



Faith Pulpit

Biblical Preaching in the Twentieth Century

Preaching is foremost in the minds of those who teach homiletics classes. They love to preach, and they like to talk about preaching. Such was the case recently as another teacher of homiletics and I met for breakfast to discuss how to be more effective in the classroom. Our conversation was side-tracked from methodology as we began to deal with the dearth of expository preaching today. This weakness is readily observable in many recent books on homiletics. The emphasis is away from exposition to “inductive” or “life experience” preaching. Such writing is impacting even the pulpit ministry of some who call themselves “expository” preachers. My colleague gave an example from his experience in one of the prestige pulpits of America where he was instructed that only “how to” sermons were preached from that pulpit (that is, how to be a better person, how to relate to one another, how to deal with life problems). Relating to people’s needs is essential to the pulpit ministry, but that is the place to end a sermon, not the point of beginning. Biblical preaching must begin with Scripture and then reach out to touch people’s needs.

The argument is made that we live in a day when things have changed. People will no longer tolerate forceful, expositional preaching. Propositional preaching that begins with God and His declarations is viewed as archaic, irrelevant, and unacceptable. Is it possible that Paul’s command to “preach the Word” (2 Timothy 4:2) was just for Timothy’s day and ministry? That command is not given in an optional mode, but rather as a command to be obeyed, without question or reservation. In spite of the changes in our society, and even the changes in people’s attitude toward authority, there are several clear reasons for believing that Paul’s command is still imperative for today’s preaching.

Biblical Preaching Is Relevant

Paul’s command to Timothy grew out of a reminder that in the last days, “perilous” times would come. He believed those days were already upon them. These difficult troublesome times are vividly

described in 2 Timothy 3. People will be out of control with personal problems, relational difficulties and spiritual struggles for reality. No solution appears to be at hand to the troubles associated with the last days. That is, no solution is mentioned until one comes to chapter four. The “therefore” of II Timothy 4:1 clearly connects the command to “Preach the Word” with meeting the unbelievable conditions described in chapter three. **WHEN THE WORLD IS POLLUTED, ONLY BIBLICAL PREACHING CAN PURIFY IT!**

It is obvious that scientific advancements, educational increases and humanistic rationalism are not providing the answer to this world’s corruption. They may be relevant to making living conditions better, but life has become morally blighted. The only relevant message for a corrupt world system is the clear, convicting preaching of God’s Word.

Biblical Preaching Is Required

Paul reminds us (2 Timothy 4:1) that Timothy’s ministry must be capable of meeting the approval of God at the appearing of Jesus Christ. This is an awesome realization for this young preacher. His final test will not be how well he does with the lions at Ephesus or how popular his ministry is with the community. Timothy’s ministry must stand the test of heaven’s requirement! The standard for that final testing is his faithful and clear preaching of God’s Word.

The cliché that the preacher should believe only half of the bad things people say about his ministry and nothing of the good things is sound advice. The success of a ministry cannot be measured by attendance, applause or even accolades. Popularity or prestige have little to do with meeting the requirement of our final ministry test. Evidently, preaching the Word effectively and urgently is the requirement by which we will be measured as we come face to face with our Lord in eternity.

Campbell Morgan said that the two essential qualities for a sermon were TRUTH and CLARITY. That is what is meant by “preaching the Word.” Expounding Scripture in a way that opens up the meaning intended by the writer and applies it in the way the writer purposed is the kind of preaching Christ requires and will approve.

Biblical Preaching Is Relational

Biblical preaching is beautifully illustrated by the Prophets, John the Baptist, our Lord and the Apostles. They all fulfill what Paul describes as consistency in reproof, rebuking, and exhorting. This is Biblical preaching related to people and their specific needs. Preaching is not intended to be a discourse on a religious theme or a psychological exercise in becoming a better person while overcoming life’s pressures. Biblical preachers took hold on the Scriptures like a warrior with his sword drawn for battle. Interestingly one of the descriptive terms for the Word of God is “sword” (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12). The same Greek word is used in both references and means a knife,

or a short sword that was worn on the belt. In the midst of battle the soldier used this short sword for close, hand-to-hand combat. When he stood eye-to-eye, chest-to-chest with his enemy the short sword would be drawn and plunged to the heart.

Biblical preaching involves feeding, comforting, inspiring, encouraging, and challenging people. In the context of II Timothy 4 the ministry of reproving, rebuking, and exhorting is that of battling for the souls and lives of people. This is a battle ministry which includes revealing error, resisting sin and leading into righteousness. All of this pictures the preacher with the sword of God's Word standing heart-to-heart with his people as he delivers the Word.

Preaching May Challenge the Mind, But It Must Convict and Convince the Heart!

Biblical preaching is to be forceful: a "thus saith the Lord" kind of ministry. Herein lies the preacher's authority and confidence in the pulpit. Without such forceful, declarative preaching, he really has little to say that will change people's hearts and lives.

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Dr. Elvin K. Mattison (Ph.D., Wayne State University) was a distinguished pastor, educator, and theologian with a profound commitment to ministry and theological education. Dr. Mattison dedicated 22 years to pastoral ministry in Michigan and Connecticut before transitioning to academia. He served as a professor at institutions including Spurgeon Baptist Bible College in Mulberry, Florida; Northwestern Baptist Seminary in Tacoma, Washington; and Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa.

His international influence extended through teaching pastors at the doctoral level in India and South Korea. Known for his beautiful Irish tenor voice, he recorded an album titled "Songs of the Savior." Dr. Mattison entered glory in 2004.