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A DEMAND FOR BIBLICAL PREACHING!

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Introduction

One of my favorite preachers and writers of all time is J.C Ryle (1816-1900). All an individual has to do is just read one page of any of his books and he will be remembered. Ryle was a man who did not pray or even read his Bible until he was 21, but became a Christian man as bold as a lion for defending the objective truth of God's Word. In Iain H. Murray's biography "*Prepared to Stand Alone*", Murray gives us an interesting detail about J.C Ryle's pulpit: "Ryle kept his eye on details, including not only a new pulpit but the text he wanted on its desk. To be seen by every preacher, the words were carved, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel", with a deep groove under the word 'not' cut by his own hand."

The sad reality is this, many people claim today to preach the gospel, but in actuality the gospel is not preached. One must remember that the New Testament addresses both the act of proclamation or preaching the good news (euaggelion: εὐαγγέλιον) and the substance (content: kérugma: κήρυγμα) of that message (1 Cor. 1:21, Luke 11:32, 2nd Tim. 4:17, Titus 1:3). Both the message and the method must be in keeping with the very gospel itself. It is not just enough to possess the content of the message; we must also proclaim the content when the opportunity presents itself. The truth is, many possess the content and do nothing with it. In order to effectively preach God's gospel with correct content (kérugma: κήρυγμα) one will need to go back to the book of books, The Holy Bible. There is a summons that the true preacher must live up too! It is a demand for Biblical preaching!

Expository Unit

Nehemiah 8:1-8

“And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they [a] asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had [b] given to Israel. ² Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from [c] early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. ⁴ Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah *and* Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵ Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with *their* faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people *remained* in their place. ⁸ They read from the book, from the law of God, [d] translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.”

Historical Context

In their book ‘*Grasping God’s Word*’, by J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, they speak about historical-cultural context and they have said, “We believe that the way we approach the

Bible (i.e., the way we listen to God) should match how God gave us the Bible (i.e., the way God chose to speak). Otherwise, we will likely misunderstand what God is trying to say to us.” This is important when we come to a text we are seeking to understand. The historical context are the customs, languages, beliefs, and history of the author and his audience. With respect to the expository message, we have before us, in order to understand the content, one must observe not only literary context but historical context as well. The book of Nehemiah continues the historical narrative which began in the book of Ezra. We find ourselves in the year of 445 B.C. during the 20th year of the reign of Artaxerxes (Neh. 2:1). It had been 141 years since the gates and walls were burned by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. Nehemiah expressed deep anguish when his kinsmen had arrived from Judah (Neh. 1:2) and in Nehemiah’s deep grief he had asked to return to help rebuild the wall (Neh. 2:5-8). In Nehemiah 6:15 the wall was completed in 52 days. Ezra had already been among the post-exilic community for about 13 years, but we will see how the people will be restored under the preaching of Ezra the scribe, and his model for preaching.

1: The People Demanded To Hear God’s Word (Neh. 8:1)

In verse one the text says, “*and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. (8:1)*”. The book of the law of Moses, was the only objective truth from God to man. It is absolute truth, truth that corresponds to reality. It’s the authoritative Word of God that is inerrant, infallible, inspired, and indestructible God breathed Word (2 Tim 3:16). It is the only “living and active Word that is active and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). The word of God is like a seed that saves us (1 Peter 1:23). The Word of God is like a fire that cleanses us (Jer. 23:29). The Word of God is like a hammer that shatters us (Jer. 23:29). The Word of God is like milk that nourishes us (1 Peter 2:2). The Word of God is like meat that satisfies us (Heb. 5:14).

That is what expository preaching is, it is authoritative. The reason why is because it stands upon the very authority of the Bible as the Word of God. In the context of this passage, there was a demand for Biblical preaching which erupted the hearts of the people. They gathered as a congregation, and summoned the preacher. Where is this desire within the Church today? We gather for crafts, skits, sports, pot-lucks, but good luck gathering *anyone* to hear the Word of God, anymore than thirty minutes on Sunday!

2: Expository Preaching Involves Reading the Text (Neh. 8:3)

Verse three states “*He read from it*”, Ezra did not stage an event or orchestrate a spectacle, he simply read and proclaimed the Word of God. In far too many churches’ the Bible is nearly silent. There are plenty of stupid jokes that distort the nostrils of a Holy God in Heaven, and not enough of reading the text! The public reading of Scripture has been dropped from many services, and the sermon has been sidelined, reduced to a brief ridiculous devotional. Many preachers accept this as a necessary concession to the age of entertainment. In many Christian Churches’ the horrible message with zero *content* is justified as long as they give the “plan” at the end. I guess that will miraculously make up for all the doctrine and theology they left out.

3: Expository Preaching Involves Explaining the Text (Neh. 8:7)

Verse seven reads “*the Levites explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place.*” After reading the text clearly, then the expositor is to explain the meaning of the Scripture to the people. That will involve historical context, literary context, immediate context, remote context, subject matter, explicit features of the text, implicit features of the text, differentiating between descriptive and prescriptive scripture and so on. In regards to explaining the text, the expositor must study the original languages. Richard Ramesh address this in his seven-step method for Biblical preaching, he says: “The difference between studying in your own language and knowing the original languages is something like the difference between the picture on a black and white TV and on a color TV.”

4: Expository Preaching Brings About Understanding and Application (Neh. 8:8)

In verse eight we read, “*they understood the reading.*” So, after the explanation and exposition the people understood. So many today leave the Church more confused because the preacher wanders so far from the text, and even his general subject, bringing in much that is irrelevant, and (in order to fill up the time) wandering all over the place – some preachers apparently consider it their business to give a synopsis of nearly the whole range of theology in a single discourse. Ezra had an aim and his style had a single object so the meaning will not be mistaken. Many would understand the preaching and therefore would lead them to ask themselves, “Will I obey this Word?”, “How must my thinking be realigned with Scripture?”, “How must I change my behavior to be fully obedient to this Word?”, all this brings about the application.

Conclusion

The fear of God is not just missing in our nation, but it seems to be missing in the Church. When Christians are content listening to some wee little Zacchaeus sermon, then that is only going to produce a wee little Christian. Just because some preacher rattles off the Plan of Salvation at the end does not justify serving God's people sloppy joes from the pulpit. I am not saying that every sermon will be a grand slam, I find it to be the quite opposite! But it isn't about being a rockstar, it's about dealing faithfully with the text (2 Tim. 2:15, Acts 20:27). Expository preaching is marked by reverence. In verse six it reads, "*all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.*"

As the book was read the people stood. Why? To mark their reverence, it reveals their heart and sense of expectancy as the Word was preached. We must remember that expository preaching involves two parties, the preacher and the congregation. The congregation's role is to hear, receive, and obey, thus the congregation demonstrates reverence for the exposition and teaching, because the sermon is bringing the Word of Christ! Next the preacher, must demonstrate the message by his very own holiness and reverence, by asking himself did I deal truthfully and responsibility with the text? Always remember this word from such a runt of the litter like me: "*A weak minister in prayer and study, makes for a clown in the pulpit.*"

Bibliography

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