confirming miracles.

Reflecting on the ingratitude of those among whom he had long discharged the office of a prophet, and performed many wonderful works, without any good result, he broke out into these words, announcing that the time was now come, when he should depart to other cities, having learned, by experience, that the inhabitants of the country adjoining that lake, among whom he had begun to preach the Gospel and perform miracles, were full of obstinacy and of desperate malice.<sup>1</sup>

This message of Jesus Christ is a prophetic declaration.

Matthew 11:25-27 continues.

At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All

things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

Note the time frame. On the same occasion Jesus denounced the cities of Galilee, He gives thanks to the Father.

Calvin observes, “The discourse is addressed to the Father, and consequently is marked by greater energy than if he had spoken to his disciples. It was on their behalf, no doubt, and for their sake, that he gave thanks to the Father, that they might not be displeased with the low and mean aspect of his Church.”<sup>2</sup> Here we plainly see the pastoral element in this discourse of Christ. God is pleased to hide the things of salvation from those who consider themselves wise and prudent. God is similarly pleased to reveal the things pertaining to salvation to those with childlike dispositions.

Who comes to savingly know the Father and to avoid the judgment pronounced on Bethsaida, Capernaum, and Chorazin? Christ, addressing the Father in prayer, teaches His disciples. “No one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matthew 11:27). In prayer, as their pastor and shepherd, our Lord teaches and leads His disciples in a proper confession of the sovereignty of grace. Here is an example to emulate.

Not satisfied with either prophetic announcement or pastoral care, as if they are incomplete without the third element, Jesus Christ immediately adds the evangelistic appeal. “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Christ addresses the weary and heavy-laden, those who labor and are burdened. Who are these weary burdened souls? Calvin explains.

He speaks of...those who are overwhelmed by their sins, who are filled

with alarm at the wrath of God, and are ready to sink under so weighty a burden.... Christ means by persons laboring and burdened, those whose consciences are distressed by their exposure to eternal death, and who are inwardly so pressed down by their miseries that they faint; for this very fainting prepares them for receiving his grace.<sup>3</sup>

Christ invites those under conviction to come to Him. “The relief which he promises consists in the free pardon of sins, which alone gives us peace.”<sup>4</sup> Christ is the master evangelist because He is the master prophet and teacher.

The prophetic, pastoral, and evangelistic elements complement one another. They form a full orb message. For some, teaching the subtleties of divine sovereignty and affixing an evangelistic appeal are incongruous. This is not the case for our Lord. John Murray gives notice of this.

Whatever our reasoning might dictate, the full free and unfettered overture of Christ in the gospel comes on the crest of the wave of sovereignty. The truth is that the overture is the climax to which all else in this text moves. The movement of disclosure breaks into the full and free overture of the gospel.<sup>5</sup>

The evangelistic appeal in Christ’s thinking is the natural culmination of the combined emphasis upon judgment and divine sovereignty.

This shows us, in a graphic way, how Christ readily combined the prophetic, the pastoral, and the evangelistic elements in His message. If these three elements are essential when expounding the most difficult texts and subjects, these three elements must surely be a regular feature in all our preaching.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *The Comprehensive Calvin Collection, Harmony of the Gospels* (Albany Oregon: Ages Software, 1998), 2:18-19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>5</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings*, 4 vols. (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 3:189.

# IN RESPONSE – THREE *ELEMENTS* OF PREACHING: PETER

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Christ executes three offices. Christ the prophet declares His will by His Word and Spirit. Christ as priest brings men and women to God. Christ the King subdues sinful hearts to himself.

I've maintained there are three corresponding elements of preaching. The prophetic element proclaims the truth of Christ. The evangelistic element pleads the proper response. The pastoral element persuades and teaches. We have seen them at work in the words of Christ. If I am correct, we also see these elements at work in the preaching of the apostles.

Acts 3:12-26 is an example of Peter's preaching. Peter responds to the amazed Jewish people after the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. Peter declares the truth of God concerning the Jewish people and Jesus. Verses 12-16 clearly reveal the prophetic element. Peter points an accusing finger at the Jews. He indicts them. As an eyewitness, he convicts the Jewish people of murdering the Messiah whom God raised from the dead.

Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.

Peter's tone changes at verse 17. The evangelistic element comes to the fore. Peter relates the work of Christ to the prophets. He calls the people to repent of their actions toward Christ. He calls the people to embrace Christ.

And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers

did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

Peter then proceeds to teach the people their station before God. He does so by linking Jesus to the promise of Moses and the days of Christ to all the prophets. He tells the people they are heirs of the covenant made with Abraham. This pastor teacher assures the people that God sent Jesus for their salvation in fulfillment of this covenant.

Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.

Peter indicts, pleads, and teaches. His message is at once plain and straightforward. It is convicting, penetrating, and at the same time, profoundly comforting. Peter is prophet, evangelist, and pastor.

Peter was arrested. The next day he spoke before the Sanhedrin. Acts 4:8-12 summarizes the short message inspired and empowered by the Holy. "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...(verse 8). First, as a *prophet*, Peter once again declares the truth of God to the rulers of Israel.

Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead by this name this man stands here before you in good health (verses 8-10).

"Let it be known to all of you...." With power, passion, and compassion, Peter proclaims the truth.

As a *pastor*, Peter adds that Jesus Christ fulfills the words of Psalm 118:22. Verse 11, "He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone." This teaching may be repugnant to the Jewish Rulers. Yet it does represent a pastoral element in Peter's presentation.

Peter reasons with the Rulers of the nation. They know the story of Jesus. They know their own rejection of Him. They also know the Psalms and the predictions regarding Messiah. Peter takes a key portion and applies it to Christ and to the Jewish people. Again, his tone changes. He is measured. He teaches.

Finally, Peter the *evangelist*, notes salvation comes in the person of Christ alone. Declaration and teaching lead Peter to set forth the only appropriate response. Verse 12, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." The call to turn from rebel ways and turn to Christ is implicit. The One who heals is the Messiah. The rejected One is the Savior. If healing and salvation are in Him alone, all must turn and follow Him.

In short compass Peter, declares Christ, teaches how Christ fulfills ancient prophecy, and states the only way of salvation. Peter exemplifies prophetic, pastoral, and evangelistic preaching. The modern pastor teacher must not only teach. He to must be the local prophet and evangelist in the midst of the people of God and in a lost and hurting world.

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# IN RESPONSE – THREE *ELEMENTS* OF PREACHING: PAUL

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We have looked at examples from Jesus and Peter to substantiate the thesis that all good preaching contains three elements, the prophetic, the pastoral, and the evangelistic. There appears to be no specific order and we can make a case the three elements are often closely intertwined. We now turn to the apostle Paul. We begin with Paul's great sermon in Athens on Mars Hill, Acts 17:22-31.

Paul's introduction is well known. He points to the religious nature of the pagan Athenians. Verses 22-23, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.'" Worship betrays the religious nature. The very God these Athenians declare "Unknown" and at the same time worship, Paul takes as his starting point. He is, strangely, as the Greek text states, the agnostic God. This is the unknown God, the Athenians, these agnostics, confess they know exists.

Paul takes this acknowledgement as a place to begin his teaching. He teaches the Athenian philosophers know the true God, the God of the Bible, not as Savior but as Creator, verses 22-28.

Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, "For we also are His children."

Paul teaches self-evident truth. The true God does not live in temples made with hands. God gives life and breath and all things. He caused all humanity to

spring, not from a primeval pool, but from the original man, Adam. This God determined the times and places for all to live. God also created humanity with a special purpose. Humanity's purpose is to seek God (verse 27). If there is any doubt all of this *teaching* is based upon self-evident truth, a pagan poet confirms it (verse 28).

On the foundation of this teaching, Paul introduces a prophetic note (verse 29). "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man." We are all children of God by creation. The reference is not to a saving relationship with God or to adoption.

Since this is the case, we owe it to the Creator not to violate Him with idolatry, with violations of the Second Commandment. We know the Divine Nature by virtue of our own creation and the creation around us (Romans 1:19-20, Psalm 19:1). The implicit message is one of guilt before God. As a prophet, Paul indicts the Athenians.

The teaching and indictment lead to evangelism. Evangelism can never properly occur in a vacuum, without adequate foundation, without some understanding based in teaching. Evangelism also cannot properly occur without the indictment of guilt for sin before God. There must be some conviction. This conviction comes by a work of the Spirit (John 16:8) through the instrumentality of Providence (Psalm 83:13-16) and or the spoken Word (Ephesians 5:11). The pastoral element in teaching and the prophetic element in declaration are essential to proper evangelism.

With this foundation, Paul turns to God's purpose in calling men to Himself (verses 30-31).

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

God overlooked sin in former times. How so? He did not bring immediate punish-

ment. Paul says the same thing in Romans 3:25. "In the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed." In Christ, the sins of the elect were formally punished. This demonstrated God's righteousness (Romans 3:24-26). Condemnation for all other sins comes at final judgment and in hell.

The call to all people everywhere is to repent (verse 30). This was the message of Jesus. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). This was the message of Peter. "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). It is a consistent call. It is the proper response of the informed and convicted sinner. Turn. Turn from sin. Turn to Christ.

Paul grounds the imperative in the coming judgment (verse 31). "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). This too is self-evident truth possessed by pagan sinners. Regarding such sinners Paul says, "Although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them" (Romans 1:32).

The Judge is Jesus Christ. This truth comes by special revelation. God proves Christ is the judge of all by raising Him from the dead (verse 31). The resurrection is the hinge upon which the gospel swings. Paul does not hesitate to proclaim the resurrection of the dead. Acknowledgment of it is essential. "If there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain" (1 Corinthians 15:13-14). Paul ends his message with an evangelistic appeal rooted in the final judgment and the resurrection. Paul, along with Jesus and Peter, displays the three elements of preaching, the pastoral, the prophetic, and the evangelistic. Our preaching must do the same.

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