

The Sermon of Sermons

(Adapted by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. Not a prideful “This is the best sermon ever,” but a sermon about sermons, or the place of sermons in scriptural worship.

I. SERMONS IN THE SCRIPTURES

- A. Acts 20:7 - Traditionally a text used to authorize communing every Sunday, it also authorizes preaching when disciples assemble for worship.
- B. 1Cor. 14:19 - Paul reveals that the purpose of preaching is enlightening, edifying, and instructing the assembly.
 - 1. Preaching isn't about floor time for brethren who cannot edify. While there is an expected period of training and development, if one cannot edify others, he should not preach.
- C. 1Cor. 14:26 - Indicates that even in a time of inspired gifts, men came prepared to present lessons.
 - 1. Preparation is absolutely essential - 1Tim. 4:15-16

II. WHAT IS A SERMON?

- A. Bible names are “sermon, lesson, teaching, preaching,” all representing the same concept: a religious message presented in an instructive and persuasive lecture format; one person speaks while others listen.
- B. Not many directives given regarding format, subject, age, or type of person preaching in the Scriptures.
 - 1. 1Tim. 2:9-10 - Women are not to preach to men.
 - 2. 1Cor. 14:26 - Any prepared, capable, Christian man may present a sermon when appropriate.
 - 3. 1Tim. 5:17 - Elders can preach lessons.
 - 4. Most often the one who preaches the lesson is the evangelist, one who follows in the steps of Paul, Timothy, and Titus.
 - 5. 1Tim. 4:11, 4:16, 5:7, 6:2; 2Tim. 1:11, 2:2, 2:24-26, 4:1-2, 5
 - 6. Titus 2:1, 2:15, 3:14
 - 7. Make the message relevant for the needs of audience and occasion.

III. WHY A SERMON?

- A. Edification and encouragement of Christians - 1Cor. 14:26; Heb. 10:24-25
- B. Worship services are for the disciples, designed for the saint's edification; any visitors to the assembly are welcome, but are incidental to the purpose of Christian worship.
 - 1. That's what Bible studies and Gospel meetings are for.
 - 2. To gear the sermon toward a visitor is to miss the point of the assembly according to the Scriptures -- the edification of one another.
 - 3. We do not redirect the communion, offering, prayers, or singing for the benefit of visitors; fellowship in worship is with one another as Christians before the Lord.

4. If an unbeliever is convicted regarding a lesson, wonderful! But that is not the point or purpose of sermons in the assembly.
5. A practical, reasonable pattern for preaching in two Sunday services is to present a first principles lesson in the morning, as those who are young, developing, or weak in the faith are most likely to be present in greater numbers.
 - a. For the evening service, the sermon should address the needs of stronger, more mature Christians who are more likely to attend that service in greater numbers.

IV. WHAT TYPES OF LESSONS ARE TO BE PREACHED?

- A. Report of the work in other places - Acts 14:27
- B. Exhortation to remain in the faith - Acts 14:21-22
 1. "Exhort: To incite by words or advice; to animate or urge by arguments to a good deed or to any laudable conduct or course of action. In a sense, pushing forward." (*AV1611, KJV Dictionary*)
 2. Exhortations are best when phrased positively and accompanied by love and encouragement; too much beating up on brethren or errorists will lead to calloused hearts.
- C. Instructing one another - Rom. 15:14
 1. Instructions can be anything from interpreting a passage for the benefit of brethren, to explaining a topic, or making difficult passages clear.
- D. Reproving and rebuking - 2Tim. 4:2
 1. An unpleasant lesson necessary to correct things that are not right.
 2. Rebukes are inherently negative, and do not lead to obvious encouragement, but are necessary to keep the faith for the long run.
 3. Don't take a rebuke of an individual to the pulpit, ever - Matt. 18:15-17
 - a. Sermons designed to target individuals are seldom effective, and more likely to be counterproductive in the long run.
 - b. Hammering on week after week on a target usually ends up with the target leaving. "Well at least they left knowing the truth."
 - c. My first instinct is to tell such a brother: "The truth is, I would like for you to leave, too."
 - d. The correct response is the command of the apostle Paul: "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all" (1Thes. 5:14).
 - e. If I preach with the attitude "well at least I told them," there are two people who need to repent: the brother who departed and me for failing to do it the way the Lord said to preach -- "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16).
 4. Rebuke should be gentle with the utmost respect - 1Tim. 5:1-2; Gal. 6:1

V. WHAT THE SERMON IS NOT

- A. The sermon is not entertainment.
 1. Our nation is addicted to entertainment; too many preachers think they must cater to the childish impulse of entertainment over edification.

2. The quality of the lesson is in its content, not in its presentation.
 3. What makes a good sermon in your judgment?
 - a. Feel good, feel motivated, feel corrected?
 - b. Admire the presentation, the speaker's talent, the organization?
 - c. 2Cor. 10:10
 4. Just as with singing, the presentation of the lesson should not distract from the message; it is to complement the lesson.
 5. Presentation can interfere in two ways: poorly done or over the top.
- B. The sermon is not designed to be the time in the assembly where one person gets up and talks, and everyone waits patiently for him to be done so they can go home.
1. I do not get up and preach for my own benefit; I've already received the benefit of the study in preparing the lesson.
 2. The lesson is designed for the benefit of everyone else, so that you can acquire the same understanding I received - Eph. 3:4
 3. You can only get from the lesson what you invest in it in terms of focus.
- C. The lesson is not intended to always please people.
1. If you want a preacher that always speaks the truth, understand that eventually he is going to say something you don't like or don't agree.
 2. What you do after the preacher finishes the sermon says far more about you than it says about him.
- D. The sermon is not perfect and infallible.
1. 1Cor. 1:12-13 and "preacheritis"; Acts 17:11
 2. No teaching is right just because the preacher says it; it is only right if God says it. But if God said it, don't make the self-destructive mistake of dismissing it as the ramblings of an overly conservative preacher.
- E. "People have an idea that the preacher is an actor on a stage and they are the critics, blaming or praising him. What they don't know is that they are the actors on the stage; the preacher is merely the prompter standing in the wings, reminding them of their lost lines." (Søren Kierkegaard)

Conclusion:

- A. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..." (2Cor. 5:11).
- B "It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners. It was understood that whoever was caught doing this received a severe beating. A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted their (the communists') terms. It was a deal; we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching. They were happy beating us, so everyone was happy." (Richard Wurmbrand, Tortured for Christ)
- C. "The Gospel is preached in the ears of all men; it only comes with power to some. The power that is in the Gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher; otherwise men would be converters of souls. Nor does it lie in the preacher's learning; otherwise it could consist of the wisdom of men. ... We might as well preach to stone walls as preach to humanity unless the power be with the word to convert the soul." (Charles Spurgeon)