

## ***Better Worship During Preaching***

We hate to admit this, but most of us have sat through a sermon with our minds somewhere else. The preacher was boring, the sermon was long, and we were no longer with him. There is a responsibility upon the preacher to find ways to communicate effectively and efficiently with the audience. But we have a responsibility as well. How do we worship better during the preaching?

To understand this we must understand the concept of worship. Worship involves participation on the part of each of us. Worship is not a spectator sport. Worship is action. It is something we do. Worship reflects an attitude we have. It involves all of you, including your mind, your heart and your emotions. The things that affect your insides will affect your worship. Being tired, bothered, worried, bored, or mostly how you view God, will affect worship. It's hard to get much out of a sermon when one can barely keep his eyes open or his mind is racing with all that he plans to do the next day. Doing worship better begins with being focused.

Sermons really serve two purposes. First, they inform and instruct. Some listen to sermons, others learn from sermons. There is a difference. So we ask, "How do I learn better?" First, bring your Bible and follow along. Listen to what the preacher is saying. See it in your Bible. That is essential. The facts of the Bible will build faith, strengthen convictions and destroy error. God's word is powerful! Take notes, either in your Bible or on paper. Circle words, underline phrases, write down what words mean, interesting thoughts, and things that you did not know. Make your Bible user friendly to you. We remember only so much of what we hear. We remember more by hearing and seeing. We remember even more by hearing, seeing and writing down. We remember the most by hearing, seeing, writing down and telling someone else. Find a way to save and then use your notes from the sermon. You might refer to them in teaching a friend, or you might use them in teaching a class. There is a wealth of study being shared with you each week. Listening week after week ought to be a growing experience for you. You are learning and you are getting stronger as you think, listen and grasp the messages from God's word. Come ready to learn!

It is sad to see brethren gathering each week, with no Bible in hand, no paper to write on and just staring at the preacher during the sermon. If a college student did that in one of his classes, he'd probably not pass. It's hard to remember things from week to week. We can do better. We must do better.

The second purpose of preaching is to persuade the listener. Paul said, "Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5.11). The preaching of Peter moved the audience to interrupt him and ask, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2.37). Preaching is more than the giving of facts, it is the changing of lives. The Lord ended His incredible Sermon on the Mount with the story of two men who built their houses on different foundations. This story illustrated the difference in those that were persuaded to do something and those who were not. The preaching of Jonah changed the city of Nineveh. Preaching can change your life and impact generations of your family.

You will get more out of a sermon as you engage in the worship with an open heart and mind. The preacher is talking to you! That's all that matters. Where are you in the things that he says? The words of the sermon can move us to obey the Gospel of Jesus. They can move us to a deeper commitment and challenge us to become more involved. See yourself, not just in the sermon, but in what the Bible says. Make application. How can this lesson make me a better parent, or a better disciple? What is it that the Lord wants me to be? The seed that was planted into the good and honest heart produced a bountiful harvest. The good and honest heart — that's up to us, not the preacher.

The other soils found in the parable of the sower may well explain why we are not getting the most out of preaching. Our hearts may be too crowded, or shallow or hard. I will get the most out of a sermon when I listen to it with the idea of making application to myself. It is so easy to play spiritual dodge ball with the preacher, ducking from this point and then that point, or worse still, to try to guess what person the preacher is talking about, never realizing it could be me. Don't do that. You are wasting time, not worshiping as you should and failing to grasp a wonderful opportunity to become a disciple of Jesus. All of us, including those of us who preach, can learn from the sermons of others. The message is more important than the messenger. What is said is more important than how it is said. Sometimes we get that backwards.

Preaching and teaching are God's avenues of growing the kingdom. There is no other way. That powerful seed planted in fertile hearts will produce a disciple that longs to walk with Jesus. That's what a sermon can do.

- by **Roger Shouse**

---

### ***Transparent Excuses***

Proverbs 24:11,12 describes the case of a person who had opportunity to act in a life threatening situation and did not. Notice how excuses began to be offered . . .

*"Deliver those who are being taken away to death, and those who are staggering to slaughter, O hold them back. If you say, "See, we did not know this," does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?"*

Some things are obvious here. First, the one in position to help knew, or should have known, about the unjust treatment of the victim. Pleading ignorance is seldom a reasonable explanation for failing to act. This principle is certainly applicable to all of us today. James 4:17 warns us that *"to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin."*

Second, we are reminded that excuses are typically pretty 'flimsy'. Others can usually see right through them. We are not gullible fools. We can easily detect when someone is trying to rationalize their failure to do the right thing. Actually, excuses are very often a direct insult to the intelligence of those to whom they are offered.

Also, it is definitely true that God knows the real facts of the situation. While others may be occasionally deceived by fabricated stories to evade responsibility, God is not. *"All things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do"* (Hebrews 4:13)

Finally, the text from Proverbs warns us that, despite our worthless excuses, we are still accountable to God. He will not fail to punish those who have callously shirked their duty while offering up a pretext of justification for their inaction. In the end He will *"recompense every man according to his deeds"* (Matthew 16:27), not according to his silly, transparent excuses. Think!

- by **Greg Gwin**