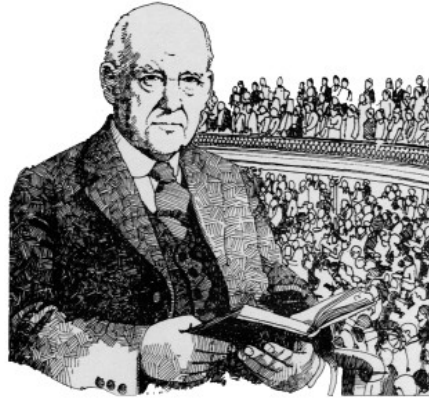


Martyn Lloyd-Jones

The Pastor as Preacher

By Erroll Hulse

<http://africanpastorsconference.com>



Dr D Martyn Lloyd-Jones was omni-gifted. He was a born leader and a brilliant chairman of meetings, whether in church meetings or in conferences. But he was pre-eminently a preacher. It was his care for and his love for souls that made him an effective preacher. When he was leader of the large congregation at Westminster Chapel, London, it was not possible for him to engage in systematic pastoral visitation of the flock. However it was his custom after every service to spend about two hours in his vestry counselling those who needed his help. A deacon was always in charge to supervise this part of the doctor's ministry. Mr Micklewright was a principal helper in this work. He had pastoral experience himself and was ideal for assisting the doctor. Dr ML-J was a pastor by telephone to many other pastors. Much of his time was spent in advising and shepherding fellow pastors, especially younger men.

It was preaching ministry that formed the basis of all Dr ML-J's work. It was his through his preaching that built up the church known as Sandfields, in Wales where he was pastor from 1927 to 1938. The same is true of Westminster Chapel, which congregation was built up gradually after the 1939-1945 world war. The war had severely depleted the congregation. Many had moved out of the city. It was his preaching ministry that spear-headed his great work among students as he frequently preached at IVF and IFES conferences. I heard him give papers on many occasions. I was present when he spoke for over two hours at the Evangelical Library in 1962. The subject was the tercentenary of the Great Ejection, of 1662. He spoke with passion and I must say I never ever saw him read a paper. His method was to use an outline. Even when presenting an historical or biographical paper, his method was to preach. His delivery was always personable and dynamic. He regularly preached at mid-week meetings and rallies throughout the United Kingdom. It was his preaching that was foundational to all his books. As with the English Puritans whom he admired, loved and commended, he preached his sermons first and later edited them for the publishers.

Here I will first give an outline of his life and then concentrate on what we can learn from his example as a preacher.

A biographical sketch

Born in Cardiff, South Wales, Martyn Lloyd-Jones spent the greater part of his childhood in rural Cardiganshire before moving with his family to London in 1914. Concluding his education at St. Marylebone Grammar School, he entered Bart's Hospital at 16, to follow a career in medicine. He passed all his examinations with brilliance. In 1921 he was chosen as Chief Clinical Assistant to the famous Sir Thomas Horder who was a cardiologist and the King's physician. The importance of precise thinking and analysis in diagnosis made a deep impression on the young ML-J. An acute intellect combined with astute observation of human nature and excellent memory were natural gifts which contributed much to his work as pastor and preacher. He could not put a date to his conversion but he came gradually to realise that he was dead in sin and found his only hope in Christ during the years 1923-24. By 1925 (and it is easy to follow his age as the 20th century progressed since he was born in December 1899) he was experiencing an intense struggle over his calling to be a pastor.



Turning his back on a successful and lucrative career in medicine, he committed his life to the ministry in South Wales in the district of Aberavon, to a church popularly known as Sandfields. Around this church was a population of about 5,000 living in sordid and overcrowded conditions. The church was part of the 'Forward Movement' and was a refuge when sorrow or bereavement or trouble of any kind came to the people there. ML-J's salary was £225 a year plus manse and rates. This was in striking contrast with a medical consultant who at that time could earn anything between £2000 and £5000 per annum. Part of his contract was to have 13 Sundays per annum free. This was a feature throughout his ministerial life giving freedom to preach in many other places and also take time to refuel and rest from the relentless demands on the life of a pastor. Initially ML-J was regarded as a lay-pastor because he had not been to any seminary or through any theological training.

In 1927 Martyn married Bethan, who was also a medical doctor. She was two years under Martyn's ministry before she really understood what the gospel was.¹ In 1927 their first daughter Elizabeth was born and Ann was born ten years later.

A remarkable work of the Holy Spirit took place in the church at Aberavon. The church membership increased in 1930 by 88, of whom 70 were converts from the world. The following year, 1931, saw another 135 added, 128 of whom were 'from the world'. All his life ML-J was a profound believer in the phenomena we call revival. He always pointed out that the Kingdom of Christ does not advance by business methods and worldly schemes. He never ceased to warn against shallow evangelism of the decisionist kind which lacks conviction of sin and heart repentance.

Upon his settlement in the Sandfields church, he had to learn from scratch all that is involved in leading an assembly of believers. Very soon his calling as a preacher was recognised. In the first year of his ministry he agreed to preach in 52 other churches usually on a Tuesday or Thursday evening. The impact of his itinerant ministry was felt throughout Wales. His preaching was powerfully evangelical and in resolute opposition to prevalent modernistic theology.

In 1932 and 1937 ‘the doctor’ (everyone seemed to refer to him by that name), ministered in North America. His powers as a preacher were soon appreciated. Leaders in Canada urged him to return with a view to being called to minister of a large church there. He declined.

The record of these early years reveals many instances of his pastoral care individual needy people, and sometimes the dying. He was a personal pastor not only in visiting but also in correspondence. Many Christians who lacked pastoral leadership wrote to him for counselling. On one occasion when his correspondence had to be forwarded to him, there were 90 letters that had accumulated in one week.² Not only was ML-J a born preacher, he was a born leader. Soon there gathered round him a dozen pastors. Together they covenanted in specific practical ways to promote the evangelical cause in Wales.

In May 1938 the doctor announced his resignation from the pastorate in Sandfields and in the same month accepted Dr Campbell Morgan’s offer to share the pulpit at Westminster Chapel in Buckingham Gate which is only a short distance from the House of Commons and Buckingham Palace. During the war years the Lloyd-Jones family lived in Haslemere, Surrey. In 1943 Dr Morgan retired, leaving the doctor as sole pastor of the church.

1939 to 1945 saw the congregation scattered and reduced to about a quarter of the size it had been under the ministry of Campbell Morgan. There are circular galleries at Westminster Chapel which when totally full, together with the ground floor area, can accommodate about 2,000. The first gallery level can seat 720 and the upper gallery about 200.

The congregation was ignorant of the Reformed faith and unaccustomed to series of expository sermons. Some were opposed outright to ML-J and preferred Campbell Morgan’s alliterated easy-to-follow simple preaching outlines. The doctor’s style was more challenging enabling his hearers to think through doctrine and understand it. This situation was encapsulated in the remark of an indignant male attendee who went one Sunday morning expecting to hear Morgan and was disappointed. “I went to hear Morgan” he complained afterward, “and heard that Calvinist instead!” Some of the deacons were tinged with liberalism. Overall the majority were content while the ministry was shared, but were not happy when Campbell Morgan retired and they faced the prospect of ML-J at every service.

Under these circumstances the doctor exercised exceptional wisdom. On Friday evenings he organised a time of discussion when the congregation could freely discuss any subject. It should be noted that a pastor will very soon know how the ground lies if there is opportunity for open discussion.

Some of Lloyd-Jones’ friends were doubtful whether the primitive simplicity of church life in Calvinistic Methodism could succeed in London. One of the observers at that time was a Dr Johnson. ‘When I saw that he was without choir, musical entertainment and any external aids set to preach the Chapel full, I wondered if he could – with his away preaching in the week – sustain the load’. At one time the weekly open discussion concerned what could be done to fill the Chapel like it had been filled under Campbell Morgan. Many suggested that there should be additions to the service. A minority expressed the view that the primary reason they attended was for the preaching and did not desire any extra items.

The primacy of preaching is illustrated by the form of service followed. A chapter in Iain Murray’s biography has the title ‘Sunday mornings in the 1950’s.’³ It captures magnificently the form and atmosphere of those times for those who will never have the privilege of having been there. There were no accessories. There was a substantial reading of Scripture, a 10 to 15 minute prayer, and then a sermon of about 40 minutes. On the Lord’s Day evenings, it was the same, except that the main thrust of the sermon was evangelistic and would last anything from 40 to 60 minutes. There were always four hymns in the usual Non-conformist manner. I cannot recall an addition of any kind whatsoever. During Campbell Morgan’s day there used to be a choir, but that disappeared.

These years, 1939 to 1969, when Campbell Morgan retired from Westminster Chapel were momentous years. Here in the heart of London the doctor exercised a preaching ministry, the influence of which spread round the world. In addition to tourists who made Sunday at Westminster part of their itinerary, university students preparing for all kinds of vocations from many countries, regularly attended Westminster Chapel. Also many students from the London Bible College attended Westminster. For them the doctor was a model preacher.

My wife and I arrived in London in 1954 with the express purpose of studying extramurally at London Bible College. I had just graduated as an architect and worked in an architectural practice in London. We lived at the Foreign Missions Club. There we met Iain Murray and David Fountain who together, insisted that we attend Westminster and benefit from the doctor's ministry.⁴ We were inspired and imbibed the teaching at Westminster from 1954 to 1958. Our London Bible College studies (under Dr Ernest Kevan), prevented us from attending the famous Westminster Chapel 'Romans lectures' on Friday nights. The Sunday series that made a major impact on us was on Ephesians, a series on chapter three of Genesis and a short series on Ezekiel chapter 36.

In addition to his itinerant preaching all over Britain during the week and during the summer break, the doctor was also in demand in the Student Movement. For example, his book with the title '*Authority*' was first preached as a series of sermons at a conference for students.

Throughout his ministry from his early 30s to 80, The Doctor preached to congregations roughly ten times the size of those of any leading preacher in the UK today. Besides his own congregations at Westminster, 1,200 to 1,400 on Sundays, there were the large crowds at the mid-week rallies or special occasions. For instance as early as 1932 he preached to 6,000 in Toronto and in 1935 to 7,000 at Llangetho. The Lord not only gave him the gift of preaching, but gave him the congregations which would benefit from this preaching. He was, without doubt, the foremost preacher in the United Kingdom during the 20th Century.

In 1941 a quarterly meeting began for ministers which was by private invitation. This developed into the 'Westminster Fellowship' which was confined to full-time pastors. Sometimes subjects were addressed by a visitor or member of the fraternal but mostly it consisted of open discussion led by the doctor a chairman. In 1967 I began to attend. There must have been about 220 who were eligible to attend. The average attendance was about 120. Some travelled all the way from Wales to attend. For nine months of the year the fellowship took place on the first Monday of the month. Monday is the 'tired day' for pastors. Attendees would return from the fellowship greatly encouraged. To a number of members of the Fellowship the doctor was a friend and counsellor a shepherd guiding and advising them in their difficulties and encouraging them through their family and personal trials.

In 1968 ML-J fell seriously ill and resigned as pastor from Westminster Chapel. This brought to a conclusion 30 years' ministry there. He wrote to his friend Philip Hughes, that he felt he needed to place into written form the material that he had preached, particularly on the book of Romans. Letters from friends confirmed this desire. A missionary in Mombasa wrote to say that he had read the monthly sermon printed in the Westminster Record since 1948 and another missionary in Morocco wrote to assure the doctor that his written ministry had been a very great blessing over a period of ten years. For six months during 1968 the doctor did not preach at all. His recovery from surgery was successful and in 1969 he was able to resume his very considerable and widespread itinerant ministry.

A significant event in the doctor's life took place in 1977 when he gave the inaugural address for the founding of the London Theological Seminary. This was a seminary that had been established through his encouragement.

In 1979 the former cancer from which he had suffered, returned. He was constrained to limit his public engagements, yet still kept a few preaching engagements during 1980 in Scotland, Wales and England. The doctor believed passionately in the Puritan view that it is a Christian duty to prepare well for death. In his final illness he maintained an outstanding testimony and was an inspiration to his own family and the wider Church. He entered glory on the 1st of March 1981, St David's Day.



Learning from Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones as preacher

During 1939 ML-J was invited to speak at Westminster Seminary in America. He chose as his theme 'Preaching and Preachers'. Sixteen lectures were published in a book with that title, by Hodder & Stoughton. In the first chapter 'The Primacy of Preaching', he analyses the reasons why preaching has fallen from the prime place it should always occupy in the church of God.

From the outset we have to keep in mind what preaching really is. It is addressing people in the name of the Triune God through the Bible and addressing them in the whole of their being: intellect, affections, conscience and will. Gospel preaching is the earnest endeavour to persuade people and move them to repentance and faith. Gospel preaching is unique inasmuch as it can only be effective by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence the place of prayer and holiness in the life of the preacher is paramount.

The doctor always commended the English Puritans and like them, he believed in preaching as God's way to convert sinners and to feed and sustain believers. Like the English Puritans he held that there is no substitute. Nothing else addresses the whole person, mind, affections, conscience and will, like preaching. Nothing else comes with authority from God himself. Nothing else is inhabited by God the Holy Spirit in the unique way that preaching is. The Son of Man himself came to preach as did the one who prepared the way for him. The multitude did not go out into the wilderness to hear a lecture from John the Baptist. A rock formed his pulpit and the heavens his sounding board. He preached. And when his hearers arrived John did not flatter them or set out to make them feel good. His aim was to bring them to repentance.

Since Gospel preaching is unique, the doctor devoted the first two chapters on his book *Preaching and Preachers* to that theme. He warned against the trend to allow entertainment to dislodge the primacy of preaching with musical items, songs, solos or by testimonies. He referred to the new kind of official in the church - the 'song leader', who is supposed to produce the atmosphere. 'He often takes so much time in producing the atmosphere that there is not time for preaching in the atmosphere!' Preaching as the vehicle in which God's power is revealed, ebbs away when distractions have left minimum time to attend to it.



A variety of influences are antagonistic to the prime place of preaching today. In the days of the apostles the Jews demanded miraculous signs (1 Cor 1:22). Today many of charismatic persuasion think that the power of God is vested in signs, wonders and miracles. Even though nothing happens except in their imagination, this idea persists. But those who persevere in their calling to preach, are rewarded in the testimony of changed lives.

The primacy of preaching is often usurped by 'methods'. Energies are exhausted in administration or in counselling. Effective expository preaching requires enormous discipline of mind and heart. There are several mega congregations in the USA where expository preaching is practised. Don Carson of Trinity College, Deerfield maintains that he does not know of one effective expository Bible preacher in the USA who has not taken measures rigorously to protect the primacy of prayer and study (Acts 6:2). There is a balance to be kept. Pastoring and caring for people is vital but the imperative exercise of study must not be neglected. The Scriptures liken the expositor to an ox treading out the grain. It is taxing work (1 Tim 5:18).

What makes preaching unique? What makes preaching different from political speeches? What makes preaching different from lectures in school or university?

The answer is that preaching is addressed to the whole man: mind, affections and will, to convert him to God and when converted to move him to love and serve the Triune God with all his being. In politics the speech maker will try to get his hearers to vote for his party. In preaching the object is to constrain people to believe in and live for Christ.

It is a mistake to confuse preaching with lecturing. Lectures can be assisted by power points and overhead projectors both to impart information and keep attention but that can never substitute for preaching. The use of an overhead projector tends to break the direct link between the preacher and his hearers. Overhead projectors are useful for lectures. Lectures can be informative and even inspiring. But lecturing is not preaching.

Preaching is God's appointed way by which sinners are humbled. No human agency on earth can bring about conviction of sin toward God. That is the unique work of the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised, 'When he comes he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement.' (John 16:8). Of course the Holy Spirit uses a variety of means such as reading and personal friendship and discussion or listening to radio or audio cassettes, but it is expressly declared in Scripture 'God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.' (1 Cor 1:21). Note that in the eyes of the world preaching is foolish. Satan hates it because he knows that it is God's chief way of humbling sinners and saving them.

Principles of interpretation

The inspiration of the Bible is plenary. It extends to every part. Every chapter of the Bible is the work of God the Holy Spirit and the Bible is inspired in the very words that are used. The Bible script came in at different times and through a variety of prophets a fact which is beautifully expressed in the opening Hebrews, 'In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways'. The Holy Spirit inspired different prophets in different places and with widely various circumstances. The scriptures are made up of history, wisdom books, and the experiences and writings of the prophets. The New Testament consists of narrative and doctrine which came in the form of letters by the apostles. There are also apocalyptic books like Daniel and the book of Revelation. The Gospels include accounts of Jesus' miracles and his direct teaching as in the Sermon on the Mount, or by parables. Every part of Scripture requires careful analysis as to its intent. For instance Bildad in chapter 18 of Job is misguided and tells us the exact opposite of Psalm 78. Wicked men are not always cursed in this life. Often wicked men prosper and get away with much evil behaviour harmful to others. The preacher is required always to examine the intention of Scripture. He must ponder best way to present that part. He must always measure how much material he can present. The doctor displayed wonderful skill in baking a well-rounded fresh loaf of bread, just the right size for his hearers.

There is a set of principles of interpretation to be used in the interpretation of Scripture in its diversity of character. This is called hermeneutics which is the science of interpretation. A basic handbook like Milton Terry's 'Biblical Hermeneutics' enables the preacher to grasp what is figurative, how to deal with simile and, how to preach on the parables and so on. Think of the difference between preaching on the clash of King Hezekiah and Sennacherib (Isaiah 37-39) and say just two words in Paul's letter. A favourite with the doctor is a sermon he preached from just two words: 'But God' (Eph 2:4). An important principle is to preach on the great central themes of the Bible and leave parts about which you are uncertain until the Holy Spirit give you light on them. We will never in this life know everything. God is transcendent and we rejoice in that fact. We do not have to know everything. Calvin, great expositor that he was, was not ashamed to say that he did not understand the Book of Revelation. That was modest of him because we can be sure he understood most of it. But there are parts which we all find hard to interpret.

I often saw the doctor expose and mock modernists in his preaching with telling effect. He scorned the critical unbelieving attitudes of higher critical scholars whose attitude to the Bible is deplorable. This was important because there were always students present who were tempted by the poison of unbelief residual in modernism. His method was to say that we must always humble ourselves before God and never think that we can sit in judgement on his holy Word. He warned that there is a judicial blindness given to proud scholars who deem themselves to be more intelligent than God and who sit in judgement on his Word.

The inspiration of the Bible is verbal. The very words and sentences are God-breathed and therefore inerrant and infallible. The 16th Century Reformers such as Luther and Calvin made it mandatory that ministers of the Word mastered Greek and Hebrew in order to know the sense of the Scripture. Few pastors are able to master Hebrew but at least we now have so many linguistic helps and critical commentaries that it is possible to check carefully the meaning of the text.

A further important factor in the Bible is its unity. In spite of such a variety of materials the whole when put together is organic. Every part complements every other part. A term which pertains to the Bible is holoscopicity, a word which is used in physics and biology. The term points to the fact that parts of a body may represent the whole of the body in question. In a holograph, even the smallest part contains the picture of the whole, when the means of observation is present and available. It is possible for scientist to have knowledge of a whole body through the information contained in one cell. Of course we would understand the word holoscopicity differently when it comes to the Bible.

The vital matter that I am driving at is that whenever we prepare a message from any part of the Bible we always consider that part in the light of the whole. The study of immediate context of any text of the Bible is essential. But as important is the consideration of any text or context within the whole Revelation of Scripture.

This in turn is related to the subject we call biblical theology. It has to do with the revealing activity of God which from the beginning was progressive. Thus from Genesis, the first book in the Bible, we have a story that develops into a complete book of promise which we call the Old Testament. Everything is looking

forward and is preparatory to the coming of Christ who is born into the world by incarnation and who brings salvation. At every point the preacher has to take note of this historic progressiveness and relate his material to the whole. As an example there is the account of the birth of Samson. When Manoah the father of Samson, asked the angel who told him about the impending birth, he answered that his name was 'wonderful' (which in the Hebrew is *pele* – Isaiah 9:5). When Manoah took a young goat and sacrificed it on a rock, the angel of the Lord went up in the flame as it blazed toward heaven. What does this mean? That sacrifice on the rock is symbolic. It is an emblem and an announcement of what was to come when the supreme work of Christ was achieved in his sacrifice of himself on the Cross at Calvary. A sermon on Manoah and his sacrifice means that the preacher can paint the picture of an important part of the history of God's people and then proceed to preach.



The character of preaching

In preparation it helps to have a check list of the elements that characterise a sermon. It should be:

1. Expository
2. Progressive or systematic
3. Exegetical
4. Doctrinal (instructional)
5. Structural
6. Applicatory (pastoral)
7. Practical
8. Experimental
9. Trinitarian
10. Evangelistic
11. Powerful (spiritually compelling)
12. Popular (relevant and attractive)

As we examine the principal features of Puritan preaching I am not suggesting that all the Puritans exemplified all these qualities all the time or indeed that it is possible for any preacher adequately to fulfil them all in one sermon. You cannot say everything every time. For instance, in his description of the Great Judgment in Matthew 25 our Lord does not even mention faith. Why should he? The necessity of faith is spelled out in other places. It is a mistake to overpack a sermon. The average person is limited in the amount of material he can absorb in one sitting. The best kind of preaching, rarely possible and rarely achieved, is the kind in which one great main point is driven home so that the hearers never forget the impact.

When a preacher is coming near to completing the preparation of his sermon, he may well ask the following questions: Is this sermon really expository? Is my text in harmony with the context? Is it exegetical? Have I fathomed the precise meaning of the text or am I making it say what I would like it to say? Will the Word of God itself come with power? Is there doctrinal instruction? Will my hearers be built up in the great central truths of the faith?

Have I assembled my material with the best possible structure, easy to follow, logically connected, easy to remember? As I preach this sermon am I dealing with my people pastorally? Am I mindful of and sympathetic with, their struggles and temptations? And is this exposition practical? What are they expected to do about it? Is my sermon experimental? Will hearts be warmed? Will Christians be delighted in their union with Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

What about those in the congregation who do not believe? How will this affect them? Will it be powerful? How can I bring my hearers to repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ? Will I be used to compel them to come in? (Luke 14:23). What is there about my sermon which makes it appealing and attractive? Our Lord used references to nature and Thomas Watson used delightful, pithy metaphors and similes. How can I emulate my Master and some of his best servants to make my preaching the effective vehicle of salvation and edifying to believers?

The task is exceedingly difficult. Paul says, 'And who is equal to such a task?' (2 Cor 2:16). Although he was, in the formal sense of college or university education the most under-privileged of the Puritans John Bunyan came closest to exemplifying all these features, characteristics which can be used like a check list. Bunyan in God's providence can act as an encouragement to many who feel inferior because they have lacked the advantages of seminary training.

The preaching of ML-J was essentially doctrinal. Doctrine is a word that many fear. We must be doctrinal in the sense that we proclaim the Triune God, his attributes, his ways with mankind, his wrath against sin and his grace to save in the person of his Son. Every application that is made must be theological in the sense that it is the counsel of God to us as to how we live in the home, at work and in recreation. Preaching the gospel is preaching the salvation that is in Christ and this cannot be done unless there is clear teaching about the Three persons of the Trinity, that is the knowing God (theology). We baptise converts in the name of the Three Persons. That is theological. Jesus said, 'You are the light of the world' (Matt 5:14). This light is the light of truth. The apostle Paul declared that the Church is 'the pillar and foundation of the truth' (1 Tim 3:15). The churches are intended, with their pastors as leaders and supported by the memberships, to be the place where the truth is well established and where the truth is held up high for the benefit of all. How can a church be a bright light if the members are not well taught and if they are not zealous in their minds and in their practical living for truth?

A method by which a preacher can check whether he is preaching the whole counsel or will of God (Matt 28:30; Acts 20:27) is to read through *The 1689 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*. Ask the question, How much do my people know of the truths set out in the 32 chapters of this Confession? It may be helpful to preach a series of sermons on the subjects outlined but to be sure to ground the sermons in Scripture.

There are innumerable examples of what it is to be doctrinal. For instance take the person of Christ as human and divine. That is a glorious subject. Jesus is all that God is, and at the same time he is all that a man is. This is an integral part of the Gospel and needs to be preached in a soul-gripping fashion. Campbell Morgan was noted for the way in which he could divide his subject and text in a structured, imaginative and often alliterated way. He could describe narrative in a graphic manner. Morgan was not noted as a doctrinal preacher. The Doctor challenged his hearers to think and analyse for themselves. He was noted for that. He was always asking questions and probing the minds of his hearers, which is very different from polished structures eloquently presented in which the hearers are more like spectators rather than being engaged and challenged in a personal and direct manner to think issues of truth through for themselves. The preacher must gain the hearts of his hearers. I used to sit in the gallery and from that vantage point often noted that the Doctor would have notes the size of an envelope. His writing was dreadful and he could hardly tell which was the top and which the bottom! It did not matter. Once he warmed to his theme he did not need them anyway.

With regard to evangelistic preaching it is possible with almost every part of the Bible to have an evangelistic challenge. Robert Bolton expressed the matter clearly when he asserted, 'The Lord Jesus Christ is offered most freely, and without exception of any person, every Sabbath, every sermon, either in plain, and direct terms, or implied, at the least.' Most congregations consist of a majority who are already believers and they need constantly to be inspired, edified and fed with expository preaching. At the same time, they need constantly to have a model set before them of what Gospel is and how it works. After all they go out into the

world every week to bear witness to the saving power of Christ. Expository preaching as exemplified by Dr ML-J fulfilled the dual purpose the telling forth the way of salvation in Christ and edifying and building up believers.

Systematic Expository Preaching

Dr ML-J mostly employed the systematic expository method. He would occasionally preach a topical sermon but almost always followed the method used by the English Puritans in consecutive series of sermons.

This method has great advantages for the hearers and for the preacher himself.

Through consecutive preaching which is demanding hard work, the preacher will discover that the Scriptures are inexhaustible. The treasures of truth are limitless. But the mining has to be done and the preacher is always in need of books. The element of study is illustrated by the example of Jonathan Edwards.

The preacher will not have to lose time searching for something different every week. Spurgeon explained that it suited him to have a different passage of text every time he preached because three times a week he preached to a congregation of about 5,500 and every occasion was evangelistic. He also possessed gifts for this which were extraordinary. There may well have been an overall loss because at the time of Spurgeon's death there was a dearth of powerful theological preachers. It takes time to build up a theological mind in our hearers and by far the best way is to work through whole books. For instance by taking years to preach through Romans, the doctrine of salvation by grace is established in a most powerful manner. Likewise by long series on Ephesians, the doctrine of the Church was powerfully established in the minds of his hearers. This method is cohesive and not fragmentary. It is the method followed the English Puritans. From them we have received the finest body of expository material in the history of the Church.

When this way is followed it has the advantage time is not lost looking for subjects. Rather, there is the challenge of building up a profitable theme and expounding a book of Scripture in a way that the hearers will never forget. When commencing a book, it is helpful to provide the historical background and also an overview of that book. For instance with Romans, several sermons can be devoted to getting the whole book into perspective. Recently a friend told me that he could remember the whole outline word for word that I had used in preaching a sermon at a Bible rally 30 years ago. I was pleased to hear that, not because I am flattered, but because it shows how tenacious the Bible is. An introductory sermon on Romans can be devoted the theme of unity between the Jewish believers at Rome and the Gentile believers. That subject is present from beginning to end of the Romans letter. Essential in introducing the epistle to the Romans, is a grasp of the main theme of righteousness. God's provision of a righteousness that saves, is the thread and the theme from beginning to end. From there the divisions of the book can be outlined as a background before proceeding section by section and sometimes verse by verse. It is always important to maintain the overall perspective and then the details within that framework. On many occasions I heard the doctor use the expression, the wood and the trees. If we admire a tree within a woodland area we do so against the backdrop of the forest where it is situated.

The consecutive method means that important and necessary subjects which are sensitive, such as divorce, will be addressed. This method safeguards the preacher from being accused of targeting certain people.

Besides the value for the congregation of consecutive expository preaching, it stretches and develops the preacher himself. As David Jussely, associate Professor of practical theology at the Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi suggests, 'It encourages both depth and comprehensiveness in the preacher. Each year the preacher will be exposed to the vast and manifold configurations of biblical literature. He will be forced to deal with texts and interpret subjects which might be normally avoided (like those leprosy texts). Such exercises challenge him and keep him fresh, enthusiastic and humble about preaching'⁵ The consecutive method also has the advantage of discouraging repetition. It is so easy for a busy preacher to fall prey to just repeating in a different form, work that he has done on previous occasions. Also there is a tendency to go back to his favourite subjects and in this way be unbalanced and neglect the whole counsel of the Bible. Repetition discourages the congregation who think, 'here he goes yet again!'

How to proceed with systematic expository preaching

Those setting off in the ministry or those pastors who have never engaged in consecutive preaching through books of Scripture, may well wonder where to begin. A short series is advised.

It is misleading if those who read the Doctor's volumes on *Romans* and *Ephesians* get the idea that he was only a verse by verse preacher. He was a versatile sermon outline maker. In the early years at Westminster he preached short series. Short series formed the basis of some of his most popular books. For instance there is two volume work on Matthew 5-7, *The Sermon on the Mount*, (by 1990 this had been published in Japanese, Spanish, Korean, Portuguese, Thai, Chinese, Dutch and Slovak.) *Faith on Trial* (eleven sermons on Psalm 73), *From Fear to Faith*, (six sermons on Habakkuk).

The book of Jonah invites a short series of sermons with special reference to the salient points brought out by Christ (Matt 12:38ff). With the help of the Puritan Gurnall a series on the Christian in Complete Armour (Eph 6:12-18) can be full of spiritual meat and marrow. Many pastors have preached a series on the Ten Commandments with great profit. Don Carson on one occasion elected to preach on the whole Bible in a series of seven sermons. The fascinating and instructive way in which he did this illustrates well the subject of biblical theology explained above.

1. The God who does not wipe out the rebels (creation and fall)
2. The God who writes his own agreements (the Abrahamic covenant)
3. The God who legislates (Moses and law).
4. The God who goes after the rebels (kingdom and prophets).
5. The God who becomes man (incarnation).
6. The God who loves (John 3:16 – mission and purpose of the church).
7. The God who is very angry (second advent, heaven and hell).

The first series that I preached to a congregation that had never before known consecutive expository preaching, was five sermons on Genesis 3:8 with the title 'Our first parents hiding behind the trees of the garden'. By this they came to appreciate the blessings of the consecutive method and paved the way for a much more extended series on Genesis. The pastor may choose to preach a series on Genesis chapters one to three, as this is foundational to the whole Bible. Within the series he can open up fully the creation ordinances of marriage and the Sabbath. It is important at least once a year to preach on marriage and the family.

Practical advice:

1. Start early in prayer and constantly seek the help of the Holy Spirit in prayer
2. Seek guidance and then get to work on the passage of Scripture you are going to expound.
3. Stick to your text or passage when the going is hard. Keep working -- keep reading-- keep praying, make notes, and better if possible write out your sermons, then memorise, then preach with just an outline. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) said 'Reading makes a full man, conference a ready man and writing an exact man.'
4. Make sure to find and form a clear structure true to the passage and use that structure to implant the truth in the minds and hearts of your hearers
5. Keep the congregation's needs always in mind

As an example let us take the well known John chapter 3 where Nicodemus is described as coming to Jesus by night.

We must always begin with context and historical background. In this case we must find out all we can about Nicodemus. He was important because he was a member of the Sanhedrin the body of 70 leaders who governed Judah. We discover from John 19:38,39 that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus body for burial. We know too that they feared the Jewish leaders and that explains why Nicodemus came at night to see Jesus.

Next we study what Jesus said. He was very direct. Here is the place where we teach doctrine. In this instance the necessity of the new birth. Here we resort to systematic theology and import into John 3 what the Bible teaches about the new birth.

What is the new birth? The new birth involves a whole person affections, mind, will. It is a new creation (Eph 2:10). It is union with Christ (Rom 6:1-4). It is a spiritual resurrection from the dead (Eph 2:1; John 5:24-27; Rev 20:4).

While teaching about the new birth the text can be explained. Why born of water and the Spirit. What is the water? Numbers 19:1-8 tells us about the water mixed with the ashes of the heifer. This points to the meritorious cause of the new birth and the Holy Spirit to the effective cause of the new birth.

Then in application drive home the main points made. (Repetition in preaching is necessary but in written articles for publication is unacceptable).

Nicodemus' visit that night (the background)

The necessity of the new birth (the doctrine)

The application. Faith in Christ and coming to him is the way to new life (practical)

In the application go back and picture Nicodemus and what he thought. Describe how discouraged he must have been. How can I be born again? I can do nothing! I am dead in sin! Only the Spirit can do this! I can bring nothing! I can do nothing! But wait! Jesus said I needed to believe on him. He said too that as the Israelites looked to the cross with a snake on it. So I need to look upward to God's provision. He surely meant that I should look to him and his sufferings and then I will be healed. In fact that is what Nicodemus did and he found salvation in Christ.

Every passage requires careful analysis as to its character and teaching. Take another example, namely the Great Judgement described in Matthew 25:31-46.

Here the context tells us that this is the climax of a great exposition known as the Olivet discourse which takes up the whole of Matthew 24 and 25.

What are the main points?

1. There is the Judge on his throne
2. There are all the nations assembled
3. There is a division between the sheep and the goats
4. There is the sentence of eternal life eternal death from the Judge
5. There is a reason given, namely, good works

For point five teaching is needed to show that we are saved by faith alone and that good works is the evidence of true faith and not the meritorious cause of salvation (Eph 2:8,9; James 2:14-26)

We must be flexible in our methods. In this case heart searching personal application can be made after each point.

Be yourself

The doctor made much of every preacher knowing himself and his own limitations. He also warned against being boring. The preacher needs to maintain eye contact and to address convey truth through his personality. Every preacher had to make a realistic assessment of his abilities. It is no good imitating some popular preacher. That is artificial. It is important to avoid annoying or distracting habits. Spurgeon's book *Lectures to my Students* is a fine book which with much humour, warns against the ludicrous and the absurd. Why not encourage your wife to give you constructive criticism but do not be offended when she does!

If you are unmarried there must surely be a spiritual and wise member in the church who with a good mind who can give you advice. Material which has warmed your own heart in preparation and which has been born out of prayer is the best. The use of illustration, preferably using illustrations from the Bible, is important. References to oneself should be limited. Relevance is vital. Sermons on subjects (topical preaching) are occasionally called for. However in the application of the sermon there should be reference to current issues and events.

It is said that a preacher needs to take hold of his hearers and grip their attention in the first two minutes. To start with a fine looking package and then unload superb contents is ideal. Dr ML-J never resorted to methods as such. On occasion he was a slow starter and there were times when he struggled as all preachers do. He tells us that it was his interest in people that guaranteed application. (For application of preaching to all kinds of hearers see chapter on William Perkins). He followed the medical approach of thinking of the patient and diagnosing his disease and what remedy could bring healing. He was very direct in addressing his hearers in their need. He pointed that it is possible to expound Scripture in such a way that the man of the world does not know what on earth you are talking about. ML-J was constantly aware of the need to explain the terms of Scripture. He was always relevant and like Spurgeon before him would refer to major events and interpret them. His first book in 1939 was, *Why does God Allow War?*

In demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

The concluding chapter of 'Preaching and Preachers' is devoted to the subject of unction. The doctor felt passionately about this issue which is grossly neglected today. It used to be the custom in many churches before worship services for prayer to offer in the vestry (elders and deacons) with this factor of the power of the Spirit in mind. This is how the doctor begins the concluding chapter:

'I have kept and reserved to this last lecture what is after all the greatest essential in connection with preaching, and that is the unction and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It may seem odd to some that I keep the most important thing of all to the end instead of starting with it. My reason for doing so is that I believe that if we do, or attempt to do, All I have been saying first, then the unction will come upon it. I have already pointed out that some men fall into the error of relying upon the unction only, and neglect to do all they can by way of preparation. The right way to look upon the unction of the Spirit us to think of it as that which comes upon the preparation. There is an Old Testament incident which provides a ready illustration to show this relationship. It is the story of Elijah facing the false prophets of Israel on Mount Carmel. We are told that Elijah built an altar, and then he killed a bullock and cut it to pieces and put the pieces on the wood. Then, having done that, he prayed for the fire to descend; and the fire fell. That is the order.'

Jesus said that 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you' (Acts 1:8). That promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when Peter who had been restored after his grievous fall preached with both clarity and power. The evidence of that power is seen in the 3000 who were converted that day. That power of the Holy Spirit is not confined to the day of Pentecost. Throughout the history of the Church there have been those who have preached with great unction and many conversions. For instance to read the life of George Whitefield is to read of a preacher endued with the power of the Holy Spirit. Whitefield was all life, wing, power, force! Times of revival are times of the Spirit's power. It is not always like that. The life of Dr ML-J is an example to us all of one who preached in times when there were many conversions and persevered through lean times such as the early years at Westminster Chapel. Perseverance is of the essence of the pastoral and preaching ministry. Whether the preacher experiences little unction or much he must always do his best as the Scripture says, 'Do your best (*spoudazo* means be zealous, be busy, be industrious) to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth' (2 Tim 2:15).

The doctor advocated the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a power experience. Many differ with him as to the terminology and use of the idea of a second experience after conversion but we would surely agree with his emphasis on the need for spiritual power in ministry and preaching. Whether we use the term baptism of the Spirit or filling of the Holy Spirit the outcome of empowering is the same. I conclude with the doctor reasoning this out in his book *Preaching and Preachers*.

‘But look again Acts 4:7. Here are Peter and John on trial before the Sanhedrin, and charges are brought against them: “When they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name have ye done this?” But notice what the record has to say: “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people” ’

‘How do you interpret that/ why does it say, “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit?” You might argue, “But was he not filled with the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost as the other men were?” Of course he was. What then was the point of repeating it here? There is only one adequate explanation of this. It is not just a reminder of the fact that he had been baptised with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. There is no purpose in the use of this expression unless it means that he received a fresh accession of power. He was in a critical position. Here he was on trial with John, indeed the Gospel and the entire Christian Church were on trial, and he needed some new, fresh power to witness positively and to refute the persecutors – some new, fresh power, and it is given him. So the expression is used, “Peter filled with the Holy Ghost”. This was another filling for this special task.’

‘There is yet another example of this in that same fourth chapter of Acts in verse 31. There were all the members of the Church praying, in fear, at the threatening of the authorities who were trying to exterminate the Church. Then this is what happened, “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost” – the same people again. They all had been filled with the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost, and Peter and John on subsequent occasions also; but here the entire company is filled again with the Holy Ghost. It is obvious, therefore, that this is something which can be repeated many times.’

The doctor in the chapter from which the above is cited goes on to describe a number of examples of empowerment especially from the Great Awakening of the 18th Century to drive home his point that the Holy Spirit anoints or fills preachers with power. This occurs sometimes with remarkable results. From an earlier period, 1630, he cites the case of John Livingstone who preached at a special gathering at Kirk O’Shotts between Glasgow and Edinburgh. Five hundred people were added to the churches in that locality as an outcome of that one sermon! What shall we say in conclusion to the subject of empowerment? The pastor is to seek earnestly and to expect the Lord to empower his preaching. As Elijah laid the sacrifice on the altar and then prayed for fire to come down from heaven so the pastor should look for the fire to come down from heaven to bless and prosper his ministry in the saving of souls and the building up of the saints.

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The First Forty Years, 1899-1939*, Iain Murray, 393 pp, Banner of Truth, 1982, p. 166.

² *ibid*, p. 244-246

³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones – *The Fight of Faith*, Iain Murray 1939-198, p. 251].

⁴ Iain Murray invited me to become the manager of the Banner of Truth Trust in 1957. That publishing venture was born in that year. David Fountain became pastor of Spring Road Evangelical Church where he ministered to his retirement in about 1996. He was the first to invite me to preach. When I arrived he placed a Geneva gown over my shoulders. This was in imitation of the doctor who wore a Geneva gown in the pulpit on Sundays. That was the only time I ever wore clerical garb.

⁵ Banner of Truth magazine April 2005, p14.