

What people are saying about *The Archer and the Arrow*

Most preachers learn to preach from preachers who have been used by God to convert, mature, and train them. Some of this learning is conscious, some is unconscious. So this book is important, as it articulates the preaching of Phillip Jensen, whose teaching of the Bible has been of significant influence in Australia and overseas.

The book clarifies the key features of his preaching: gospel-focused, biblical, theological, passionate, loving, and pastorally applied; and it suggests ways in which we should gain the same strengths in our preaching. Highly recommended.

Peter Adam

Principal, Ridley Melbourne Mission and Ministry College, Australia

Preaching is the lifeblood of the local church. God not only forms his church through his word, he also grows, strengthens and matures his church through his word. This is an outstanding book by one of the world's foremost preachers. It is essential reading for any would-be Bible teacher.

William Taylor

Rector, St Helen's Bishopsgate, London, UK

Phillip Jensen has been both faithfully and provocatively preaching God's word for decades. Here he tells us how. His observations are keen, his suggestions convicting, his speaking plain. (And he also finally explains for us why most commentaries are so useless to the preacher!)

Mark Dever

Pastor, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington DC, USA
President of 9Marks

I remember a journalist once describing Phillip's preaching as being "like a submarine commander addressing his sailors". I've always thought that was close to the mark. For over 30 years I've heard Phillip preach the Bible as it is—a matter of life and death. This book is gold, and gives us decades of prayer and thought and practice in how to preach the Scriptures as the very words of God.

Al Stewart

Director, Evangelism Ministries (New Churches), Sydney, Australia

Having gained so much from Phillip Jensen's preaching, I am delighted that his thoughts and instruction on the preacher's task are now in print. They are characteristically rooted in Scripture, radical, challenging and inspiring, and will be a great help to all preachers—from the novice to the veteran.

Vaughan Roberts

Rector, St Ebbe's Church, Oxford, UK

The disciple-making vision of *The Trellis and the Vine* will only be realized through the kind of fearless, Bible-driven proclamation of the gospel that has been the hallmark of Phillip Jensen's ministry. For over 20 years I watched him train a generation of young preachers during their ministry apprenticeship. This brilliant book now distils this wisdom for every preacher and would-be preacher.

Colin Marshall

Author, *The Trellis and the Vine*, Sydney, Australia

About the authors

Phillip Jensen is an internationally renowned preacher and evangelist. He is the author of the well-known *Two Ways to Live* gospel presentation, as well as numerous books and Bible study materials, including *Guidance and the Voice of God*. He currently serves as Dean of Sydney at St Andrew's Cathedral. Phillip and his wife, Helen, have three children and a growing number of grandchildren.

Paul Grimmond is a gifted and well-known Bible teacher, currently serving on the campus of the University of NSW. He is the author of *Right Side Up*, a book aimed at helping new Christians to understand the Christian life. Paul lives with his wife, Cathy, and their three children in Sydney's east.

**THE ARCHER
AND THE ARROW**

PREACHING THE VERY WORDS OF GOD

**PHILLIP D. JENSEN
AND PAUL GRIMMOND**

The Archer and the Arrow

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PO Box 225

Kingsford NSW 2032

Australia

Telephone: (02) 9663 1478; international: +61-2-9663-1478

Facsimile: (02) 9663 3265; international: +61-2-9663-3265

Email: info@matthiasmedia.com.au

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com.au

Matthias Media (USA)

Telephone: 724 964 8152; international: +1-724-964-8152

Facsimile: 724 964 8166; international: +1-724-964-8166

Email: sales@matthiasmedia.com

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com

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Preface

In the summer of 1990, I walked onto the campus of the University of New South Wales for the first time. I was a new Christian and I was expecting university to challenge my faith. It did, but not necessarily in the ways I'd assumed; God was preparing the way. As I walked along the pathway to the enrolments centre, a fellow student introduced himself and asked if I was a Christian. I told him that I was. His next question was the most obvious question in the world, although I didn't realize it at the time: "Would you like to study the Bible while you are on campus?"

Several weeks later, I found myself sitting in a packed lecture theatre, listening eagerly to an hour-long sermon on the opening verses of Romans. The preacher, who I'd never heard of before, was a man named Phillip Jensen. His preaching was clear, winsome, challenging, theologically rich and exegetically deep—although words like 'theological' and 'exegetical' meant nothing to me at the time. I just knew that I liked it. Here was someone who preached with crystal clarity what God was saying in the Scriptures. Every week, I walked away convicted of my need for Jesus and the importance of trusting him in everything. Every sermon reshaped my understanding of God, myself, and the world that I lived in.

In the coming months and years, God used Phillip's preaching to turn my whole life around, just as he had used it in the lives of hundreds of others before, and has used it countless times since. Among many other things, I learned

from Phillip that the Bible is the unified account of God's dealings with his creation, and that it reveals his plans for the world. I came to understand why Jesus' death and resurrection stand at the heart of human history and as the centrepiece of God's self-revelation. And for the first time in my Christian life, I realized that the Bible could be read and understood by anyone willing to obey the God who speaks through it.

Perhaps more than anything else, I learned that Jesus' death and resurrection purchased my life for God. My life was not for my own pleasure; it existed for the glory of my heavenly Father. The result was a career change—I left medicine behind for the folly of preaching the eternal gospel to a needy world. I was not alone. Phillip's preaching continues to raise up a generation of preachers for the cause of Christ. Without doubt, he has been a once in a lifetime preacher, appointed by God to achieve remarkable things for his kingdom.

The purpose of this book is to make some of Phillip's wisdom about preaching available to a wider audience—wisdom acquired over almost four decades of faithful biblical ministry.

In God's kindness, that wisdom has been sharpened and refined by the events of the past few years. While Phillip has spent a lifetime teaching people to preach, for the past five years or so he has had a more formal role in teaching new theological graduates how to preach. This has involved what Phillip describes as “a move from unconscious competence to conscious competence”. It's a phrase that requires a little explanation.

In acquiring any new skill, there are a number of stages involved in the learning process. You begin by being unconsciously incompetent—that is you can't do something and you're not even aware that you can't do it. For example, when you were a teenager, you may well have wanted to learn to drive a car while being blissfully ignorant of your inability. It was only when you tried to drive for the first time that you moved from

unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence—that is, to knowing that you didn't know how to do it.

Of course, the good thing about being consciously incompetent is that it motivates you to learn. You ask questions. You try to break the task down, and practise it bit by bit. Over time, through persistence and hard work, you gradually move to conscious competence—you can finally do what you've been trying to do. But somewhere along the line, as you practise your newfound skills over and over again, conscious competence gives way to unconscious competence. You don't need to think about driving any more; it just happens naturally. You can hold a conversation with the person beside you or sing along to the radio—all without thinking about what needs to happen with the clutch and the gearstick.

The problem is that once you are unconsciously competent, it can be very difficult to share your skills with someone else. You find that you can't quite tell them how you do it—you just do it. The process of teaching another person involves intentionally moving from unconscious competence back to conscious competence. That has been the process Phillip has been going through in recent years as he has sought to teach others to preach. He has had to stop and think about how and why he does what he does, so that he can pass on some of the important lessons to others.

That's where this book began. Phillip and I started working on the project together, with the aim that I would fashion Phillip's growing reflections on preaching into something accessible to anyone interested in growing as a preacher.

Hopefully the result is theologically and biblically clear, as well as practically challenging and useful. Of course, it is not all that could be said about preaching, and not even all that Phillip would want to say about preaching. For those who want to chase up some of his further thoughts on preaching, please see the additional

articles, audio and video available at www.phillipjensen.com.

Now it says on the title page that the book is written by both of us. What that really means is that Phillip did the thinking and had the ideas, and I worked out how to organize them into chapters and write them down. Indeed at a couple of points in this section where the discussion drops into the first person, it's Phillip talking, not me (such as when he describes the week he spent preparing a sermon on Matthew 5).

But before we move on, there is perhaps one more question to answer. Who exactly am I?

I am a preacher whose life and ministry owes a great debt, under God, to Phillip's friendship and preaching. I have been listening to Phillip in various contexts for the past 20 years. I did a two-year ministry apprenticeship under his leadership at the University of New South Wales in the mid 1990s, and then returned from training at Moore Theological College in 2001 to work as an assistant minister under him.

In God's sense of humour, I was then given the task of following him in the pulpit at Campus Bible Study and Unichurch at the University of New South Wales. His preaching has literally changed my life. And I have spent the past 10 years trying to put into practice what I have learned from him. My aim has not been to copy him, but to learn to preach in the light of the principles that I have learned from him, all the while acknowledging that God has created me as an entirely different personality.

Given my long association with Phillip as a colleague and friend, and some limited experience as a preacher in my own right, I was apparently a logical choice to work on this project with him. It has been an honour and joy to be involved. Over the past 12 months I have spent many hours in conversation with Phillip and others who have learned from him, with the goal of putting this book together. I pray that it will encourage and

inspire a new generation of preachers to love Jesus and to preach his words to a world that so desperately needs them.

But let me finish with an important warning. I don't expect that you will be so crass as to read this book hoping to be just like Phillip. However, if you're anything like me, hidden away in the quiet recesses of your heart is the longing to change the world by your preaching. It is all too easy to read a book like this with that terrible mixture of longing for Christ's glory and for personal recognition and renown.

So let's remind ourselves at the beginning. This book does not contain five simple steps to preaching like Phillip. Nor is it the promise that, even if God has given you the gifts to be able to preach like him, your ministry will have the same visible effect. This book is not about Phillip's ability to keep hundreds of people listening to him preach for an hour and a half at a time, although God has given him the capacity to do that. Nor is it a book about how to grow a large church through your preaching, though God might use what is learned and practised as a result of reading it to grow his church in amazing ways. It is rather a book about what it means *to preach the very words of God*.

May reading it cause you to delve deeply into God's word, so that you might grow more and more as a faithful preacher of God's power, glory and grace, to his eternal honour.

Paul Grimmond
January 2010

The oracles of God

This book is all about preaching. And as we begin, we need to ask the obvious question: What do we mean by ‘preaching’?

For most people, ‘preaching’ refers to the monologue that takes place from some more or less sturdily constructed device for holding notes, at roughly the same time every Sunday morning, amongst the gathering of God’s people. It involves a certain kind of person, with particular gifts, often with specific educational qualifications and a distinct mode of communication.

It is understandable that we call this activity ‘preaching’. After all, we live in a world where preaching isn’t confined to the Sunday sermon. There are Muslim preachers and Jewish preachers and even atheist preachers. Preaching is a perfectly good word to describe what each of these preachers does, if for no other reason than it’s hard to find another English word that describes the activity of declaring a message in a monologue to a group of listeners.

But this creates a problem for us. The common use of ‘preaching’ to describe what happens from the pulpit has the potential to derail our discussion of preaching before it has begun. If preaching is about the pulpit monologue, then the person who wants to become a better preacher might easily be persuaded to read books about hints and tips on how to hold an audience. Questions of rhythm, pace and timing become essential. The

craft of preaching submits to the art of oratory. Rhetorical skill and comedic genius become the essential weapons in the preacher's arsenal. But this is not biblical preaching.

It's not that a preacher's ability to communicate is entirely irrelevant, as we shall see in chapter 5. But biblical preaching is not defined by the gift of communication. In the Scriptures, preachers are not remarkable because of their charisma or dramatic ability. Rather, they are commended for speaking God's truth.

Moses on Mount Sinai was not called upon to embellish the message with his own personal touches but to speak what God told him to speak. "So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that *the LORD had commanded him*" (Exod 19:7). Samuel was not required to keep the people from boredom by his judicious selection of witticisms, but stood before kings and commoners alike to remind them of God's precious commandments and promises—"So Samuel told *all the words of the LORD* to the people who were asking for a king from him" (1 Sam 8:10). Ezekiel's mouth was spiritually muzzled so that he could only open his mouth to utter what the Lord had spoken—"I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and unable to reprove them, for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, '*Thus says the Lord God*'" (Ezek 3:26-27).

Throughout the Bible, the essence of speaking God's word is faithfulness to the message as it has been received from God. Even the Lord Jesus came not to speak his own words but the words of his Father in heaven (John 14:24). And when Jesus sent his apostles into the world, it was to preach the message that he gave them—"teaching them to observe all that *I have commanded you*" (Matt 28:20). They were to speak the very same message that Jesus himself had received from his father (John 16:12-15).

That is why the Apostle Paul speaks so often of his own ministry in terms of stewardship (1 Cor 4:1-2, 9:17; Eph 3:2; Col 1:25). Paul has been given something by God that is not his own—it is God’s gift for the sake of others. And the most important thing that he can do as a steward of the mysteries of God is to pass them on as clearly and faithfully as he can. As Paul himself puts it:

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.
(1 Cor 4:1-2)

The distinguishing feature of a good steward is that they be found trustworthy—that they deliver in pristine condition whatever has been entrusted to them.

The *Mona Lisa* is probably the world’s most famous painting. It currently resides in a purpose-built, bullet-proof case in the Louvre. It is considered so precious that it has only been exhibited outside of the Louvre twice in the last century. In 1963, it was displayed for a time in the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., and then in the spring of 1974 it was hung in the Tokyo National Museum.

Can you imagine what might have happened if those responsible for delivering the painting decided that the *Mona Lisa* was a little short of artistic merit? What if they had whipped out a brush in transit and added a nice floral pattern to the border or updated the dress to the duck-egg blue fashion of the day? “We thought it was a little dreary and we wanted to brighten it up a little.” This would not have been an acceptable excuse. Their job wasn’t to improve the painting, but to deliver it in its original condition.

How much more with the word of God!

Peter expresses it clearly in his instructions to the believers

scattered amongst the dispersion:

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
(1 Pet 4:7-11)

The goal of life for those living in the last days is the glory of Christ. And Christ is glorified when we live self-controlled, prayerful, loving, servant-hearted lives in which we speak the very oracles of God to one another. The incredible thing here is that the command to speak as one who speaks the oracles of God does not just apply to the 'preacher' but to whoever speaks amongst the congregation of God's people. For all of God's people, everywhere, the challenge is to speak to each other as those who speak the very truths of God and nothing less. Whether we speak one to another over a meal or one to a thousand from the pulpit on Sunday morning, the aim for all Christians is to speak God's truth in order that we might all be encouraged to live for the glory of Christ as we await his return.

What, then, is the essence of preaching? It is not related to the number of people we speak to, nor is it related to our ability to communicate. The essence of preaching is passing on the message as we have received it—that is what it means to speak the very oracles of God.

Clarifying the confusion

And so we find ourselves in a rather awkward place. In a book that is quite clearly about preparing and delivering sermons, we have just suggested that sermons and preaching are not synonymous. What should we make of that?

The point is that although preaching shouldn't be limited to sermonizing, Christian sermons must be defined by a biblical understanding of preaching. Biblical preaching is about communicating God's thoughts and not our own. And so we preach biblically whenever and wherever we declare the word of God to each other. In fact, sometimes there may even be more preaching happening over morning tea than from the pulpit, if dozens of conversations revolve around sharing God's words of encouragement and rebuke with one another. Sermons, in other words, are a subset of a larger activity—the activity of proclaiming God's word to one another, and from one generation to the next.

Preaching is an activity that all are called on to perform. But it is also an activity particularly given to the prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers within the congregation of God's people. By framing the issues in this way, we remind ourselves that preaching doesn't begin with the aim of preparing a helpful and interesting message that will, at the very least, keep people from their morning siesta—even if it doesn't manage to restrain them from rampant day-dreaming. That is not the heart of preaching. The heart of preaching is declaring what God has said.

The rest of this book will concentrate on the process of preparing and preaching the weekly sermon, and will thus be addressed mostly to those who act as pastors and Bible teachers (and to those who are training for such ministry). However, we should also acknowledge (while we are laying down our definitions) that the sermon in the Sunday gathering is by no means the only context in which sermons are preached.

Sermons are delivered at funerals and weddings, at graduations and on special occasions, at evangelistic rallies and conferences, at men's breakfasts and women's coffee mornings and youth rallies and kids' clubs. There are many contexts in which sermons are preached, and these different situations will affect the relationship between preacher and audience, and the nature of the communication. However, the heart and aim of all of them is the same—to declare God's word truthfully and faithfully.

Why we fail

Despite the fact that it has become trendy these days to claim the name 'evangelical', and to espouse undying love for 'expository preaching', the practice in many pulpits on any given Sunday suggests that our outspoken desire to expound God's word is not always translated into reality. Why does this happen?

It is impossible to cite all of the permutations of human sinfulness involved, but let us try to outline some of the forces that keep us from preaching the pure word of God.

Perhaps our first problem is encapsulated in that dreadful word 'relevance'. In a world where the consumer knows best, there is no greater crime than 'irrelevance'. As is regularly pointed out, if no-one is listening, it doesn't matter what you're saying. And it's a critique that is keenly felt by many pastors.

These days, churches compete with sport, shopping, socializing, entertainment and even slothfulness for attention—apparently many people prefer to sleep in on Sunday mornings! And so we feel the pressure to be relevant, the pressure to see more people walking in through our doors—a pressure that is amplified and confused by our mixed motives. At one level, we just want to see people won for Christ. But our pride also longs for others to notice the 'success' of our

ministry and ask our advice, and our self-protectiveness knows that the management committee is constantly watching the bottom line. For any number of reasons, most pastors today experience an intense pressure to see more people coming through the door.

Moreover, in our ‘always on’ world, increasingly controlled by social media and constant connection, we are told that we must listen to the consumer or die. The fundamental doctrines of the new millennium are freedom and autonomy; choice is king. We are constantly encouraged to ask: What do people in our world want from church? What are the topics that they want us to talk about? What will interest people in coming to visit us? With the best of intentions, we are left with the democracy of sinful souls as the arbiter of our message. For without doubt, the words of God about sin and judgement are not the words that seem guaranteed to attract more people to listen.

Hand in hand with this emphasis on autonomy and freedom has come the importance of listening. To be relevant, we must engage the world outside the walls of the church in ‘conversation’. In one sense, this is what we should have always been doing—talking to people who don’t know Christ about the love and mercy of God. But the problem lies in what we mean by ‘conversation’.

‘Conversation’ has come to mean accepting all opinions as equally valid. To declare that I am right and that you are wrong is the social equivalent of bathing in manure. The direct result is a growing discomfort about preaching the truths of God as the truths of God. Rather than announcing “this is what God says”, we gradually water down the message to make it more acceptable. We pick up the Bible and ask what Jesus might contribute to the conversation. The effect is to reduce God to our level. God does not declare or demand—he suggests. And we begin to read his word as a human document with hints of

the divine. Tucked away in the bottom drawer of our systematic theology is the belief that the Bible is still God's word, but unspoken beliefs are quickly forgotten.

As part of the process, we buy into the atomization of the Bible. We preach about 'what Paul says' or 'what Peter thinks'. It is not wrong to notice that Paul uses a different vocabulary from Peter; nor should we shy away from the fact that Isaiah possessed a different personality from Jeremiah. Miraculously, Scripture is God's word through human authors. But does our preaching remind our hearers that they are listening to a word from the living God? Do we remind our congregation that this word has one divine author who stands behind and speaks through the entire biblical word, from Genesis to Revelation?

Slowly but surely, our confidence in the word of God has been undermined. In our desire to be part of the 'conversation', we long for the acceptance and legitimacy that will never come. And our preaching starts to be sprinkled with phrases like 'the way I see it' and 'it seems to me'.

At first glance, introducing our ideas with 'I think' rather than declaring 'God says' conveys a wise and thoughtful humility. We acknowledge that we aren't gurus to whom people should come for answers. We invite the outsider and the sceptic to come and listen. But ultimately the appearance of humility cloaks the anxiety of an unbelieving heart. Why should people come and listen to what we think, when there are so many wiser and more capable people in the world to listen to? Surely the reason we have anything to say at all is that we do not speak our own wisdom but the wisdom that comes from above.

True humility is to speak the words of God. False humility is to speak our own words as if our words are what matter. People shouldn't come to hear the preacher. People should come to hear God.

What if God showed up this Sunday?

If God guaranteed you that he would visit your church this Sunday, and bring a message to the congregation, direct from his own lips, speaking his life-changing truth to the spiritual needs of all, would you think about cutting one or two songs, and giving God some extra time? Would you ask the drama team to postpone their 20-minute re-enactment of the Prodigal Son? Would you feel the need, if you were the minister, to put aside some time after God had spoken to tell some stories that made the divine message a bit more real and relevant to the people?

If God did turn up in all his blazing glory to deliver a message to your church, what would your reaction be? Hopefully you would scrap everything, fall trembling on your knees, and say, “Speak, Lord, your servants are listening”.

The truth is, of course, that God is with us whenever we gather, and he speaks his very words to us. Whenever we open God’s Scriptures and read his words, he is with us and he speaks. And yet by our actions—by the way we run our meetings, and by the way we preach—we often demonstrate that we don’t really believe in the transforming power of his words.

This is what speaking the oracles of God means: it means saying what God would say if he were to turn up at your church. It means saying what God did say when he was here on earth in the person of his Son. It means saying what God has said, and continues to say, through the inspired Scriptures. True preaching is preaching that unfolds and explicates and explains and declares the living and active words of God.

Without this conviction everything else in this book is meaningless. It is the foundation of every faithful preacher’s preaching.