

# Heralds of the King

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Christ-Centered Sermons  
in the Tradition of  
Edmund P. Clowney

Edited by Dennis E. Johnson

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*Heralds of the King: Christ-Centered Sermons in the Tradition of Edmund P. Clowney*

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In Memory of  
Edmund Prosper Clowney  
(1917–2005)  
and  
Jean Wright Clowney  
(1920–2008)



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# Preface

This is a gift from preachers to preachers, and to all God's children who gather, Sunday by Sunday, hungry and thirsty to hear afresh their Father's declaration of love for them and triumph over their enemies through Jesus, his beloved Son. Its development has been our labor of love for two persons: *first, proximately*, for our dear (and sometimes daunting) teacher, mentor, and model, Dr. Edmund P. Clowney, through whom each of the contributors, at various points in our Christian pilgrimage, became captivated in wonder over the glory and grace of Jesus the Christ. Jesus is that *second, supremely* worthy Person whom we love, to whom we offer these efforts to proclaim his Word as our thank offering, first for his saving grace and then for his gifts to his church, including a pastor and teacher such as Ed Clowney. We love because Christ first loved us and gave his life to make us his own. As you will discover in the introductions to the sermons, each of us whose paths crossed Ed's realize how much he would want this little book to deflect attention away from himself and instead to rivet our admiring gaze solely on the Savior. He would be particularly pleased, I suspect, that our publisher insisted on inserting "Christ-centered" in the original subtitle that I had first proposed, so that "Christ" comes before "Clowney" there, as he should everywhere!

Our aim is twofold: first, we are eager to share with you the burning passion to preach Christ from all of Scripture, which we

“caught” from Ed. As you will see, this infectious eagerness to attune our ears to hear the Holy Spirit’s witness to the Son in every text of the Bible, from every era of redemptive history, was something that we contracted not only from Ed the homiletician or Ed the exegete and biblical theologian, but also from Ed the sinner saved by divine grace, who himself stood amazed and humbled at the mercy shown him at Christ’s cross. As you read the chapter introductions, each composed without reading the others, you will be impressed by the consistency of our impressions of Ed’s humility and contagious wonder at the glory of Christ radiating from every page of God’s Word. Perhaps most striking are the testimonies of students from different generations at different institutions who found themselves so overwhelmed in worship as Ed opened the Word in the classroom that they could not take notes on the lecture-turned-paeon-of-praise.

We cannot now take you back with us into a seminary classroom or church sanctuary, to share precisely our experience of “burning hearts” (Luke 24:32) as we were led in the discovery of the Christ who suffered and entered into glory throughout the Scriptures. As of March 20, 2005, Ed stands before the throne of the Lamb, singing the praises of the singing Savior whose grace he had preached to struggling sinners on earth for more than sixty years. (You can, however, hear almost one hundred of Dr. Clowney’s sermons and lectures online through the audio collection that has been assembled by the Edmund P. Clowney Legacy Corporation at [http://www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=epclegacy](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=epclegacy).) We hope that our introductions to the sermons will give readers a taste of the person that Ed was (by grace alone, he would always insist!), thereby reinforcing the point that preaching Christ from all the Scriptures is not an automatic product of an abstract hermeneutic method (though it entails sound interpretive principles and practices) but rather grows from a heart that feasts daily in fellowship with the Savior through his Word.

Our second purpose is to show that *one does not have to be Ed Clowney* to see Christ revealed on every page of Scripture and to broadcast the good news of his redemptive achievement in your own ministry, whether your calling is that of a pastor charged to shepherd God’s flock or that of bearing informal witness among family,

friends, and coworkers. This case is easier to make today than it was in 1952, when Ed transitioned from pastoral ministry into teaching practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary.

It was almost a half century ago that his *Preaching and Biblical Theology* appeared.<sup>1</sup> That slight (121 pages) but groundbreaking volume, the first that Ed wrote for publication,<sup>2</sup> engaged issues raised by the “Biblical Theology” movement then current in historical-critical circles, and it touched on the pre-World War II debate in the Netherlands over redemptive-historical versus “exemplary” preaching. Ed harvested the rich legacy of Reformed covenant theology, of Protestant predecessors in the sober exploration of biblical typology such as Patrick Fairbairn, and especially of Geerhardus Vos’s insights into the implications of the fact that God embedded his written Word into the unfolding of his plan of redemption in history. Affirming the unity of God’s redemptive deeds in history and his inerrant words in Scripture, which attests and interprets those deeds, Ed mapped a homiletic that draws its authority from the God who speaks and saves, its content from the whole Bible (in its temporal, thematic, and formal diversity as well as its theological, christocentric unity), its vividness from a sensitivity to the dramatic, flesh-and-blood concreteness of God’s engagement in Israel’s and our struggles, and its motivating power from the savoring of divine grace that transcends our wildest imagination.

*Preaching and Biblical Theology* would eventually be followed, when Ed’s responsibilities as seminary president and professor abated somewhat and his service to the church permitted, by other contributions on the theme of Christ-centered preaching, informed by Scripture’s redemptive-historical character: “Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures” in the anthology *The Preacher and Preaching* (1986), *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (1988), *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (2003), and *How Jesus Transforms the Ten Commandments* (2007).<sup>3</sup> Less visible

1. Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961; London: Tyndale, 1962.)

2. Edmund P. Clowney, *Eutychus (and His Pin)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960) appeared the previous year, but it was a collection of articles originally written for the periodical *Christianity Today*.

3. Samuel T. Logan Jr., ed., *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1986); Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding*

on his résumé but probably more influential for the progress of the gospel and the health of Christ's church have been the hundreds of pastors—heralds of the King—whose hearts have been set on fire by Ed's example in the pulpit and whose minds have been honed by his incisive coaching and critique in the Homiletics classroom.

Today others are catching the vision and passing the spark along, both in pulpit and in print. Some have been Ed's students or colleagues in person: for example, Charlie Drew, one of our contributors, has authored *The Ancient Love Song: Finding Christ in the Old Testament* to lead thoughtful Christians along the paths by which God drew his people in hope and longing toward their ultimate Champion and true Husband.<sup>4</sup> Iain Duguid, another contributor, has explored the Old Testament's witness to Christ in such studies as *Living in the Gap between Promise and Reality: The Gospel According to Abraham*; and in *Hero of Heroes*, he has set Jesus' Beatitudes in the context of our Lord's self-disclosure, showing that these "blessings," too often experienced either as sentimental idealism or as guilt-imposing impossibilities, in fact point our hearts toward the Blessed Hero who inaugurated God's kingdom through his innocent suffering and victorious resurrection.<sup>5</sup>

Other homileticians who are advocating Christ-centered preaching informed by Scripture's redemptive-historical structure have not been Ed's students or associates, but they give evidence of acquaintance with his thought. These include Bryan Chapell, Sidney Greidanus, and Graeme Goldsworthy.<sup>6</sup> Series such as *The Gospel in the Old Testament*<sup>7</sup> and the *Reformed Expository Commentary*<sup>8</sup>

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*Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988); Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003); Clowney, *How Jesus Transforms the Ten Commandments* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007).

4. Charles D. Drew, *The Ancient Love Song: Finding Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000).

5. Iain M. Duguid, *Living in the Gap between Promise and Reality: The Gospel According to Abraham* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999). Duguid, *Hero of Heroes: Seeing Christ in the Beatitudes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001).

6. For example, Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (2nd ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005); Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

7. Raymond B. Dillard, *Faith in the Face of Apostasy: The Gospel According to Elijah and Elisha* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999) and later volumes.

8. Philip G. Ryken, *Galatians* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005) and later volumes.

provide a growing body of resources and modeling for preachers who are catching a passion to preach Christ in all of Scripture. We rejoice that the rich tradition of Christ-centered preaching, to which we hope that this little book will contribute, is far wider than Ed Clowney's circle of influence (even as it is far older<sup>9</sup>).

One Christ, one gospel of grace . . . but many heralds sent out by the King of kings to announce his victory. The preachers who have contributed sermons to this volume are representative of the variety of messengers whom Christ has captured and chiseled to declare God's glory among the nations. Some of us, as you will see, were dragged "kicking and screaming" to the realization that each and every one of the Bible's sixty-six books, given to God's people over a millennium and a half, has a single integrating center, a single Hero, Jesus the Messiah, on whom pivots God's whole agenda to recapture his rebellious realm and re-create his sin-cursed handiwork. Others drank in the Christ-centered character of Scripture just as dehydrated pilgrims in a blazing desert rush to quench their thirst in streams of cool water. Some of us preach in large churches; others in congregations of modest size. Some pastor urban churches; others serve in suburbs or small towns. In some congregations, maturing believers in stable families are in the majority; in some, a significant number of curious but uncommitted non-Christians are present each week. Our congregations are located across the United States: in the Northeast, the Mid-Atlantic, the Midwest, the South, the Southwest, and the West Coast.

The sermons in our collection themselves illustrate the diversity of the Scriptures' witness to Christ. When I contacted these preachers, I asked each to nominate from among his sermons that message that best exemplified the influence of Dr. Clowney on his understanding and proclamation of God's Word. I also asked for the texts of a couple of alternative sermons, in the event that two preachers chose the same Scripture text. Happily, not only was there no such duplication (so every contributor submitted his first choice) but also the passages were distributed nicely across the biblical canon:

9. See Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 62–125.

four from the Law of Moses, three from the Prophets,<sup>10</sup> one from the Psalms, two from the Gospels, and one from an Epistle. Discovering the Bible's focus on Jesus and his mission from start to finish illumines both the Scriptures that anticipate his coming and those that testify to his achievement and draw out its implications.

As editor I want to express thanks to several people who have helped bring this project to completion. Thanks first to the Clowney Legacy Corporation board members who envisioned this collection, invited me to serve as editor, suggested names of contributors, and offered helpful advice along the way. (In the fall of 2007, as I sent "When God Promises the Impossible" to my fellow contributors, I also sent it to the members of the board. Not long thereafter I received a hand-written note from Jean Clowney, Ed's widow and a member of the board, expressing appreciation for this first installment of the collection . . . along with a list of insightful editorial corrections that would make the sermon and introduction better! Jean joined Ed in the presence of Christ on June 7, 2008.) Thanks particularly to Helen Holbrook, a member of the Legacy board, for transcribing sermons from audio recordings into text files, greatly facilitating the editing process. Deborah J. Dewart, legal counsel for the Clowney Legacy Corporation board, helped greatly as the Corporation clarified agreements with each preacher who contributed material to this project. As noted in the introduction to the late Dr. Conn's sermon on Isaiah 55, we are grateful to Dr. Conn's daughter, Mrs. Beth Conn Neikirk, for permission to publish his sermon posthumously and for her editorial review of both the sermon and the introduction that I wrote for it. Thanks also to Grace Mullen, assistant librarian and archivist of Westminster Theological Seminary's Montgomery Library, and to the staff of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia for providing access to audio-recordings of Dr. Conn's sermons, from which "Thorns and Fir Trees" was selected. Finally, many thanks go to Allan Fisher, senior vice president for

10. When Jesus affirmed to his disciples "that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44, *ESV*), his reference was to the threefold division of the Hebrew Scriptures (only partially reflected in our English versions, which follow the categories of the Greek Septuagint), in which the Prophets included not only Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets, but also the historical narrative books Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

book publishing, and the editorial staff of Crossway for venturing to publish this book. As Al has observed, *Heralds of the King* forms a fitting complement to and extension of *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, published by Crossway in 2003, since the heart of that work is thirteen of Ed's classic, widely-loved expositions of Christ and the glory of his grace "in all of Scripture." We here join our voices to Dr. Clowney's in extolling the mighty and merciful Redeemer!

Now, listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd, as he calls his sheep by name from the pages of his Word, through heralds whom he has seized by invincible mercy and sent in joy, bearing his message of good news.



# A Tribute to Edmund P. Clowney

1917–2005

Theologian, educator, and pastor Edmund P. Clowney was born July 30, 1917, the only child of a Philadelphia cabinetmaker. His academic gifts appeared early, as did his artistic abilities. One of Ed's first jobs was sign-writing for a local grocer. Later he would illustrate Sunday school materials and give evangelistic "Chalk Talks" to seaside crowds.

Ed arrived at Wheaton College certain of his family's Presbyterian faith but unsure of his own role. There, while struggling to meet God's demands, he found a verse in Jonah: "Salvation is of the LORD." That message, of God bestowing life on believers despite their failings, became his central theme. While at Wheaton, Ed met Jean Wright, with whom he would enjoy sixty-three years of marriage. They were to have five children, twenty-one grandchildren, and fifteen great grandchildren.

While Ed gathered degrees not only from Wheaton but also from Westminster Theological Seminary and Yale University Divinity School, and although he later assumed the first presidency of Westminster, he bore himself not as a fusty academic but as a well-

humored pastor, approachable and gregarious. His sermons were narrations of a joyous gospel.

Painstaking in his scholarship, Ed's prime concern became to reveal Jesus' presence throughout the Bible (e.g., *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* and *The Unfolding Mystery*). He wrote ten books and hundreds of articles, many of which have been translated around the world. His last book, *How Christ Transforms the Ten Commandments*, was accepted by the publisher only days before his death.

Ed helped establish satellite seminaries for Westminster in California and Florida, a Reformed seminary in Aix-en-Provence, France, and a theological studies program for urban ministers in a rough section of North Philadelphia. His passion for service led him to relocate four times after his "retirement" in 1984—to teach at Westminster Seminary California, to help at Christ the King Presbyterian Church in Houston, and twice to serve as theologian-in-residence at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Ed's sense of humor and his love for people was radiant. In the last week of his life, even as speech failed him, he joked with visitors and family by hand signals and wiggled eyebrows. He took much comfort in hymns sung by friends around his bed. Though Ed claimed his high school music teacher once begged him *not* to sing, he was clearly eager to join in that unending doxology his whole life had anticipated.

Ed died March 20, 2005, after a short illness. He was 87.<sup>1</sup>

1. Adapted from the Edmund P. Clowney Web site, [www.edmundclowney.com/](http://www.edmundclowney.com/).

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