

Why Sermons Should be Preached, and Not Be Pod Cast on The Internet!

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Act 28:31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

1Co 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

1Co 2:4-5 And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

The widespread trend today, is for preachers and churches to put every sermon ever preached on the internet, making them available worldwide in video or MP3 formats, thus spreading the good news and giving both the preacher and the churches involved an exposure unheard of in old days. Churches everywhere are pod casting their sermons free of charge. People everywhere can hear the wonderful messages being preached. This marvelous technology has opened vast new realms for the propagation of the gospel in ways before unheard of and unimagined.

The tendency has been so great that it has prompted preachers everywhere, to “improve” their preaching, after all, they are preaching to an unknown and unseen audience, and they want to preach the best sermons that they are capable of. The really good preachers have become “internet icons”, famous and popular around the world, “internet pulpit sensations”. The whole affair seems quite innocent and quite good. After all, what could be wrong with “preaching the gospel”? Think of the masses that are being reached? Surely this is a good thing, isn't it?

Actually, the entire concept of the instant broadcasting of the message of Christ, all over the world, for all to enjoy and be touched by, is a sacred shibboleth these days. Nobody would dare question the methodology of something with such a great potential of changing peoples lives. It is so good, that it could never be bad! This is exactly the fulfillment of Christ's prophecy that “this gospel shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24: 14). Nobody can dispute the validity of this, and if they do, then they are of the devil! Anyone who does not endorse the broadcasting of sermons over the internet, must be an Anti-Christ.

Yes, it is the most wide-spread method of sowing seed today. Everybody is doing it. Any preacher worth his salt is on the internet. It increases his sphere of ministry. It spreads the message being preached. What on earth could ever be wrong with something so right?

At the risk of being defrocked, and driven out of town with base ball bats, I'm going to lay my neck on the chopping block and suggest at least 5 reasons why the practice ought to be abandoned at once, and why a return to traditional preaching methods needs to be re-introduced. I hope that if you are a preacher, you will take the time to consider carefully what I am saying here. I'm not playing to the popularity cheering section here. I'm trying to be honest with God and with myself. I may never win a vote as a favorite internet preacher, or television preacher, but I have to bring God's word to my thoughts, and change my preconceived notions where there is a conflict with what He says.

1. The first thing I want to point out is that a pragmatic methodology of preaching is unacceptable for a genuine prophet of God. The ends do not justify the means.

Pragmatism says: "The end justifies the means". If people are being saved, and lives are being saved, if the great commission is being fulfilled, then it does not matter "how" we do it! The important thing is that the job is getting done. Now all this sounds well and good, but is this the way that God's prophets should think? Do whatever it takes, do whatever works? Or do we have a responsibility to ask first and foremost... "Does it please the Lord?" "Is it what He has told us to do?"

Paul referred to His preaching as a "demonstration" of the Holy Spirit. It was of the highest order of spiritual power (dunamis), and not a demonstration of human wisdom or enticing words. Human wisdom is exactly what we face at this point today. Sophistry says "anything goes". God says: "Preaching is a demonstration of the Holy Spirit and Power".

The word "demonstration" here is not synonymous with "a performance". The mop salesman at the State Fair puts on a demonstration of his mop so you will buy it. The super non-stick pots and pans are sold the same way... they are "demonstrated" by the slick huckster to get you to lay down your hard earned cash and buy a set. This is not what God has in mind when he says that the preaching of Paul was a "demonstration" of an unearthly person and an unearthly power.

The "demonstration" is in the preaching, not in "a performance". We are not hucksters for Jesus! We are not peddling the gospel, like a carnival vendor. We are voices from an unseen realm. We are mouthpieces for God. Our words are not from human wisdom, human sources, human methodologies, human efforts, human powers, or anything else human. When God says Paul's preaching was a demonstration of Him (Spirit and Power), He is talking about the effects of actual preaching, to actual people, in a

congregational setting.

The reason I chose to include Acts 28:31 in my texts above, is because the word for “preaching” there cannot be misinterpreted as any form of conversational speech, or private witnessing, but it means “public heralding” of Christ in a congregational setting. It involves the idea of a congregation and a formal sermon being preached to them. The word does not mean listening to a tape, or private witnessing. It does not mean rehashing a message that was preached a year ago, by a stranger to strangers! It is congregational “heralding”! When the preacher is heralding God’s message to a congregation he is interacting between time and eternity. He is bringing a heavenly message, with a heavenly power to bear on a specific people whom God has put in front of him. The Holy Spirit owns it, and both His presence and power “demonstrate” it. The sermon in this heralding context is a living thing, life-giving, life-changing, time stopping and eternity bringing. The preacher looks into the eyes and hearts of his hearers, and he moves his whole soul to change them, to speak specifically to them and to their needs. But using enticing words, polished speech, pretty verbiage...That is never what true preaching is about!

All the forces of heaven and earth are moved to effectuate a living demonstration of God, when a sermon is preached. This is a most unique and precious thing. It is not transmissible. By that I mean that you cannot transmit what happens in a real preaching moment, over a tape, CD, DVD, MP3, Video, radio or television station. Real preaching is alive. It breathes the breath of heaven. It brings the Life and Power of God. It is not a replay of a good performance. It is the real performance. It is the living moment of interaction between a true spokesman for God and the people to whom He is supposed to deliver his message. It is tears and prayers and pointed thought, directed speech...targeted to specific individuals, who are known by the preacher in that living moment, and through the operation of the Holy Spirit. It is the dew of heaven falling upon the brows of hungry and needy souls who are brought together for the purpose of worship, and praise and listening. When you are listening to a real sermon, by a real man of God, in a real congregation, you will look at the Spirit working around you. You will be impacted by everything that transpires, and not just by the preachers words. Nothing substitutes for live heralding! There are no imitations of it. There is no repeating it. It happens in a moment, and applies only to that moment, because it is a Holy Spirit event.

This is not to say that God cannot use a tape, or an MP3 in someone’s life. He certainly can, and He has used such things. What I am saying here is that the preaching event is not the performance of human wisdom or enticements. It is a very special and sacred thing which cannot be duplicated through electronic means.

I’m sure many will challenge me on this, but my point here is that we are not free to do as we please (pragmatism) but we must do what He wants. And clearly the best way to preach is congregationally, to live bodies, in a live setting, while looking into their eyes.

2. The second thing I want to address is the way that Pod casting and the like, has contributed to the decay of church centered worship. Assembly together for corporate worship is commanded.

While there are a few churches experiencing phenomenal growth today, most of them are emergent or they are churches with little emphasis on the centrality of the cross. Their emphasis is on various forms of humanistic thought, and not on the solid exposition and application of the Bible. Aside from a few of these growing giants, there is a widespread exodus from church today.

When we pod cast, we are saying... "It's OK to stay home and miss church, because you can listen to it whenever you want. We are feeding the frenzy of individualism, and undermining the Biblical precept of corporate worship. People say, "I can worship God, just as good at home, as I worship Him in church." And we are supporting that idea with our tapes, MP3's and videos.

Without going into too much depth (which would sidetrack me), let me simply say, that the Bible commands believers to "assemble together" (Heb. 10:25; Matt 18:20). We are living in a time when it is customary to emphasize "the individual" and his "individual experience". But the truth is that worship on earth is to be patterned after that in heaven. In heaven all of the worship is corporate. Please read Revelation 4 and 5 to see how worship is done in heaven. There are no soloist in heaven! Every imaginable kind of being joins in the one heavenly chorus of worship and praise. Individuals are nothing, and the paeon of praise is the blending of all voices together of all the concentric circles gathered around the throne of God and the Lamb. What does this have to do with why sermons should be preached and not pod cast? It shows that our worship is to be corporate worship. Saying "I can worship God at home, or in a forest glen, or on the lawn mower" does not eliminate the need to assemble together for a corporate worship experience, where preaching is part of the experience of worship. The clear pattern in the book of Acts is corporate worship for the church, which includes preaching. Look up and compare: Acts 1:13-14, Acts 2:1, Acts 2:42, Acts 16:16, and Acts 20:7. The same truth is emphasized by Paul. See 1Cor. 5:4; 1Cor. 11:17-18, 1Cor. 11:20, and 1Cor. 14:23.

From these verses we can conclude that the modern emphasis on "me" and "my", and "what do I get out of the service?" is not normal, nor is it healthy for the church. It's not about what you get out of the worship. It's about "what does God get out of the worship?"

We are witnessing the "slaughter on tenth avenue" of the church that meets there. She is publishing her videos and pod cast's, but her pews are forsaken, in favor of a more convenient and more attractive imitation worship at home in front of a screen. The church suffers tremendously, and so do the people who practice this kind of phony

worship. How can they have “fellowship”? or does that concept no longer apply? How can they blend their voices with others in the singing, Psalms, spiritual songs etc? How can they put their tithes and offerings in the plate? How can they put their arms around a hurting brother or sister? How can they tell special needs to the church? Or Prayer requests? How can they look at their brothers and sisters responding to the message? Can they see that tear rolling down their cheek as God speaks to the people?

Making the sermons available online, has made them unnecessary in church! Why go, when we can have all we want of them, at our convenience, at home? So what has happened is that we have sent the subtle message that church attendance isn't really that important...that instant church, anytime, any place is perfectly acceptable. Of course we justify it this way...“we are reaching the shut-ins and people who cannot come, for one reason or the other.” “We are making the sermons available for review, by the people who do attend, just in case they missed something. This will help them grow.” Yes, that might be true in one sense, but does that justify us making church available as if it were bottled, and all you have to do is pour it out whenever you want it? Tincture of church service, essence of worship, drops of preaching, oil of Amen! Does that cheapen the worship experience and practices of our people? Doesn't that say that the corporate worship isn't really all that important? Of course it does. I'm not saying that there may not be situations where pod casting might be better than nothing, such as in the case of the genuinely shut in. I'm saying that indiscriminate use of such things undercuts our goal of getting people to genuinely worship God in church!

3. The pod casting of sermons has raised up a generation of “Sermon Critics”, rather than a generation of true worshippers.

This is perhaps my strongest objection to the practice of pod casting. They are everywhere, the new critics, the experts on sermonizing, sermons and preachers. They listen for a few minutes, and if it is not what they want to hear, or the style is not to their liking, they cancel it and go on to another sermon. They keep doing this until find the perfect sermon, the perfect preacher for the moment, and bam they put on their critiquing ears, and proceed to determine what they like and dislike about the sermon, the preacher, the church and anything else they decide needs to be criticized. These people listen, not to learn, not to humble themselves under God through the message, but to judge everything according to their own arbitrary standards.

The problem with this whole concept is that it sets men up as their own judges of preachers and sermons. If a preacher is delivering a message from God, what gives these people the right to judge it, reject it, approve it, recommend it, or loathe it? Who do these listeners think that they are? God's message requires no man's approval. It requires humble submission to the truth. God's man requires no ones approval. And God's truth is true whether you like it or not. So where do these professional sermon listeners get off with their arrogance and judgmentalism?

This largely comes from the notion of entertainment. We have subtly conveyed the message that sermons are to be entertaining. How many times have I had people come up to me after church and say...“Great sermon preacher, I really enjoyed it.” Enjoyed it? Who told you that you are supposed to “enjoy” sermons? You enjoy a tasty ice cream cone. You enjoy a good book. You enjoy a baseball game. But why on earth do you think that you are supposed to enjoy a sermon? Sermons are supposed to dig deep into your heart, and convict you of sin. They are supposed to open up your utter unworthiness in the presence of the All-worthy One. They are supposed to tell you God’s message for your life. But “enjoyment” is not an appropriate adjective to describe a sermon. Bowing before God, humbling the soul, repentance, growth in grace, these are appropriate responses, but not enjoyment. Sermons are not supposed to give us pleasure, they are supposed to give us truth.

Preacher, please listen to me for a minute and think about this. Don’t you think that people are critiquing you when you put your sermons on line? They are slicing and dicing the content, the tone, the delivery and other aspects such as exegesis, or hermeneutics and are thereby robbing themselves of many benefits that the sermon might otherwise have for them. If it doesn’t tickle their ears, and please their fancy, it is cast aside. You are endorsing this prideful arrogance when you feed into it, by contributing your sermons into the world wide web slush fund of on-line sermons. You are telling these people, go right ahead and judge me and my ministry. You are granting permission for this pride by making your sermons available for such inspection and critique. If your message is from God, you are cheapening it by encouraging people to do this. You might respond by saying, “well this is no different than what people do every Sunday in church. They slice and dice and criticize me in church the same as these web sermon surfers.” You may say this, but that is not exactly correct. Because if they are “in church”, they are also exposing themselves to the movement and operation of the Holy Spirit in the service. They are not just critiquing, they are participating. That is a huge difference. Perhaps the expression on their face will cause you, the preacher, to go someplace completely different with the message. Preachers take cues from their listeners, but that can never happen in sermon surfing the web. You cannot adapt your message to your audience, when you are preaching by remote control. Long distance sermonizing is devoid of adaptability and response mechanisms. It is basically nothing more than a dead sermon, when it appears on the web. It is a has-been re-hash. It is only useful as “enjoyment”, slather for the critics, popularity voting, and predigesting, or spiritual indigestion. Can people learn doctrine through it? Yes. Can they get a message out of it that will help them? Yes. Can the lost be turned to Christ this way? Of course they can. But should this be our norm and standard, our modus operandi? I don’t think so.

Now a days, people who come to church, after digesting WiFi preaching, don’t even have a clue as to how to really worship God and how to listen to real preaching. Worship has become a lost attribute of our churches. We talk about it. We have worship leaders to conduct it, worship music to set the mood for it, but the average Christian person coming into a church setting, after being dowsed and drowned with internet sermonizing, has no clue what real worship is or how to do it. This is a crime against God. We have robbed

people of the very reason church exists...worship! People don't worship, when they come to our church, because we have fed the whole concept of non-worship, by making sermons private little things that we carry around on our Ipods and MP3 players, in our pockets and on our headphones. Privatizing sermons for personal use is, in my opinion, a big mistake of this century, because directly contributing to the dereliction of the church. We have been shorn of our power and divested of our Holy Spirit, and we have caused this demise ourselves. Now we need to stop it.

4. The effect on preachers, has also been catastrophic, and is another reason to quit posting sermons on the world wide web.

We are supposed to be a humble lot. We are supposed to be decreasing while Christ is increasing. We are supposed to be lowly and in tune with the Lord. We are not supposed to be occupied with ourselves, how we look, how we speak, how we are perceived. But these critics have made us the most self centered, self-conscious bunch of religious people on earth. We want the fame and popularity that comes with delivering "the best sermons". Best according to their unscriptural standards of entertainment value, and comparison to other preachers. So we start comparing ourselves to ourselves, and with each other. *"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise"* (2Cor. 10:12). We have been mastered by the desire to be better, based on an arbitrary and an unholy standard.

The effect of all this preoccupation about what people think is disastrous. We should not be doing this at all. We even watch our own sermons, to see what might be wrong, and what might be changed, improved, made more palatable or presented in a better way. I'm not suggesting that we should not try to improve our preaching. I am suggesting that we should not try to improve it based upon worldly standards, or the opinions of men. Because what we are doing then is catering to popularity. The desire to be Sermonizing Favorites, world renowned preachers, so called great "men of God", is an alluring and dangerous activity for a true preacher. We should seek only God's approval, only His, "well done thou good and faithful servant". What people think of us should never be our concern. The greatest preacher who ever lived, was rejected of men, and was crucified. We should follow Him. That is the ultimate compliment...to be like Christ. Instead of rejection and crucifixion, we want applause and glorification. That is just plain wrong for a servant of the Lord. No wonder there is no revival today. No wonder there is no genuine Holy Ghost power filling our churches. The whole thing has become a show! A theatrical production!

We are to blame for all this shallow, lifeless, empty, void and dead Christianity that surrounds us. As preachers we need to get out from in front of the looking glass, and start seeking the power and approbation of God. He is the only audience whose opinion counts. What He thinks of our preaching matters most, matters preeminently, matters for

eternity. But what Joe Bananas thinks of us, does not matter one squeak or grunt. It is of no consequence what the masses think. But it is all-consequential what The Almighty thinks! We need Presence and Power not applause and approbation from sinners like ourselves.

Not only should we quit posting our sermons on the net, but we should repent in sackcloth and ashes, for having loved and sought popularity rather than humility, and Godliness. Having loved the fanfare of men, we have forfeited the power of Jesus Christ. How subtle has been the deception of all this in our hearts. We have driven people away from our churches, and away from our Lord, because we have been more concerned with winning the approval of men. We have said to ourselves, just keep putting those sermons out there, maybe one of them will make us a internet sensation. After all it doesn't hurt anyone. What? It doesn't hurt anyone! Are you crazy? Look what it has done to you! It has hardened your heart so you do not see the movements of vanity, pride and sin within your own breast. It has made you the center of your own parade. It has made you the center of your own stage, robbing Christ of all the glory. "Not I but Him" is no longer heard on your lips. If it has hurt you like that, how has it harmed also those, who follow you and laud your wonderful sermons. You may never know the extent of the harm your ego has created, by pursuing self and respect, fame and importance. Let me remind you of one small truth, that you may have forgotten. There is no man who is of any importance whatsoever. If whole nations are as the dust on a balance or a drop in a bucket, who the heck do you think you are? You are just a vapor, a wisp of smoke, so step away from the mirror and get down on your knees. You and I are the reason our age is so rocky and destitute. People are going to hell while evaluating our sermons! They are damning their own souls while listening to our voices with headphones. And because we like it, we allow it to continue. We have become most wicked in all of this. We are supposed to be shepherds who lead the sheep by example, and we harbor this secret sin of self-centeredness and pride. While we are prancing before the looking glass of popularity, we gaining the world, but losing our own souls. God awaken us, and send us to our knees, in repentance. Let us quit tolerating and feeding our pride. We are of all men most miserable. Our pride has eaten us like a cancer or rot, and Christ is no longer truly glorified in what we are doing, because everything we do is for to be seen of men (Matt. 6:5; 23:5). Lord please deliver us from such ungodliness and blatant pride. Humble us Oh God, that we may be truly servants of Thine. Take away the sinful ambition in our hearts. O Jesus make us like Thee.

5. The last thing I would like to suggest, is that sinners see the folly of our ways, when we make it so readily available to them on line.

They too, criticize and critique the preachers on line. The problem however, is they look at our sermons as hog fodder. They would fain fill their belly's with the husks that that swine eat. They pick out certain things that we say, and allow them to get stuck in their

teeth, so they can just go right along, poking fun, laughing and joking, living as enemies of God. They do not take us seriously, because we take this stuff too seriously. They see how busy we are trying to get approval from everybody. We have forgotten how to wield the sword of the Spirit, so that it cuts and penetrates the lost man's soul. We are too busy making things palatable and pleasant, so much so that we no longer do our job. Are people ever saved by online sermons? Perhaps they are, but more often they are just plucking what they want like candy from a tree. They are chewing on what they like, and are discarding the rest. Since it is impossible to witness genuine worship through a video, they have no clue what the presence of God is, and it is exactly God's presence that they need to be brought to. Before Him, they will bow, and if they will ever bow, it must be by being brought into His presence.

The world looks at us listening to thousands of hours of these dead sermons, and they think that everything we do is just as boring, just as pointless and just as empty as listening to that stuff, which they see as just junk...a waste of time. And guess what? They are right! It is junk. It is a complete waste of time. It is a feeble attempt to do what the church is supposed to be doing each and every Sunday. We are supposed to do on Sunday, what these tapes and videos are trying to do 7 days a week! God ordained the first day of the week, to lead men to God and cause them to bow in true corporate worship. If it isn't happening on Sunday, it won't be happening the other six days either. If heaven does not come down in our live sermons on Sunday, replaying videos of them and our failure to really preach is just an exercise in futility. The world can see this clearly as crystal. It is a waste of time, a total joke, if we do not congregate around the throne on Sunday. And if we do, in reality, taste heaven, and drink of it's glory on Sunday, then we do not need a fake imitation of it the other six days. The real deal is sufficient for the whole week. God ordained one day in seven to be for congregating, fellowshiping and worshipping, and we cannot improve upon what God has ordained. So I am suggesting that we return to the basics, and quit all this other nonsense. God can use church on Sunday to accomplish His ends, and that is His methodology, not ours.

Somebody says, "but they continued daily and from house to house in Acts", (Acts 2: 46-47) and they are absolutely right, but this was only after they had a living encounter with God and God's people on the Lords day (Acts 2:1-4). The going from house to house, and the souls being added daily, was because of what happened on the Lords day, when three thousand were saved, because of "the demonstration of the Spirit and power". The daily activity was the result of the congregational activity, and not a replacement for it. We need to return to the genuine, vital, soul-changing, corporate worship on Sunday, before we rebroadcast empty sermons, to empty people, by empty means, in hope of impacting lives. Nobody is impacted and changed by becoming a sermon expert. Nobody is changed by feasting on regurgitated truth, second hand morsels. Men need to come to church, and experience real Spirit and power. There is no substitute, and we need to quit giving the impression that there is a substitute for Sunday Worship. Lord bring us back to the basics that can never be improved upon. We need a revival of true preaching, done God's way, on God's day. Amen.