



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #9

C. The Power of God's Word

1. The Power Is in the Word, Not in the Preacher

There is a certain amount of power in every word that a person speaks. We can use words to hurt others, and we can use words to help, encourage, comfort, and persuade others. Sometimes a person can accomplish more with words than with force. That is why someone has coined the proverb: "The pen is mightier than the sword."

The world still admires orators of the past like Demosthenes of Athens and Cicero of Rome. Audiences can be swayed into different ways of thinking and acting by the words that they read or hear. A preacher, therefore, may begin to think that he can accomplish great things for the kingdom of God because of the words he chooses to and because of his speaking ability. But we should not think that the power to create and sustain faith in Christ and thus to save men's souls lies in our words and in our speaking. Listen to what the apostle Paul said about his preaching in Corinth. **"I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God...I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"** (1 Corinthians 2: 1-4).

The power to create, sustain and strengthen faith in Christ is not in the preacher, but in the Word of God that he preaches. As far as the world is concerned, the good news about Jesus is nothing but foolishness. Paul said: **"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness"** (1 Corinthians 1:18,23). How can the story of a man who lived a long time ago in another land and who was put to death on a cross help or save anyone? It seems like foolishness. But Paul said: **"It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe"** (1 Corinthians 1:21).

No merely human word can convert anyone to true faith in Jesus. No merely human word, no matter how powerfully it is presented, can change anyone from being an enemy of Christ to being a believer in Jesus. The Holy Spirit has chosen to do His work in men's hearts through a particular message of divine power: the law of God to knock down man's pride and the Gospel of Christ to create new life and hope. **"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter (the law) but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"** (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). **"For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us"** (2 Corinthians 4:5-7).

This treasure is the Gospel of Christ, **"for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes"** (Romans 1:16). The Holy Spirit creates and sustains spiritual life through the Gospel, even when it is spoken by us whom Paul calls earthen vessels, pieces of pottery that are easily broken. The power is in the Word of God, whether it is written or spoken. Paul wrote to Timothy: **"From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"** (2 Timothy 3:15). It is power sufficient to give us wisdom that will save us, because it gives us Jesus Christ, our Savior. The Gospel produces trust in Christ in our hearts and it maintains that trust through repeated hearing of that same Gospel! **"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"** (Romans 10:17).

Questions

1. Why do some people think that the pen is mightier than the sword?
2. Why is God's Word called foolishness by unbelievers?
3. What power does God's Word have that no human word has?
4. What power did God's Word have on the first day of the world?
5. What is the new covenant, and how it different from the old covenant?
6. What must the preacher recognize about his own abilities?