

Preaching the Gospel

A monthly magazine for preachers and those who want to preach.

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Observations of an Old Preacher

The last two decades have seen a decided change in the substance of preaching. Sermon topics today consist principally of moral and ethical lessons that deal with the issues that beset our nation. Many of these sermons are scriptural, timely, and need to be preached, but brethren, that is not the full gospel. Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Regardless of what else preachers may preach, the fundamentals of the gospel must not be put on the "back burner." There is no substitute for the gospel, for it is God's power to save the sinner (Rom. 1: 16,17).

--Lindsey Allen, Florence, Alabama, U.S.A. (90 years old)

Today our church "fired" Jesus!

Jerry Blount, Wichita, Kansas, U.S.A.

(Condensed by PKW.)

Today's article will be intended to fill in an oversight in my preaching and teaching. Over the last few years I have found myself reacting to some of the ever-changing attitudes of the society in which I live. I have come to believe that the "feel good" religion now sweeping our churches in the name of Christianity is to the church what drug addiction is to society at large. Once these churches are infected, they rapidly become addicted. They become filled with a very shallow people wanting ever more dramatic events to make them "feel" fulfilled. Once addicted, hype replaces substance. Sounds like somewhat of a reversed substance abuse? Churches abuse their members from a lack of substance.

These churches are always looking for the innovative method of church growth. "Children's church" replaces training your children to worship and respect their creator. As the youth move into teenage, entertainment replaces serious Bible study and effective spiritual growth. In other words, the original call of the gospel is often replaced with an offer of entertainment or treats.

Most of the religious leaders involved in these changes know that what they are presenting is different than what Jesus presented. Worship becomes about "us," rather than about offering ourselves to our sovereign Creator. A shocking reality has settled in on me as I have completed my latest study of the church as described by the Bible.

I believe that Jesus would be run out of the pulpits of most churches today.

At best He would be relegated to some small country church, known for its “backward” ways! Jesus’ “brand” of Christianity is very different from today’s brand. That seems like a weird statement doesn’t it? He is the founder of Christianity! But as we look at Jesus’ actual preaching style, I will be asking directly... “Could you handle it?” I am also asking you to consider carefully what you think “should be” the nature of the preaching (its tone and content) in the church today.

As we observe Jesus’ method of teaching—

- 1. The one major characteristic of Jesus’ teaching style is that He was blunt. Incredibly blunt! Could we tolerate Him in our pulpits today?**

Another surprising characteristic to many was that His normal mode is to end a discussion (or sermon) on something powerfully provoking but...negative. If Jesus preached for you week after week and kept sending you home to think on something negative, (with a sour taste in your mouth)... how long would your congregation tolerate it?

As we observe Jesus’ method of teaching

- 2. He would consistently send them home with something “negative” to chew on!**

Consider the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7). It starts in Matthew 5 with the pleasantries of the beatitudes. Now notice that the sermon ends with the prophecy of the judgment in which most of the people there assembled would be condemned while thinking they were serving Jesus. **“And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”** (Matthew 7:23) Jesus followed this comment with the parable of the wise man who built his house on the rock and the foolish man who built his house on the sand. Then, Jesus sent them home to think about it.

Consider Nicodemus (John 3). I tend to think the tone of Jesus’ voice was tender in this discussion... but the message is as direct as ever.

Jesus’ first response to Nicodemus is that unless he is born again, he cannot even see the kingdom of God. Following Nicodemus’ puzzlement, Jesus says he cannot enter the kingdom without being born of the water and the spirit.

“Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?’” John 3:9-10

Jesus went on to explain further and sent Nicodemus home with . . . “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.” John 3:19-21

Notice that even when Jesus is dealing with godly, seeking people... His usual method is to send them home with some powerful but negative truth to chew on. This is exactly backwards from what “professional” preachers are taught today. To “grow” a church we must leave everyone with something positive.

Consider the woman at the well in John 4. Her discussion with Jesus rapidly focused on pointing out she was living with her 6th man who was not her husband. She eventually ran into town still pondering this and exclaiming such to the townspeople.

Consider the healing at Bethsaida John 5. Jesus healed the man. Then, “Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, ‘Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.’”

Do you see the pattern emerging in which one after another are sent home with something serious, negative, or harsh to ponder?

Finally, let’s consider the aggressive style of Jesus’ preaching in Matthew 23...The first segment is to the effect that the Pharisees actually preach it generally right... but they just don’t live it. That’s a bit surprising from the rhetoric today isn’t it?

If Jesus came to preach a “meeting” at your congregation, Then... culminated the week’s series of lessons with this sermon as the climax, Would He be invited back? Note: Using Matthew’s order of sermons... this is actually Jesus’ last ‘public’ message i.e. His grand finale!

--jerry@eldorable.kscoxmail.com

Serving God for Nothing

Barry Kercheville

As I write, I am in my third visit to India teaching Indian preachers. Many are relatively young in the faith and have an immature concept of New Testament Christianity (which is one of the major reasons we are here). American money, offered indiscriminately, has the tendency of luring unscrupulous men into preaching— something that is not totally unknown in the United States. These will gather up “baptisms” to impress visiting American preachers in the hope of obtaining support. They will hint that if only they had more money they could work harder for the Lord’s cause. Their promise is not a result of a burning desire to work full-time saving souls. In fact, it is clear that if there was no money, there would be no work for the Lord.

The apostle Paul expressed the proper attitude: “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16). C. A. Burcham encouraged me in my younger years when he said something on the order of, “In preaching, we always have a job, the question is whether we will be supported by the brethren or we will support ourselves.” Indeed, money cannot be the driving force, but instead, “the love of Christ constrains us” (2 Cor. 5:14).

This spirit must not only infect those who preach. Satan’s challenge to God concerning Job was, “Does Job serve God for nothing?” Satan’s argument was that Job only served God because of the physical blessings bestowed on him. If these were taken away, Satan was convinced that Job would curse God. Therefore trials are used by God to filter out those who find serving God a convenient and profitable lifestyle (1 Pet. 1:7).

Every year we watch Christians fall when tough times challenge their faith. They are the “wood, hay, and straw” of which Paul spoke in 1 Corinthians 3:12-13, and they are burned in the “fire.” We have now entered a new year and more trials await us. Who among us will be the wood, hay, and straw? It will be those who do not serve God for nothing. But for those who endure, the result will be a proven character that will find praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

--Focus Magazine February 2008

From the Editor

Negative Preaching

The articles in this issue are rather negative—and for good reason. I fully agree with Bro. Allen and Bro. Blount. Bro. Blount is observing denominational tendencies that are affecting churches of Christ—more especially the churches which already show their liberal attitude toward the scriptures by participating in institutionalism. But there are always brethren who become most upset when the sermons are not “positive” enough, and Bro. Allen is addressing what he observes in faithful churches in a very conservative area of the United States. Brethren, let’s look to ourselves and make sure that we preach the whole gospel. Let us make sure that we do not shy away from preaching the negative messages which Jesus preached. **PREACH THE WORD!**

The Sermon’s Introduction

How sad it is when a preacher does not say something at the beginning of his sermon to cause the hearers to want to hear what he is going to say. Yes, we hearers are supposed to pay attention no matter what. But when the preacher catches our interest at the beginning, the sermon makes a greater impact.

Preacher: When you get up to preach, imagine that when you announce your sermon subject the hearers are saying to themselves, “So what?” (I hope they are not, but imagine that they are.) Your job then is to get them interested in what you are going to say. Say something to make the topic vital, important, and helpful. Use a scripture, an illustration, a current event—something to help your hearers get involved in the subject. Introduce your sermon carefully!

But even worse is when the preacher does not announce his topic and begins without letting the audience know where he is going or why. No introduction, no topic, no explanation—**NO INTEREST.** Introduce your sermon!

More Subscribers?

Regularly we get requests to add new people to our mailing list, and this makes us very happy. Feel free to add others. If you feel this magazine is helpful, then share it.

Online with Joel

Our grandson, Joel, will complete his three-month trip to the U.S. on March 26, so I do not have an article from him this month. We miss him very much and are counting the days until he returns. He says he is having a wonderful time, but he is also looking forward to his return to South Africa.

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