

22ND PASTORAL CARE CONFERENCE – OCTOBER 2016
MESSAGE SERIES – THE EFFECTIVE PREACHER AND PREACHING
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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Theme of my messages (past and present):

- 19th PCC: The equipping and readiness of God's workman
- 20th PCC: Primary importance and value of moral and spiritual stature
- 22nd PCC: The effective preacher and preaching

All the three themes are related to theme for this conference: *The Glory of God in Ministry and the Ministers*. They are also in line with the objective of Pastoral Care Conferences – to encourage the brethren, help them grow well and be equipped for effective ministry.

These messages are relevant to all believers – especially those with leadership responsibilities in preaching, teaching and shepherding the flock.

The Effective Preacher and Preaching is a very important subject – a major aspect of church life, with significant bearing on the health and direction of the church.

MESSAGE 1: WHAT IS EFFECTIVE PREACHING AND A GOOD MESSAGE?

INTRODUCTION

Many are not clear what constitutes good, effective preaching ministry and what constitutes a good message. We are easily impressed with what appears to be a good message and may not perceive the reality.

We may not be very conscious what influences us to conclude that a message is good or not so good, and whether it is better or worse than another.

A message that appears good or better than another may not be so.

Some questions we need to ask are:

- What should the hearer look forward to in a message?
- What should a preacher concentrate on and strive towards?
- How do we know whether the ministry of the Word is going on well?
- What are the major issues involved?

HOW MESSAGES ARE OFTEN JUDGED

1. Is the message enjoyable?

Often, hearers judge a message by whether they *enjoy* the message. But are good messages always enjoyable?

The Lord Jesus is the perfect preacher. He communicates the truth flawlessly and effectively. But instead of appreciating His message, some hearers picked up stones to throw at Him.

John 8:59

Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

The hearers did not always enjoy the preaching and messages of the Lord Jesus. Some were so aroused and antagonistic towards the Lord and His messages that they finally crucified Him on the Cross.

Likewise, the prophets and the apostles preached faithfully. But their hearers often did not enjoy what they had heard. For example, the prophet Jeremiah was severely persecuted for his faithful ministry and the apostle Paul faced intense opposition and had to flee from city to city.

2. Is the message interesting, uplifting and easy to follow?

Hearers often regard a message as good if they find it *interesting, uplifting and easy to follow*. Should these be the criteria for good messages?

The disciples of the Lord Jesus sometimes had difficulty receiving His message. An instance can be found in John 6.

John 6:60-61, 66

60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"

61 But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble?"

66 As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

The disciples did not find the Lord's message interesting, uplifting or easy to follow. Instead, they grumbled, and many withdrew from Him.

3. Is the message short and do people stay awake?

Some are adamant that good, effective messages must be *short, or at least not long*. But we read in Acts that some preachers in the early church preached lengthy messages.

Acts 15:32

Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.

What if people feel sleepy or actually fall asleep during a message? Does it mean the message is not effective or lacking in quality?

We read in Acts of a certain Eutychus falling asleep during Paul's preaching.

Acts 20:7-11

7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

8 There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together.

9 And there was a young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead.

10 But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, "Do not be troubled, for his life is in him."

11 When he had gone back up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then left.

Some comments on this passage:

- (V 7) It was the first day of the week – the people were gathered to break bread (Lord's Supper). It was likely a time of worship together. Paul talked to them for a long time, prolonging his message until midnight.
- (v 9) Paul kept on talking, and Eutychus was overcome by sleepiness and sank into a deep sleep.
- The word translated as 'talking' in vs 7 and 9 is translated as 'reasoned' in Acts 17:2. There Paul was communicating to the Jews in the synagogue, and he 'reasoned' with them from the Scriptures. (Lexicon: lecture, discuss, speak, preach).
- The word 'talk' is also used in v 11, but here it is from a different Greek word meaning 'to converse'. The 'talking' in vs 7 and 9 could be more preaching than merely having a conversation.

While good messages may be unpleasant, difficult to follow, lengthy, and some may doze off, it of course does not mean that:

- messages that are unpleasant or difficult to follow are good messages
- the longer the messages, the more effective they are
- sombre and dull messages are better than interesting ones

WHAT THEN IS EFFECTIVE PREACHING AND A GOOD MESSAGE?

Effective preaching is the effective communication of the truth that God intends for the hearers in a particular context. A good message persuades and moves hearers in the direction of what God desires of them.

Some truths may be difficult to communicate or receive, but the preacher should try to present these truths clearly and in a manner not unnecessarily difficult to understand and receive.

Truths may not be pleasant or enjoyable to hear – e.g. the path of discipleship, the way of the Cross, being rebuked.

Many hearers and preachers are preoccupied with interesting and enjoyable messages. But these messages may have little substance and may not be honoring to God. For example:

- Interesting anecdotes, illustrations and much humor that entertain but do not deepen the hearers' insight into the truth or commitment to God
- Contents that pander to what the hearers like to hear rather than what God wants to communicate
- Jokes that are inappropriate, that promote a spirit of frivolity and hinder the spirit of worship and reverence for God
- Teachings that are not doctrinally sound, wholesome and accurate

Preachers are not there to entertain and they should not even try. And hearers should not expect them to. Wrong expectations and wrong approach on both sides will reinforce each other towards the wrong outcome.

It does not mean there is no place for humour. Proper use of humour can reinforce effective communication of the truth. The objective must always be the effective communication of the truth that God intends for the hearers.

Purpose of a message

The primary purpose of a message is to help believers have an accurate understanding and reception of the truth, resulting in their minds being renewed so they can appreciate what is important in the eyes of the Lord and receive well what the Lord intends for them.

All hearers should look forward to this outcome. And they should pray for and support preachers as they carry out this solemn responsibility.

HINDRANCES TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND RECEPTION OF MESSAGES

Communication and reception of messages can be hindered by:

1. An unhealthy critical spirit

When hearing a message, beware of having an unhealthy critical spirit that can hinder the proper reception of the truth and message God intends.

2. Spiritual opposition

Because true preaching has significant potential for contributing to the advancement of God's kingdom, healthy church life and edification of believers, we can expect spiritual attacks and opposition on both preachers and hearers. For example:

- Hindering the preacher in his preparation and communication
- Preventing the hearers from being present
- Obstructing the hearers' understanding of the message or causing miscommunication
- Causing the hearers to be distracted and lose concentration
- Making the hearers feel sleepy
- Creating a barrier between the hearers and the preacher, making the hearers reactive to the truth being presented

It is important to pray diligently and earnestly for both the preacher in his preparation and preaching and the hearers in their reception and understanding.

AN OT ILLUSTRATION ON TRUE AND FALSE PREACHING

A passage in the OT on true and false prophesying gives some insight into the subject of true and false preaching.

1 Kings 22:2–18; 23-28

2 In the third year Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel.

3 Now the king of Israel said to his servants, "Do you know that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, and we are still doing nothing to take it out of the hand of the king of Aram?"

4 And he said to Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-gilead?" And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses."

5 Moreover, Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire first for the word of the Lord."

6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king."

7 But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not yet a prophet of the Lord here that we may inquire of him?"

8 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. He is Micaiah son of Imlah." But Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so."

9 Then the king of Israel called an officer and said, "Bring quickly Micaiah son of Imlah."

10 Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting each on his throne, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them.

11 Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made horns of iron for himself and said, "Thus says the Lord, 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are consumed.' "

12 All the prophets were prophesying thus, saying, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and prosper, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king."

13 Then the messenger who went to summon Micaiah spoke to him saying, "Behold now, the words of the prophets are uniformly favorable to the king. Please let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably."

14 But Micaiah said, "As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I shall speak."

15 When he came to the king, the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?" And he answered him, "Go up and succeed, and the Lord will give it into the hand of the king."

16 Then the king said to him, "How many times must I adjure you to speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?"

17 So he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep which have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master. Let each of them return to his house in peace.' "

18 Then the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"

23 "Now therefore, behold, the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the Lord has proclaimed disaster against you."

24 Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, "How did the Spirit of the Lord pass from me to speak to you?"

25 Micaiah said, "Behold, you shall see on that day when you enter an inner room to hide yourself."

26 Then the king of Israel said, "Take Micaiah and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son;

27 and say, 'Thus says the king, "Put this man in prison and feed him sparingly with bread and water until I return safely." ' "

28 Micaiah said, "If you indeed return safely the Lord has not spoken by me." And he said, "Listen, all you people."

Some observations and lessons from this passage:

- (vs 6, 11-12) The false prophets spoke what Ahab wanted to hear.
- (v 13) The messengers persuaded the true prophet Micaiah to do likewise.
- (v 14) Micaiah's answer: 'what the Lord says to me, that I shall speak' – he was true to God and prophesied faithfully.
- (v 17) Micaiah the true prophet spoke the truth God intended for the hearers.
- (v 8) Ahab hated him – didn't like to hear truth which wasn't favourable to him.

Important to pay heed to what we can learn from this passage:

- (v 16) Though Ahab charged Micaiah to tell him the truth, his primary concern was not the truth or the will of the Lord or what the Lord had to say. He was bent on carrying out his desires.
Lesson: Our primary concern must be the truth and what God has to say – and not our own desire.
- (v 8) Ahab became personal. He hated the one who faithfully spoke on behalf of God and acted against him – (v 27) Ahab put God’s prophet in prison with instructions that he be fed sparingly.
Lesson: It is a serious matter to react against God’s faithful servants and to act against them and ill-treat them.
- (v 28) Ahab went ahead to the battle in spite of Micaiah affirming God’s message that he would not return safely. (vs 30-35) Ahab’s cunning scheme to secure his own survival in the battle did not save him.
Lesson: If we act contrary to the will of God and the truth, we will not escape the adverse consequences on our lives and being – even if we escape from some physical, temporal aspects.
- (v 23) The false prophets who prophesied falsely were under the influence of the deceiving spirit – and they may not even be aware of it.
Lesson: Many who are under the influence of evil spirits and being deceived may not be aware of it. This is a precarious state to be in and the negative effects on others can be serious. The evil spirits are actively at work and they influence people to varying degrees. We need to be vigilant, but not fearful.
- (vs 6, 11-13) The false prophets did not have the right heart attitude. They were eager to please the king and they spoke what he wanted to hear. They made themselves easy targets for deception by the evil spirits.
Lesson: Deception occurs more easily along one’s inclinations, especially wrong inclinations.
- (vs 11-12, 24) Zedekiah’s main concern was not truth but personal interest, status, pride. He appears to be the leader among the false prophets. In v 24, Zedekiah struck Micaiah on the cheek.
Lesson: The true servant of God must be prepared to remain true to Him even if it means going through difficulties and hardship.
- (v 6) The king’s 400 prophets counselled differently from the true prophet Micaiah – they were all wrong.
Lesson: The majority may not be right. But we must be slow to conclude we are right and all others wrong – especially if others have a sincere and meaningful walk with God. Do we have good grounds that can bear examination?
- Ahab and the false prophets reinforced each other.
Lesson: False preaching and ‘false’ hearers can reinforce each other towards an outcome that is against God’s will.

CONCLUDING NOTE

The crucial issue that preachers and hearers should be concerned about is: *Love for the truth and being true and faithful to God.*

The question we need to ask ourselves is: *Is truth and being true and faithful to God more important to us than all else – in reality?*

[NOTE: All scriptural quotations in this series of messages are taken from NASB]