



PEOPLE  IN  
MINISTRY 

# Dick Lucas

*Dick Lucas, minister at St Helen's Bishopsgate, London, is the quintessential Englishman, with a grey cardigan almost as thick as his Oxbridge accent. His voice seems to originate somewhere below his knees and resonate up before escaping from his barely open mouth. Like many Englishmen, Dick is polite, impeccably mannered and quite charming. But unlike many Englishmen, he is forthright and uncompromising about the truth of the gospel. He was in Australia for a number of speaking engagements, among them the Focus on Parish Ministry Conference where he spoke on 'The Priority and Practice of Preaching'. I caught up with him during a lull in his schedule.*

## *What is preaching?*

The simplest answer is that preaching is the primary thing that God has called his ministers to do. For example, in the final letter that Paul writes—II Timothy—where a lot was going wrong with the church at Ephesus and some things were going wrong even with Timothy's ministry, he tells him to *preach the word*. It was the fundamental thing he had to do. The same thing is true of Jesus, that before he becomes our saviour he is primarily a preacher.

So if it's a priority for Christ and his apostles then it ought to be a priority for us. But quite evidently it isn't in the Church of England at home.

## *Is there any difference between 'preaching' and 'teaching'?*

The Bible doesn't make any real distinction. For us, preaching is teaching the word of God which is to be found primarily in the Holy Scriptures. If there is any special emphasis for the preacher, he is to proclaim it to those who don't normally hear it, as well as to those who do. But I wouldn't want to make a very great distinction.

## *In my mind, when I hear 'preaching' I think 'sermon'. Is that equation going to stand up as the years go on?*

One of the things we make plain at our conferences in Britain is that we're not talking simply about 'pulpiterring'. The average minister is preaching the word of God as much outside the pulpit as in it. He'll be doing classes for baptism, he'll be talking at weddings and funerals, he'll be talking to an old lady over a cup of tea—all that is teaching the word of God. The danger of pulpiterring is that you get the idea that preaching is only one sort of special thing, which in some ways the Victorians tended to make it.

Nor is preaching just lecturing. The word of God is a powerful thing. Saying that preaching is 'teaching the word of God' can

appear to be very dry—in Britain, a ‘teaching church’ is seen as a fairly ‘dry’ church. But in the New Testament, the word of God is a powerful thing. We’re not doing something like you do in school. We are doing the very thing God has told us to do as the priority means of grace.

With regard to the sermon as such, I don’t think it has had its day. I understand that all modern educational theory is against it, and that it’s regarded as quite outrageous to have one man giving a monologue while others sit on hard pews listening. But I think that is really only a statement that preaching has been very bad in the last two or three generations—and it doesn’t seem possible to defend it.

People have got tired of sitting and listening to bad sermons and quite rightly have voted with their feet. But we have to come back to the bottom line in the New Testament: that Christ has told us to sow the seed. And it’s very difficult to know how you sow the seed if you don’t take the word of God and teach it to the minds and hearts of men.

*You say that there is a lot of bad preaching around. What do you think is the main defect?*

The main thing must be lack of content; but if you ask me that provocative question, I must say that a lot of preaching is *dull*.

I’m talking about Christian preaching—I’m not thinking of Liberal preaching. The Liberals by and large have given up preaching in Britain and I’m very glad they have. I think it points to a certain modesty. If you haven’t anything really to say, in the end you won’t say it. I rather admire the Liberals for that, because it’s absurd to give a central place to the sermon if you’ve really nothing to say—and they no longer do.

But in Protestant Evangelical circles at home, dullness is the chief thing. I sometimes say at our conferences that every church building that we are meeting in was once full, and that it was emptied by the clergy. It wasn’t emptied by secular forces—

as we like to think—but by dull sermons. That’s what some of the Victorian novelists say, like Trollope—they say that they just couldn’t stand it any longer. And if people are going to come back into some of our extraordinary buildings it will be because there is something compelling to hear.

Sermons have been written off since the third or fourth century. Then a Chrysostom appears and everybody is rattling along the street to hear him.

*And so you would say to preachers, “Whatever you do, don’t be dull?”*

Yes, well there are some people who just can’t help being dull, and I would question whether they were called to that particular job. I don’t have a rigid view of the ministry. I think if you have an Anglican view that everyone has to be a rector then you’re really in great difficulty, because in a staff of a dozen (like we have at St Helen’s) they’re not all going to be people who can hold a public position—even though they all believe the Bible and can teach a Bible class well.

So I think the man who is going to be a compelling preacher is obviously going to be a rarity. There is a gift as well as the hard work. And some people are always going to be dull. It’s very hard to forgive that, isn’t it, when we’ve got the most glorious message in the world? I don’t mean that we need to use gimmickry—I just think that if you can’t make this glorious news *sound* glorious then there must be something fatally wrong with your equipment. And it’s very difficult sometimes to put your finger on what it is.

Spurgeon used to say that if a man hasn’t been given a big chest, God hasn’t called him to preach—which is another funny way of saying the same thing.

*You’re obviously doing some work on thinking through what ‘ministry’ should be, and encouraging people to press on. I know that your church has set up this thing called ‘The Proclamation Trust’. What is its role?*

We’re doing a lot of what you just said—

we spend a lot of time with young ministers thinking out what the ministry is. We feel that they haven't got it clear when they come out of theological training, and it's desperately important for them to get it clear. They have to get their priorities clear so that it begins to impinge on their diaries, and they start saying no to things, so that they have time to do the things that they're meant to be doing. We're thinking a lot about that at our conferences. We do very little homiletics [that is, the art or study of preaching].

My experience is that studying homiletics doesn't turn out good preachers. A good preacher has to find out what he's meant to be doing. He's then got to find out what the word of God is saying and how to dig it out for himself. So we spend a lot of time at our Proclamation Trust conferences talking about what we're there for and the New Testament.

I'd like to see preaching taught within the Bible departments of the colleges. You see, if you teach the Bible properly, people will want to preach it. If you hear a proper sermon, you'll say, "I must go and tell somebody that." But if you hear a lecture of theology which just makes you feel that this is all a great problem, then you won't want to preach it, will you?

*If we can move to the wider picture—and this may be a difficult question—what is the state of play with British Christianity?*

You have to say that there's a lot more life around than there's been for generations. A friend of mine who'd moved to a very lively church that had been touched by the Charismatic movement once said, "In my last parish we dealt with the problems of death—namely how to find enough money to unblock the drains. Now we're dealing with the problems of life. The problems are just as big, but I'd rather have them."

I think that's a fair comment. If you ask me about the older churches (that is, the older denominations) I'm afraid they come under the heading of the problems of death more than the problems of life. It's very difficult to know what future they have.

Graphs show that they will have all disappeared by 2040. The Baptists will be the last to sink into the tomb. The Church of England will be dead and gone by 2015.

I don't think that's of much help, because all the life that's coming in is in the younger element. And things can change dramatically, and they'll have to change dramatically if the older churches are to survive.

There's a lot of charismatic and community churches around and you'd need the wisdom of Solomon to know what will happen to them in the next 25 years. It's hard not to believe that many of them will have sunk away without a trace. But it's equally hard not to believe that many of them will have become very impressive.

If you ask me about Evangelical Anglicans I'd have to say that we're terribly divided and that's very sad. You've got to remember that in our country (and we're quite odd in this) Anglican Evangelicals are probably the strongest force in the older churches, because we have so many more men (for various sociological and other reasons). We were a very strong force 20 years ago, and we were united under persecution. But we've become a major player on the field now. We can no longer be ignored—we're flattered and courted. And under many pressures of that sort we've become divided.

There are the Charismatic Anglican Evangelicals and the more Social-Gospel-orientated Anglican Evangelicals and the new Liberals. (Look at some of the Word Commentaries which are supposed to be *the* great new Evangelical commentaries—some of the Old Testament ones are quite frankly as liberal as can be.) Then there are the old guard Prayer Book people, who are often antiquarian in their interest and who I don't think will have any great influence in the future.

I suppose I put myself in the category of being a straightforward, perhaps slightly old-fashioned Evangelical who believes what I believed 20 years ago.

*The pressure of novelty is strong.*

Yes, and it's very dangerous. I can see it mainly outside Evangelicalism. Whenever you meet the Church of England outside Evangelicalism it is always talking about some new, great way in which we're going to cope. They're always talking about coping in the future, but they never get there. It's very sad. I hope Evangelicals are not talking like that.

It comes from being discouraged. I think the Wimber crusades are attracting people simply because they're so discouraged with their ministry. Here is a man who is obviously a kind and delightful man who offers you a ministry, and if you haven't got a ministry (for whatever reason) you fly to him for help. And these people who haven't got a ministry might have been faithful teachers of the word of God—it's just that the whole system has squeezed the life out of them.

It's very difficult for a young minister—he doesn't get much leadership. His leaders are often too busy. That's why I believe in team work, and one of the things that The Proclamation Trust is doing is giving people a sense that they belong to something bigger.

*What about your own plans? Where are you heading?*

I want to teach the Bible to ministers that they may teach it to others. That's where my main energies are going. I taught I Timothy in London (and other places) last year, and I'm teaching Romans at the moment.

I grieve over the lack of good commentaries. It seems to me extraordinary that it's now 40 years since the war, that there's been an Evangelical resurgence, and yet it is still impossible to get a library of 66 commentaries (on every book of the Bible) that is adequate. It's difficult to think of another profession where there isn't masses of top class literature on everything.

We're still sadly lacking on the Old Testament, although it is being caught up with. But again, academic expertise doesn't produce a great commentary. The Bible has to be preached or it never reveals its treas-

ures. You can't look at it in a test tube. We can't expect the academics to produce the commentaries unless they themselves are taking this word of God to men. So I suppose the ideal commentators of the future are going to be preachers who've got brains.

Take I Timothy. I found a recent commentary by a chap from North America called Fee which was quite useful, and there was the fine scholarly commentary by Kelly (although it doesn't go nearly far enough for the preacher)—but that was about it. Fee contradicts most of the things that have been said about I Timothy, and I think that basically he is right. It seems extraordinary that we have to wait till 1988 for someone to take us along the right road for I Timothy. It's almost Gilbertian, isn't it? What are we doing, if that's meant to be our job?

You still find people giving lectures on I Timothy that it's all about church order and how you organize the congregation. It's really nothing to do with that at all. It's a great plea for the leaders at Ephesus not to lose the gospel, which they are already doing within the lifetime of the Apostle Paul. Slightly different subject, isn't it?

To me, it is absolutely extraordinary that we have these colleges around the world, and we still don't know what we're meant to be preaching on a book like that. I find that baffling. Things are getting better—there is some improvement, but there's still some way to go. It took me the whole winter of hard work with Fee in one hand and Kelly in the other to work out I Timothy. I couldn't find it anywhere else.

I think you people here in Sydney are jolly lucky with Moore College. When John Woodhouse came and helped us with the Old Testament, I do not remember anything as helpful on the Old Testament that I have heard in Britain. These chaps are doing some really good work, because they're concentrating on the Bible.

Since our only job is to teach this book to the world and to the church, you would have thought we'd have been a bit more successful by now.

TONY PAYNE □