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Bold Witness: Engaging Church and Society with Scripture

Dr James Krohn | KRUX Stellenbosch | BISA Kalk Bay

Acts 1:6-8 | 6 “And so when they had come together, they were asking him, saying ‘Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’ 7 He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times and epochs which the Father has fixed by his own authority; 8 but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.’”

1 Cor 2:1-5 | 1 “And when I came to you, brothers, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”

Acts 26:24 | “And while Paul was saying this in his defence, Festus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.’”

“Nothing is more miserable than uncertainty”
Martin Luther

1. God Bears Witness to Himself | The Witness
2. God Rules by His Speech | The Word
3. God's Speech is God's Power | The World

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6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature, **a wisdom**, however, **not of this age**, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified **the Lord of glory; ...**”

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Rev 1:1,5 | 1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, ... 5 and from Jesus Christ, **the faithful witness**, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

2. God Rules by His Speech | The Word

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Christ had “forced open a door that [had] been locked since the death of the first man. He [had] met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything [was] different” ... It was “the beginning of the New Creation: a new chapter in cosmic history [had] opened.” CS Lewis

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1 John 1:1-4 | “1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled—the Word of Life— 2 ... we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you may have fellowship with us, as indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And I write this, so as to make our joy complete.”]

2. God Rules by His Speech | The Word

“[The Apostles] are chosen to provide the inspired witness which is definitive for the church. They are not merely recipients of revelation, but organs of revelation.”

Ed Clowney

2. God Rules by His Speech | The Word

(i). We do not preach *from* the Bible, we proclaim *the* Bible—God’s own testimony to Himself in Jesus by means of the prophets and the apostles. When the Bible speaks, God speaks. God speaks when the Bible speaks.

“The highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it. [And therefore] we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgements, or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit.” (Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.4)

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(ii). It follows therefore, that expository or expositional preaching is of the utmost importance. It is indispensable, as it is the means to allow God's Word to speak for Himself the way He had intended to.

“Expository preaching is the God-ordained and Spirit-enabled means by which the church grows and flourishes both in the addition of new believers and towards maturity in Christ. It is not merely an option, but the essential.” (David Jackman)

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(iii). The apostolic testimony is to Jesus Christ (who is *the* Faithful Witness), nothing more and nothing less; and through him, to the fulfilment of the complete corpus of God's own self-revelation leading to the coming of the kingdom.

“God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in his Son ... [who] upholds all things by the word of his power.” (Heb 1:1-3)

“To preach the gospel every time is to preach Christ every time, from every passage. Only if we preach Christ every time can we show how the whole bible fits together. ... The Bible is in the end a single, great story that comes to climax in Jesus Christ.” (Tim Keller)

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(iv). In order to proclaim the apostolic message with clarity and conviction therefore, a thorough grasp of Biblical Theology (Redemptive History) is crucial for grasping the full glory of God's purposes for humanity in Christ.

“Biblical theology furnishes a charter for preaching, a declaration of the authority, urgency, and relevancy of preaching Christ from the Scriptures. The preacher who finds in this approach a fresh calling to his labours in the gospel will also discover in biblical theology the key to new richness in sermon content.” (Ed Clowney)

3. God's Speech is God's Power | The World

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“... against the political and economic idolatries of Rome [the message of the Bible, Revelation in particular] is faithful to the prophetic tradition's conviction that the true worship of the true God is inseparable from justice and truth in all aspects of life. It is in the public, political world that Christians are to witness for the sake of God's kingdom.” Richard Bauckham

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Tim Keller | "... the gospel 'confronts,' 'completes,' and 'consoles' every society's baseline cultural narrative" no matter how resistant it appears.

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What does it mean to be a BOLD witness?

- a. Not private, but public
- b. Not style, but content
- c. Not ashamed, but confident in (the midst of) suffering

2 Tim 1:12-14 | “12 For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him, until that day. ...”

Response

In troubling times, three kinds of theologies emerge ...

- a. Escapist—*Epicurean*
- b. Duration—*Stoic*
- c. Confident, enduring trust—*Biblical Faith*

Calvin to Edward Seymour, 1548:

“There is some danger that you may see no great profit from all the reformation which you shall have brought about, however sound and godly it may have been, unless **this powerful instrument of preaching** be developed more and more. It is not said without a meaning, that Jesus Christ shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked [Isaiah 11:4]. ... Even so, albeit the edicts and statutes of princes are good helps for advancing and upholding the state of Christianity, yet God is pleased to declare His sovereign power by this spiritual sword of His Word, when it is made known by the pastors.”

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“For among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that he deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that **his voice** may resound in them.”
(Institutes 4.1.5)

2 Tim 4:1-5 | “1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 **preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction.** 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine (teaching); but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. 5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.

The Apostolic Witness in Scripture to the Faithful Witness of Jesus Christ, compels us by the power of the Holy Spirit, to be witnesses of God’s great grace, through the proclamation of the Gospel.