



What Makes a Good Sermon?

By Keith Greer

Pretend that you are planning to have a gospel meeting and are considering the type of preacher you want to hold this meeting. What should be your most important consideration? Style? How well known he is? How long he preaches? Topics? While I believe you would get as many answers as the people you might ask, allow me to make some suggestions. Over the past few years, I've attended a number of meetings and heard many different types of speakers and sermons. Well-known, not-so-well-known, older men, younger men, good speakers, and not-so-good speakers. Over the past ten years, I've seen an alarming change in preaching – not for the better. How can we decide whether a preacher has a good sermon? The greatest change has taken place in the way brethren judge what makes a good sermon. Please allow me to use the Bible to answer our question regarding the qualities present in a good sermon. Surely God has an opinion on this subject!

How much scripture is used? Sadly, many of the men I've heard speak during the past few years have forgotten what preaching is. In spite of popular belief, preaching is about teaching God's word – and that's all!

“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” {Acts 20:26,27} A preacher must not be afraid to speak on any subject found in the Bible. Any preacher who refuses to speak on any Biblical subject should find another line of work! Listen to the words of the apostle Paul as he was leaving the Ephesian elders. “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” {Acts 20:32}

When a preacher enters the pulpit and gives more stories and illustrations than scripture, he makes a terrible trade-off. Please understand; illustrations and stories are fine – if they endorse a spiritual point. But if the stories are used to entertain the listeners, and have no connection with the lesson subject, the speaker is not preaching the gospel, but seeking to entertain his audience. Preaching is not entertainment! Sadly, I'm afraid we are grooming many brethren to reject good gospel preachers by giving them a continual dose that is more stories and less scripture.

Recently, I heard a man speak for thirty minutes before he mentioned one scripture! He preached for an additional ten minutes and used a total of only four verses! How much of God's word did this audience hear? What did the lost sinner learn concerning his sin and his need for Christ's blood? By the way, he offered no invitation. This is a sad commentary on gospel preaching!

Did the speaker "rightly divide the word of God." But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." {2 Corinthians 4:2} Preachers must use the scriptures correctly. Sadly, many preachers spend more time on the computer and the Internet than studying God's word. Good preaching doesn't just happen; it takes effort and study on the part of the man doing the preaching.

"So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading." {Nehemiah 8:8} Preachers need to make applications in their preaching. How does the text apply to the listener? Preachers must, by showing how it applies to them, make the text come alive to those who hear it. The alien sinner needs to understand his lost condition and need for the blood of Christ. How can the sinner understand how Romans 6:23 applies to him? The wages of sin are death – his spiritual death--if he does not repent. The sinner's good intentions will not save his soul!

Does the preaching sound a warning? "So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and

warn them for Me. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul." {Ezekiel 33:7-9} Unfortunately, some preachers have grown weary of dealing with the issues of the day. Preachers need to practice "preventive preaching." Maybe a problem is not yet present in a certain congregation. The preacher can, by preaching on them, ensure that issues swirling around the country won't hinder the local work. A preacher can also hinder the work by becoming a "specialty preacher." Preachers cannot just preach on the issues. Balance preaching is necessary. We must warn, exhort, and edify. If a preacher goes all over the country with a set of "issues sermons," maybe he needs to spend more time developing new sermons!

Does he preach with love? "But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ." {Ephesians 4:15} Does his preaching touch the hearts of those who are lost in sin? Does his preaching enable them to recognize God's love for all men? Even preaching on difficult subjects, issues of the day, or church problems must be done with love. Preachers are not infallible, and they must be willing to answer questions about their teaching. Whenever a preacher believes he is above criticism, right or wrong, he should find another line of work. People must see our care by our conduct and our preaching.

Gospel preaching must be filled with the simple gospel. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." {Romans 1:16} The power is in the message – not the messenger. God will surely give the increase if we plant the proper seed (1 Corinthians 3:6-8). Gospel preachers don't save souls God's word does that (James 1:21). But, how can souls be snatched away from Satan's power if we use less and less Bible in our preaching? I'm afraid we have too many preachers who are more concerned about being liked, having full meeting schedules, and making names for themselves, than they are about preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ. What makes a good sermon? Simply put, when God's word is taught, application is made, souls are edified, and the seed is planted. Leave the entertainment to the professionals – preach the word!!!