

Preaching the Gospel

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

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Deciding What To Preach

The gospel preacher has the job of bringing lessons which will cause the hearers to obey the Lord. Non-Christians must be brought to believe, repent and be baptized; new Christians must hear what the Lord expects of them; older Christians need exhortation to grow and put into practice what they have learned. Sin must be rebuked; false teachings must be exposed. Christians must be equipped to teach others, and Bible knowledge must be increased in all.

The job of the preacher is never-ending. And it is a big responsibility to choose the sermons to preach.

Where to Find Sermon Subjects

1. The first thing to consider is the need of your audience. In the last issue of PTG Magazine there were articles showing that today's audiences need the "old" gospel—negative sermons against denominationalism and other religious errors, and first-principle lessons on salvation and the one true church. So when considering the direct needs of the hearers, remember the general needs concerning these things.
2. Current events will also provide sermon subjects. The current problems with Islam call for sermons on that religion. The world-wide economic recession provides a need for sermons on the Christian's attitude toward money. Corruption in government, some aspects of feminism, the tide of approval for homosexuality and fornication, and the overwhelming opinion that truth is whatever the individual thinks it is—all these things call for careful attention in sermons.
3. The Christian, and especially the preacher, must be a reader of his Bible. In that reading he will find many things which will suggest good sermons. Old Testament stories, the sins which the prophets railed against, and the careful reasoning concerning "doctrinal" subjects found in the New Testament. He will find passages which provide excellent sermon outlines and material. (Try Galatians 5:1 for a powerful three-point sermon.)
4. Other religious material will furnish sermon material. I have found the articles in papers published by brethren to be full of sermon material. Many of them appear to be sermons in themselves.
5. Books of sermons can be very helpful. I like sermons which are completely written out. McGarvey's sermons are particularly helpful. Sermon outline books are also of use, but I have not found them to be very helpful to myself.
6. Debate books should be a regular part of a preacher's reading. You will be surprised what jewels you will find in them. You will find sermon material there.

7. Of course, the questions you get from the people you meet will be very important. Mzwandile Gazu gets many questions as a result of his radio program. These furnish very good sermon topics.
8. And I must not forget. If your wife says that something should be preached on, listen to her. She is usually right.

Keep working to preach a good variety of helpful sermons. Pray that your selection will do real good. And then pray some more.

--PKW

Sticking to the Subject

Sometimes a church will invite various preachers to speak on a lectureship. The inviting church will assign subjects, usually on one particular theme, and each speaker is expected to deal with the topic assigned.

Unfortunately speakers sometimes speak on a general topic rather than deal specifically with the matter assigned. Once I heard a brother who was assigned, "Are all of the laws of the Old Testament done away, or are some of them still binding?" He delivered a general lesson on the Old and New Testament laws, and only dealt with his subject with a few generalities at the end. I was disappointed, and I think others were, also.

So if a church invites you to speak on a certain subject, and you agree to speak on that subject, **DO WHAT YOU HAVE AGREED TO DO!** This may take more study and work than preaching a general lesson that you already have prepared. Don't be lazy. Do the work. If you are not willing to do that, then do not agree to speak on the topic.

When you begin your preparations for your lecture, it will help if you write at the top of the paper your purpose statement. What do you hope to accomplish? Put that at the top. Then as you work, be sure that everything you select for your lesson, and the arrangement of those items, will work together to do what you, and the church which has asked you to speak, desire.

On other occasions, a preacher can also wander from the subject he announces to the congregation. A short journey off the path may be all right, but make sure that you cover the subject you have announced and make that the main theme of your lesson. Stick to the subject.

--PKW

Brethren, warnings like the following are coming too often. Take heed!--PKW

The Full Counsel of God

Ward Hogland

In Acts 20 Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus he was pure from the blood of all men because he had preached all the counsel of God.

I heard Billy Graham preach, and much to the chagrin of some of my brethren I could say "amen" to 95 per cent of his sermon. He preached against lying, stealing, committing adultery. He preached on the home and how to be a good husband and wife and to rear your children. He

never mentioned the work, organization, and worship of the church. He never mentioned instrumental music and related subjects. Mr. Graham will not stand condemned, so much, for what he preached but for **what he did not preach!**

Brethren, I am scared to death! Recently I have heard several of our young preachers and they all preached the same thing. They preached on the home and how to be a good husband and wife and how to rear your children. Kind friend, I have some news for you. The church did not go into apostasy because of bad husbands; it went into apostasy by polluting the work, organization and worship of the church! I asked a young preacher if he knew why the missionary society was unscriptural. He said, "I don't have the slightest idea." I then asked him if he knew why the sponsoring church was wrong. He said he knew it was wrong but did not know why.

Brethren, remember the church is only one generation away from apostasy. A generation comes around every 30 years. When you wake up some morning and find the church in complete apostasy, remember it wasn't what they preached but what they didn't preach.

--from The Pekin, Indiana Bulletin, November 2008

The Depressed Preacher

Nathan Williams

Elijah must have felt pretty good. He had successfully arranged a challenge between Jehovah and Baal to take place on the top of Mount Carmel. Hundreds of prophets of Baal were present for the face-off, as well as plenty of spectators. What more could a prophet (or preacher) want? Of course, some might contend the odds were severely stacked in Baal's favor, but they would only be counting on human fingers. Elijah was counting on Jehovah, and he trusted Him to follow through.

Baal's team went first, to make sure it was a completely fair fight. After hours of passionate pleading to a god who was not a god, it was Elijah's turn. After Elijah prayed before the people, Jehovah made Himself known in a mighty way by consuming Elijah's water-logged sacrifice, including the stones it rested upon, with fire from heaven. No one could contest the result – Jehovah had won! The people said, "*The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God*" (1 Kings 18:39 NASB). They even helped Elijah slaughter those 450 prophets of Baal.

The overwhelming response of the people was more than the "Great job," or "You really stepped on my toes that time," or even "You really motivated me today." This response was tangible, immediate, and decisive. The people were moved to action.

Elijah must have felt pretty good at that moment. But in just a matter of days (perhaps even the next day) his countenance changed. "*He was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba*" (1 Kings 19:3). He asked God that he might die! How quickly this great man fell into the depths of depression. The Israelite kingdom, as a whole, did not turn toward God. Jezebel still sought his life. Elijah was still a wanted man. How could he press on if, after God's mighty demonstration, nothing really changed among the people?

Perhaps there are some lessons for preachers today. I suggest the following:

1. Don't assume to understand God's purposes. Sometimes we feel like we KNOW what God is doing in our lives. After all, we are spiritually-minded; we can read the signs better than anyone else, right? Perhaps we should get it through our thick heads that we MIGHT understand AS MUCH as everyone else. Who are we to know the mind of God? We only know what is revealed, as is the case with all Christians. We might flatter ourselves to have figured out God's intentions on a matter, only to be thrown into a deep pit of doubt and puzzlement when things don't work out the way we divined. You probably know of preachers who are constantly discouraged because they "know" what is needed in a certain situation and it never happens. They spend much time trying to motivate people to move to such-and-such a continent or such-and-such a state to preach the gospel. Or they've been trying for years to get so-and-so to start a class in his home. Or they've been working with an unrepentant soul for months with no visible signs of surrender. We seem to be beating our heads against a wall sometimes. Perhaps we should step back and think, maybe it's not God's plan for that to happen right now. We should accept God's purposes, whatever they might be. We should accept the fact we don't KNOW what His purposes are in many cases. Let's just work with what we have been given and let God fill in the gaps.

2. Don't expect too much from people. Effective, positive change comes slowly with most people. The human mind can't deal with great, sweeping, comprehensive change very well. We study for months or years on a passage and finally come to a startling conclusion. We think, "Why did I not see that before?" Then we try to preach it to a church in a single sermon and expect everyone to latch on to the thought immediately. You've heard of the three keys to teaching: "Repetition, repetition, repetition." People need time to wrestle with an idea. After all, didn't we take months to come to it ourselves?

3. We are not alone. Elijah thought he was the lone servant of God in a world of filthy pagans. God, who sees the big picture, came to Elijah, not in a mighty and fearful way, but in the sound of a gentle blowing. He assured Elijah there were still 7,000 in Israel not bowing to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Sometimes we are blind to all those who are faithfully following Jehovah. Perhaps they even walk with us in our church families, but all we see are side-tracked, apathetic, unfocused people who would scatter at the drop of a hat. But that's our limited perspective. Let's remember we are NOT alone. There ARE those who are faithful. Let's keep preaching to strengthen and motivate those good hearts!

4. Just keep working. The first thing God did for Elijah was to provide him with food to cheer him up and strengthen him (1 Kings 19:5-8). The second thing God did was to give him another task to accomplish (1 Kings 19:15-16). God did not say, "Okay, you are tired so you can stop, hide somewhere, and rest for a few years." God sent him right back to work. Perhaps one of the best remedies for depression is to refocus and start working again. Put everything else behind, and don't look back. Remember, he who is constantly looking back cannot plow a straight line. Look forward.

We have been entrusted with a task to steadily preach the whole counsel of God. Let's not let Satan side-track our work by depressing and discouraging us. God has given us great promises, among which is, "*Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you*" (1 Tim. 4:16).

May God bless us all in our labors and strengthen our hearts and hands!