**Speaking God’s Word: A Practical Theology of Preaching**

**By Peter Adam**

Peter Adam is [vicar emeritus](http://stjudes.org.au/community/vicar-emeritus/) at St. Jude’s Carlton, formerly principal of Ridley College Melbourne, and vicar of St. Jude’s. He is the author of *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching*, among books with similar titles such as *Hearing God’s Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality*, *Written for Us: Receiving God’s Words in the Bible*, and *Walking in God’s Words: Ezra and Nehemiah*. *Speaking God’s Words* offers a theology of preaching. Adam outlines the purpose of the book from the outset, “My aim in this book is to provide a robust practical theology of preaching as part of the ministry of the Word in the local congregation. I want to provide a theology of preaching, because only theological arguments are convincing in the long term” (p. 9).

The book is divided into two parts containing seven chapters. The first three chapter titles are declarations: 1) “God has spoken,” 2) “It is written,” and 3) “Preach the Word.” Adam contends that God spoke to create the world, is revealed through written words, and in consequence commanded his Word be preached because his words are effective, are part of his self–revelation, and apply to us today. Broadly speaking, Adam argues pastors need to develop a robust and practical theology of preaching. He hopes his book is practical in four different ways: by showing again that the Bible is practical in its teaching on the ministry of the Word, by illustrating various helpful models of ministry from the history of the Christian churches, by giving examples from my own ministry, and by including some practical advice. (p. 9–10).

Adam states that he wrote *Speaking God’s Word* with the following questions in mind: What does the Bible teach us about the ministry of the Word? What are the current questions about preaching? What can I say that will have theological substance and be of practical usefulness to those who preach? (p. 10). It is in part two that Adam addresses many of the current questions about preaching and theology. Adam is clearly a fan of Reformed men such as John Calvin, Richard Baxter, and the Puritans. In fact, he spends much time highlighting John Calvin’s theology of preaching (i.e., p. 61 and pp. 138–145).

Adam contends that preaching is a ministry of the Word (p. 61). But he defines preaching as “the explanation and application of the Word to the congregation of Christ in order to produce corporate preparation for service, unity of faith, maturity, growth, and upbuilding” (p. 71). It is important to note that Adam believes preaching is “a” ministry, not “the” ministry of the Word. There are other forms in which the Word is ministered through such as converting unbelievers, training people in ministry skills, through disciples and counseling (p. 72). This is the reason why he writes, “Our ministry may be pulpit–centred, but it should not be pulpit–restricted, for such a ministry of the Word will suffer severe implications” (p. 75).

Part two of the book makes the case for the importance of Scripture. In chapter five, Adam makes the case for the relevance of Scripture and the importance of having proper biblical theology. Adam is also quick to assert that preaching God’s Word is not the same as speaking the words of God. In other words, he explains, “It may be fair to infer that when we preach Paul’s words we are preaching the Word of God, but it does not necessarily follow that our preaching is in itself the Word of God” (p. 115). Therefore, the preacher simply explains, preaches, teaches, and urges people to accept God’s Word (p. 118). That is why Adam declares that expositional preaching is the best kind of preaching because, “The only kind of preaching worthy of the name is that in which the truth of a Scripture text is explained and applied to the lives of the hearers” (p. 119).

**Critique:**

A practical theology of preaching is needed for the church. Adam’s book is indeed a practical theology. He accomplishes the book’s intended goal by staying faithful to its theme throughout. His arguments for a theological foundation for preaching are both helpful and refreshing. Those unfamiliar with the theology of preaching of men like Calvin and Baxter will find some of the content informative, if not edifying. However, those form a more reformed background may find such emphasis predictable and not necessarily novel since Adam clearly comes from the Anglican tradition.

In the book, Adam attempts to make the case for expository preaching. He believes that expository preaching needs to be restored as the staple diet of Sunday sermons (p. 128). He contrasts expository sermons with topical sermons. In his view, expository sermons move clearly from “text” to “today,” which in his view topical preaching does not. However, the dichotomy between the expository sermon and topical sermon is both predictable and perhaps unfair. Can topical sermons not also move from text to today? It just depends on how one applies topical preaching in their exposition of Scripture.

Regardless of the fact that Adam may mischaracterize topical preaching, one of the more helpful emphasis of the book is given in relation to application. Preaching without application is partly useless. That is why he is right to emphasize how both Calvin and the Puritans sought to teach others how to apply Scripture to their hearts. Another helpful focus of the book its focus on Scripture. If the preacher is to “speak God’s Word,” he must do it well. Or as Adam contends, the aim of the sermon in regard to Scripture should intentionally teach the purpose of Scripture, model a good use of Scripture, and encourage people to test what the preacher says by Scripture. This emphasis keeps the preacher humble and helps him understand that preaching is more than the uttering of a person’s insights, but the proclamation of God’s Word.

Chapters one and six are perhaps the most helpful. Chapter one provides a solid theological foundation for preaching. Adam’s arguments are biblically based and consistent. They are also easy to understand. Chapter six is also most helpful because it defines the purpose of preaching. Adam contends that preaching is a means to an end. A lot of homileticians contend that preaching is the apex of the ministry of the Word. But Adam is right that it is simply a means to serve God and Christ, serve the Word of God, and serve the people of God (p. 126). Another aspect of chapter six that is helpful are the charts Adam provides and the practical steps to remaining faithful to an expositional model of preaching.

Adam clearly is a product of his Anglican background. His emphasis on Calvin’s theology may be a bit overdone. Though Calvin indeed serves as a model for faithful expository preaching, other models could have been offered. Even his examples of Calvin’s preaching seem overdone. For instance, he dedicates two pages of a quote from Calvin’s sermon on Ephesians (p. 150–152). To be fair, Adam’s highlight of Calvin’s work offers a helpful example of how one can aptly preach the Bible. Adam would have boosted his argument if he also offered examples of his own preaching in the book.

Overall, Adam’s book is a great contribution to the field of homiletics, which is saturated with how–to works for sermon delivery. He often references Scripture and makes good arguments for the proper use of Scripture. Though it lacks on providing a hermeneutical model for preaching and is stronger on an emphasis for having a theology of preaching, it offers preachers good reflective content. Finally, the subtitle of the book could have been slightly changed to a practical theology of expository preaching, which better reflects his emphasis.

**Significant Quotes:**

* My aim in this book is to provide a robust practical theology of preaching as part of the ministry of the Word in the local congregation. I want to provide a theology of preaching, because only theological arguments are convincing in the long term. (p. 9)
* It is preaching as part of the pastoral ministry that is my concern. I hope that I can be *practical* in at least four ways: by showing again that the Bible is practical in its teaching on the ministry of the Word, by illustrating various helpful models of ministry from the history of the Christian churches, by giving examples from my own ministry, and by including some practical advice. (p. 9–10).
* I have written this book with the following questions in mind: What does the Bible teach us about the ministry of the Word? What are the current questions about preaching? What can I say that will have theological substance and be of practical usefulness to those who preach?
* Three Biblical foundations of preaching: God has spoken, it is written, preach the Word
* The Bible’s assumption is that part of God’s self–revelation includes his speaking, and that the Bible contains the words of God. (p. 18).
* The sovereign transcendence of God means he can be immanent within his universe, act within it, and communicate within it, without losing his transcendent power. (p. 21).
* My argument so far has been that God has spoken, and that this belief is fundamental to biblical faith. Modern theology has tended to remove the idea of speech from the forms of divine revelation, but I hope I have demonstrated that this is a false move, and that God’s words are inseparable from his self–revelation. (p. 25).
* What we have in Scripture is the revealed and preserved words of God. (p. 27)
* The notion of “cumulative revelation” is helpful, as long as we recognize that God is the preserver of the revelation, and the one who decides which parts of his revelation will be preserved for future generations, and which parts are of value only to the generation to which they were originally given. (p. 30).
* As the Old Testament is the product of the inscripturation of the revelation, and that as revelation continues through the preservation of the inscripturated documents, so the New Testament is the product of the inscripturation of revelation in and about Jesus Christ. (p. 33)
* J. I Packer, “Scripture is God preaching.” (p. 34)
* Words are effective. God’s words are part of his self–revelation. God has appointed the ministry of the Word. God has preserved his words for us today. God has human agents in giving his revelation and preserving his words. God’s revelation is both historical and contemporary. (p. 55–56)
* Our preaching of the Bible should not be merely historical (without contemporary application) or merely contemporary (with no regard to its historical context and meaning). (p. 56)
* Let me state again that I am not opposed to preaching; indeed, I believe it is the central part of our ministry of the Word. But I think it is important to do justice to all the ministries of the Word [evangelizing unbelievers, training and equipping the saints, counseling, public reading of Scripture, choosing Bible readings) and not to make preaching carry a burden which it is unable to bear. (p. 72)
* Our definition now reads: “the explanation and application of the Word to the congregation of Christ in order to produce corporate preparation for service, unity of faith, maturity, growth, and upbuilding.” (p. 71)
* Our ministry may be pulpit–centred, but it should not be pulpit–restricted, for such a ministry of the Word will suffer severe implications. (p. 75)
* Our preaching and teaching of Christ, then are inextricably linked with communicating the content of the Bible; but the content of Scripture provides a means to an end, that is preaching and teaching Christ. (p. 89)
* There is often a direct link between a theology of Scripture and a theology of preaching because both depend on a prior theology of revelation. (p. 92)
* I have tried to show that my any view of revelation which is true to the Bible must contain the idea that the Bible includes propositions, but also that is cannot be claimed that revelation is given exclusively in terms of propositions. (p. 97)
* The crucial issue for the preacher is the relevance of Scripture. (p. 97)
* Scripture is not only the record of God’s words of revelation in times past, it is also God speaking to us now. (p. 99)
* But my argument is that God’s intention was that the historic revelation would serve future generations. (p. 101)
* What does it mean to respect the divine authorship of Scripture? It means to recognize the authority of Scripture as being the authority of God himself in his words … Because the Bible is God’s words, we should also expect to find that the words of God are useful and have contemporary power to bring salvation to us, to change us, and to transform us. (p. 105)
* The Bible is God–given. The Bible is theological. The Bible is self–interpreting. The Bible is cohesive. (109–111).
* It may be fair to infer that when we preach Paul’s words we are preaching the Word of God, but it does not necessarily follow that our preaching is in itself the Word of God. (p. 115)
* Perhaps the best way of describing it is to say that when human beings explain the Word of God, preach it, teach it, and urge people to accept it, then the Word of God achieves its purpose. (p. 118)
* There are not strictly speaking several kinds of preaching (topical, expository, textual) or many kinds of sermons (doctrinal, lectionary, life situation, relational); there is only one, expositional. The only kind of preaching worthy of the name is that in which the truth of a Scripture text is explained and applied to the lives of the hearers. (p. 119)
* The preaching and teaching of the Word is not regarded as an end in itself, however, but as a means to an end. (p. 125)
* In my own view the bulk of our preaching ought to be expository … (p. 129)
* It is therefore the work of the Spirit that God brings his Word to us. (p. 144)
* To be servants of the Word it is not enough to love preaching: we have to love people. (p. 163)
* Our love for the people to whom we preach will be particularly evident by the care with which we not only open up the passage and give them the truth, but also by the care with which we apply the truth personally and appropriately to their lives. (p. 164)
* Have you told your congregation that you love them? (p. 166).
* Show your people that you love them by the time you spend in prayer and preparation. (p. 167)