

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2010**  
**“Becoming a People of the Word”**

### **Introduction**

I've been asked to come and speak to you about "Becoming a People of the Word". It's an interesting phrase. The Scottish people were once known as the "people of the book", where the book was the Bible. And yet it's no surprise to find that in today's increasingly secular and multi-cultural society the people around us know little, if anything, of the contents of the book, even if they still have a copy on their shelves. What is becoming increasingly worrying is the increase of Biblical illiteracy within the church walls, and the vast numbers of Christians who have a very small working knowledge of Scripture. So today we're going to look at a few of the whys and the hows of becoming a people of the word, and hopefully some of my passion can rub off on you.

### **WHY?**

#### **1. Because we are commanded to.**

- Deuteronomy 6:5-9
- Joshua 1:8

#### **2. Because Jesus did.**

- Luke 2:46-47; in the temple
- Luke 4:1-13; the temptation - "it is written"
- Luke 4:16-22; reading the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue
- Jesus knew His scriptures; we may not see Him picking up a copy of *Every Day with Yahweh* from His local bookshop, but the knowledge of even the most humble Jewish fisher would probably have put us to shame.

#### **3. Because it is the basis of a Spirit-filled life.**

- How can we test a prophetic word if we do not have a knowledge of the Scriptures against which we are to test it?
- 2 Timothy 3:16 - the most famous verse. "All Scripture is God breathed". It is there so that we can be competent, and equipped for every good work.

#### **4. To know God; to love God; to hear God;**

- But be aware that Bible study is not enough. "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life" (John 5:39-40).

- "...two doctrines are friends with one another; for they are both in God's Word, and I shall not attempt to reconcile them. If you show me that they are enemies, then I will reconcile them. "But," says one, "there is a great deal of difficulty about them." Will you tell me what truth there is that has not difficulty about it? "But," he says, "I do not see it." Well, I do not ask you to see it; I ask you to believe it. There are many things in God's Word that are difficult, and that I cannot see, but they are there, and I believe them. I cannot see how God can be omnipotent and man be free; but it is so, and I believe it. "Well," says one, "I cannot understand it. My answer is, I am bound to make it as plain as I can, but if you have not any understanding, I cannot give you any; there I must leave it. But then, again, it is not a matter of understanding; it is a matter of faith." (Spurgeon)

### **HOW?**

#### **1. Rediscovering our passion for knowing the Bible**

We live in an age where there are more possibilities for reading and learning Scripture than ever before, and yet it seems that people know it less and less. Let me assure you - every single person here can find a way of studying the Bible that suits them to a tee. I'll share some of the things that I have come across, but there are dozens more that might suit you better. Don't give up!

##### a. Bible reading notes

There are loads of these. Pop into Wesley Owen or shop online. There are even some that you can get for free. They can be a really simple, easy way to get into the discipline of reading your Bible. It doesn't need to be every day - find something that fits your schedule. And it needn't be reading - there are some audio options available now too.

##### b. Bible in a Year

At the tail end of last year one of the men in our church invited everyone to take part in reading the Bible in a Year. We all got a schedule, and were partnered with someone else to encourage us to keep going. There are, again, lots of options for Bible in a Year, including some thematic options, or a chronological reading, rather than just reading from Genesis to

Revelation.

c. Scripture Memorisation

This used to be all the rage in Sunday Schools around the country, and I know that much of the Scripture I know is Scripture that I learnt in earlier years, before I "grew out" of it. However, I think that this is a very powerful tool to help us learn more of the Bible.

d. Meditation

Again - numerous styles. Lectio Divina is a popular one today.

e. Group Study

f. Academic study

- Personal analysis or reflecting on sermons.
- Bible arcing (<http://www.biblearc.com>)

## **2. Rediscovering our passion for preaching**

I want to take you on a bit of a personal journey that I've been taking over the past 3-4 years. It begins with one of my big passions - that of seeing men coming back to church, as opposed to the haemorrhaging of men that has been taking place over the last couple of decades. A man named David Murrow wrote an excellent, and very challenging book called "Why Men Hate Going to Church". I think that at the point when I first read that book I had a very "low" view of preaching, brought low by experience, and by various conversations with educationalists in particular about the nature of learning. However, through reading Murrow online, and a stack more reading besides, I came into contact with Mark Driscoll, pastor of a church in Seattle. I think I can safely say that listening to Driscoll preach, even if I don't always see eye-to-eye with him, has been one of the most spiritually significant things of the past few years for me. And through Driscoll I have come into contact with others like John Piper and Tim Keller in the States, and Tim Chester here in the UK.

So, why I am telling you this? Because over that time I've had plenty of time to think and reflect on the nature and status of preaching within the church here in the 21st Century teaching. And what I've come to believe is this - preaching is a Spiritual gift that we are in danger of squandering and suppressing. We have begun to believe that preaching is just about a transmission of information, and as such we are bowing to the "superior" knowledge of learning experts who tell us that the common 'lecture' style of this transmission is the least effective. But let me tell you what I believe: preaching is a Spiritual gift. It isn't always well represented by the men and women in the traditional wooden pulpits and trendy perspex lecterns up and down the country, but even a cursory glance through the New Testament will back up what I'm saying.

Why is it important to emphasise this? Because Spiritual gifts are timeless. We wouldn't think of suggesting that healing was no longer relevant now that we have doctors, or that speaking in tongues is obsolete because we have Google translate available on our smartphones. Preaching is a prophetic gift, an important gift that allows the church to hear from God. Done properly, it lays open our hearts and exposes them to the truth of the word of God. Done properly, the speaker becomes irrelevant as the Spirit ministers to us.

If you have the gift of healing, or the gift of prophecy, or dream interpretation, I could point you to a dozen courses that would help you grow in your gifting. But there is, to my knowledge, only 1 that encourages preachers to grow. We need to rediscover our passion for preaching before we end up with nobody who knows how to use the gift.

If you are a preacher, or an aspiring preacher, I want to encourage you that the gift you have is of utmost importance, and that you should tend to it, feed it, and exercise it as much as you are able.

However, by its very nature, I'm preaching here to a bunch of people for whom the majority are not preachers. And so I want to encourage you to do 3 things:

**i. Expect more from your preacher.** Don't just expect something safe; something intellectual. Expect much, much more. Expect that they would expose you to Scripture, and that the Holy Spirit would be manifest in their words. Expect them to be passionate about the word. Expect them to wrestle with the word, and to bring that struggle to you.

**ii. Check up on them.** The New Testament is filled with warnings not about false prophets, but about false teachers. And yet our charismatic churches today tend to be filled with instruction on testing prophetic words, and little on testing the words of our teachers (which, as just mentioned, should be just as prophetic).

**iii. Encourage them to greater things.** Much like prophecy, preaching is not a gift that you can learn in a couple of years and then that's it. There is much more to learn, and we need to encourage and enable our preachers to hone and perfect their gift.

### **3. Being people of the Word, not people of the book**

I want to make one final point, and it is this: let us becoming people of the Word, not people of the book. The Word is a living, breathing God - Jesus Christ the Word become flesh; the book is merely a representation of Him. Some churches in Scotland are guilty of idolising the Bible; having some words printed on some paper, but not having the Word imprinted on their hearts. Yes, let us read the Bible - because it can bring us closer to Jesus. But it is not through knowledge that we gain life, but only through Christ. (John 1:1-13)