

Editorial: Preaching the Power of God

Edgar R. Lee, S.T.D.

Editor and Senior Professor of Spiritual Formation and Pastoral Theology,
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

Sometimes the nature of preaching is poorly understood, even by those who are its most fervent advocates. While pursuing excellence in their sermon craft, modern preachers often see preaching primarily in terms of its basic components: exegesis (what the text meant to the original writer and hearer), application (what the text means today), homiletical form (sermon structure) and delivery (oratory).

While each of the above components is essential to good biblical preaching, none of them alone—nor all of them collectively—captures the essence of preaching. It is really quite easy to miss the forest as we closely examine the trees! Periodically, we need to ask, “What is the essential nature of preaching?”

Biblically, preaching derives from the Old Testament experience of “the word of the Lord.” The Hebrew term for “word” is *dabar*. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, the noun and its verbal counterpart occur more than 2,500 times in the Old Testament with a semantic range of “word,” “speech,” “speaking” and “thing.” Particularly interesting is the fact that *dabar* may be used both for the acts of a king, for example, as well as for the record of those acts in a book. The term can convey either the

dynamism of the act itself or the historical memory of the act.

Particularly significant are the approximately 400 times that God himself “spoke.” God’s speech, or Word, is first and foremost the going out of his personal power to reveal and accomplish what he wishes. Thus, in Isaiah 55:11, God speaking through the prophet illustrates the working of his Word by referring to rain and snow that facilitate the fruitfulness of the planet: “so is my word [*dabar*] that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” God is always present and active in his Word, filling it with certainty and power, revealing and accomplishing his will.

This understanding of the Word of the Lord pervades the New Testament as well. Thus, for Paul, “All Scripture is *God-breathed* (the literal translation of the Greek *theopneustos*)” (2 Timothy 3:16a). Only because of its God-breathed quality is it “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (3:16b).

No wonder that the word used for the utterance of Peter’s “sermon” on the Day of Pentecost is *apophthengomai* (Acts 2:14). In Greek culture, *apophthengomai* was used for the weighty utterances of