

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

“The Preaching That I Bid Thee”

By Larry Ray Hafley

Jonah was told by Jehovah to *“arise, go unto Nineveh,...and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee”* (Jon. 3:2). From this brief book and our terse text we can learn a few facts regarding the nature and character of true preaching.

First, Jonah was sent and so are we. Every Christian is a teacher in some form. Whether by word or deed, whether by exposition or example, we are all expounders and exponents of the word of God. Our very lives are sermons that are watched by the world (cf. 1 Tim. 6:1; Tit. 2:5, 10). This is a frightening thought, an awesome contemplation. Someone somewhere rates and evaluates the gospel by your life! Therefore, *“only let your conversation (manner of life) be as it becometh the gospel of Christ”* (Phil. 1:27).

However, one's teaching is not limited to life, to example. *“They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word”* (Acts 8:4). There is a famine, a drought of teaching. Very few Christians ever attempt to *“make disciples”* of their friends, neighbors, and relatives. Not everyone can teach publicly, but most of us have opportunities that are never used. It takes but little effort to plant the gospel seed.

Jonah had a larger task, but ours is no less necessary. The church has many needs, but none are greater than the need for members who will teach others also. It is not necessary to be able to teach a formal home study, though that is good. But what we need is more quite, simple, humble, informed efforts to encourage a lost soul to contemplate eternity.

Yes, Jonah was sent, and he paid dearly for attempting to evade his duty. We, too, are sent. Will we be held any less accountable for our refusal to at least talk to an acquaintance about his soul?

Second, Jonah had a specific message. Preaching that is not attuned to the needs of the people is as useless as hunting squirrels with a squirt gun. There is a great emphasis today toward meeting “the felt needs of the whole man.” Well, I am all for it – to a degree. I have always “felt” that the “Whole man” “needs” the gospel to save him. If all we do is give people more “awareness” of their “personal potential” and make them “smiling” projectors of a positive lifestyle, we are certain to send a lot of people to hell, but at least they will go in a good humor.

Preaching must be pointed and pragmatic. It must fit the needs of its hearers, but be sure the needs are scripturally defined and that they are confined to the gospel's purpose and power. Philip did not begin his study session with the eunuch by denouncing idolatry in Athens. Paul did not open with the promise to Abraham on Mars hill when he addressed the idle idol worshippers.

Jonah's message was blunt. His manner, his demeanor and personal decorum are not elaborated. We are not informed of his charm, nor do we know whether his personality was pleasing, or even if he smiled often. Being a foreigner and recently expelled from a fish's belly, he may have lacked a certain social respectability, but his audience responded. No, they were not made to “feel better” about themselves. In fact, they evidently felt worse as they quit eating and wore itchy sackcloth. Even their king left his throne, if such he had, to sit in ashes (Jon. 3:5-7).

John the Baptist was not a candidate for *“Gentleman's Quarterly,”* either. His diet was reserved for joggers, marathon runners and others today who are given to self torture. His message was no less palatable. He called

people “*chaff*” and a “*generation of snakes.*” He warned them of the wrath to come, and generally broke every rule known to positive preaching. He alienated the rich and powerful and lost his head for offending a tetrarch, which certainly did not enhance his future.

We, too, have a specific message. Boiled down it is this: sin, damnation and salvation. Dare we be any less plain about it? “*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men*” (2 Cor. 5:11). “*Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech*” (2 Cor. 3:12).

Third, Jonah’s preaching was authorized of God, i.e.; “*the preaching that I bid thee.*” The apostles were troubled by those who taught things “*which we commanded them not*” (Acts 15:24). Gospel preaching must be God-bidden. When addressing any topic, whether baptism, worship, the church, the Lord’s supper; we must “*speak as the oracles of God*” (1 Pet. 4:11).

Preaching is not easy, but it is made more difficult when one strives to “improve” on the New Testament system. Stick and stay with the Bible; “*preach the word.*” It is easier, for example, to preach what the Bible says about the Lord’s supper than it is to arrange an Easter sunrise service. It is easier to immerse a penitent believer than it is to try to explain just how and why an innocent child is somehow a depraved child of hell who needs a few drops of “holy water” dabbed on his forehead to do away with his devilish goat nature and transform him into a sheep, especially if he squalls and squirms like he’s still demon possessed.

Now, admittedly, it is sometimes easier to appoint a Pope in Rome than it is to ordain elders in a church of Christ, but that does not detract from the truth. It is easier to preach the organization of the church in Philippi than that of present day Roman Catholicism. Error makes preaching more difficult. It is not necessary to amend or alter the word of the Lord. In fact, it can be fatal (Rev. 22:18, 19). Like Jonah of old, all are better off when preachers present the preaching that God has sent.

Once, while in a debate with a Baptist preacher, several of us were wrestling with an argument that had been made. After several minutes of eyebrow knotting, James P. Needham smiled, put his finger on a familiar text and by simply reading it, false doctrine was overthrown. Brother Needham shook his head and said, “*The truth is too simple.*” That is a powerful statement, properly considered.

Fourth, and finally, Jonah did not like the results of his preaching (Jon. 4:1). Perhaps from a different view, we will not always enjoy the reaction of others to the truth that is preached, but let us rejoice that it is preached. A sermon on discipline may appear to cause more sin in a congregation than it was designed to stop, but the truth, rightly divided, handled aright, must be proclaimed. One can rejoice in the truth, if not in its results. That is often a hard lesson to learn. You may suffer, as Stephen and the brethren did in Acts 7, because truth is preached, but let this response seep and sink into your worn and torn heart, “*and they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ*” (Acts 5:41, 42). – *Truth Magazine*, October 6, 1988. ■

“6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. 10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. 11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. 12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:6-12).

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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