

Dealing with Boring Sermons

How can we keep from being bored during sermons? Some will say the answer is in the preacher, but regardless of the speaker's shortcomings, others will know that much of the answer is in us as listeners. It takes preparation and participation.

How do we prepare for sermons? The Jews had a Day of Preparation that preceded the Sabbath in which they set things in order for the proper observance of that day. We, too, can set things in order to get ready for properly observing a time of worship. This worship includes the sermon or lesson, a time of study and preaching of the gospel.

We prepare mentally and spiritually by considering how important worship is both to God and to us as His children. We prepare physically by, regardless of how much we have to do on Saturdays, never being so busy that we are worn out before Sunday comes. We make sure we are rested. If there are Bible class lessons to be prepared, we make sure they are done. In our prayers, whether our own or as a family, we ask the Lord to help us look ahead in anticipation of worship together as a congregation. Having done these things, then, approaching the sermon is simply approaching another part of the worship. We are prepared to hear the word of God declared.

How do we participate in a sermon? We listen carefully and we think about what is being said. We think about whether the passages used are being applied correctly. We think about how it applies to us, individually, as families, and as a congregation. Many bring pen and paper, making notes to keep better focused. Some use wide-margin Bibles so they can make notes alongside passages. This is not a time for being distracted by audience noise or movement, of thoughts about lunch, or matters at home or work. It is a time for God's word, a lamp unto our feet and a guide unto our path.

A simple comparison may help us: how do we properly take the Lord's Supper? Most of us say that we put away the cares of everyday life and focus on the Lord and His sacrifice for our sins. This same sort of focus is the answer to dealing with sermons. The idea of falling asleep during the Lord's Supper is horrible to us. Imagine your feelings at hearing someone snoring as the bread and cup are passed...

We get out of sermons what we put into them. The more we invest of ourselves the greater blessings we will receive, not from "the sermon," that's the wrong way to think of it, but of the study of God's word. "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, just as it is with you" (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

- by Robert Hines

"We Will Not Sit Down"

God sent Samuel to the house of Jesse to anoint a king for Israel from among his sons. Jesse made several of his sons to pass before the aging prophet. "And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these." He then asked Jesse if these were all his sons. Jesse said, "There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep". To which the prophet replied: "Send and, fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither" (1 Samuel 16:11).

This last statement indicates something grand and noble about Samuel; God sent him on a mission, and he would not rest until it was accomplished. It would also be a grand and noble thing today, if those of us who seek to serve the Lord manifested the same attitude toward our duty to God. Too many of us have sat down before the job was finished and as a result the day is far spent and much work is yet undone.

Oh for servants of the Lord like Samuel who refuse to take their ease until His work is done!

- by Earl Kimbrough

Dress Codes and Worship

Every so often, the question comes up: *Is there such a thing as a proper dress code for worship?* Some feel strongly that certain standards should be upheld, while others resist anything that sounds like rules or expectations.

To begin with, we need to be honest about what Scripture actually says. God has **not** given Christians a specific dress code for worship. There is no inspired list of approved garments, styles, or levels of formality. Since God hasn't legislated these details, we don't have the authority to do so either. Beyond the obvious necessity of modesty, binding other rules where God has not bound is wrong and the Bible clearly warns against it (Colossians 2:20-23).

James also gives a pointed warning on this very issue. In James 2:1-5, he rebukes Christians who judged people based on how they looked when they came into the assembly. Showing favoritism to the well dressed while looking down on the poor wasn't just rude - it was sinful. Any attempt to enforce a man-made dress code has us falling into that very trap.

But that doesn't mean our clothing is irrelevant. In everyday life, we all understand that clothing reflects attitude. We don't dress the same way for a wedding as we do for yard work. We don't wear the same thing to a funeral that we would to a ball game. What we choose to wear says something about how we view the occasion.

Worship is not casual entertainment. It is an act of reverence toward God, as Ecclesiastes 5:1 reminds us. While Scripture doesn't prescribe specific attire, our choices still communicate how seriously we take the privilege of approaching God.

Jesus illustrated this principle in the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14). The man who arrived without proper wedding garments was condemned. His clothing revealed a careless attitude toward both the event and the host. The lesson is sobering: God notices when our outward actions reflect an irreverent heart.

So where does that leave us? We must avoid two extremes. First, we cannot enforce a man-made dress code. But, second, we should not pretend that attitude - and the way it shows itself in the how we dress - doesn't matter. True worshipers approach God with reverence, humility, and preparation (Hebrews 12:28). Those qualities naturally influence the clothes we choose to wear when we 'go to church'. Think!

- by Greg Gwin