

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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September 20, 2020

Volume 40, # 38

"THAT WAS A GOOD SERMON, LORD!"

Don't you wonder if the Lord ever heard those words from His listeners? I suspect that He did (Matthew 7:28-29, "the crowds were amazed at His teaching." Luke 20:39, "Some of the scribes answered and said, 'Teacher, You have spoken well.'" Cf. Mark 12:28). Since those days, preachers of all stripes have received similar compliments, and those giving such praises may mean any number of specific things regarding one's sermon. A preacher may not know exactly what you thought was good unless you elaborate with specific details. I imagine that the Lord's sermons were good in every possible way as He spoke for God (John 7:16-17) as a Master Teacher in every possible detail of superior excellence (John 3:2, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher;").

Here's an interesting thought: if we had been there to hear the Lord teach, what would have been our reaction to what He said? Were His sermons good? As far as the content of his lessons, would we have been amazed at His teaching, agreeing that He had spoken well? And then a further inquiry, if preachers of today taught exactly what the Lord taught would they be commended or denigrated? What were some of the characteristics of the Lord's good lessons?

1. Jesus Condemned Sin in the Lives of Men.

There were times when Jesus had to speak out against sins in the lives of people: (a) He told the man at the pool of Bethesda, "do not sin anymore" (John 5:14). (b) To the Pharisees Jesus said, "your sin remains." (John 9:41). (c) The Pharisees sent out their disciples with the Herodians to question Jesus, "But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, 'Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?'" (Matthew 22:15-18). (d) Jesus condemned the bulk of the society in which He lived by saying, "this adulterous and sinful generation" (Mark 8:38); "evil and adulterous generation" (Matthew 16:4). (e) Jesus said concerning the scribes and Pharisees, "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?" (Matthew 23:33). (f) "But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." (James 2:9). (g) "Those

who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning." (1 Timothy 5:20). (h) "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them;" (Ephesians 5:11).

To be as specific as the word of God is, a few sins that are condemned by God follow: evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness, unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful, fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, swindlers, immorality, impurity, sensuality, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, carousing, darkened in their understanding, ignorance, hardness of heart, callous, given to sensuality, practice every kind of impurity, greediness, immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, idolatry, lawless, rebellious, ungodly, unholy, profane, those who kill their fathers or mothers, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, lusts, drinking parties, cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, and sorcerers. (Mark 7:21-23; Romans 1:29-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:17-19; Colossians 3:5; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; 1 Peter. 4:3; Revelation 21:8).

In the same context of these specific sins we read the following statements about them: (a) "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man" ((Mark 7:21-23); (b) "those who practice such things are worthy of death" (Romans 1:32); (c) "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10); (d) they are "corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit," (Ephesians 4:22); (e) "it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience," (Colossians 3:6); (f) these are "contrary to sound teaching" (1 Timothy 1:10); (g) "their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone," (Revelation 21:8).

Obviously the condemning of sins by Christ was needed then as it is needed now so that sinners would answer the call to repentance (Matthew 9:13; Luke 13:3). If men are never made aware of their sins, they will see absolutely no need for Christ, who "came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). Some may maintain the baseless notion that Jesus could teach against sin but we cannot. To see the error in this belief, read Matt. 28:18-20 (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Ephesians 5:7-12). Sermons are not bad because they point out sins in the life of individuals.

2. Jesus Taught What God Required Him to Teach.

It was the purpose of Christ to teach only what God specified, and that is precisely what He did. He stated in John 5:30, "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (see also John 4:34 and John 6:38-40). The other inspired teachers of the word of God recognized and acted in harmony with this principle as well. When they spoke, they taught "the utterances of God" (1 Peter 4:11), they taught the commandments of Christ (Matt. 28:20), they taught "the testimony of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1), they taught "the gospel of Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:16 and Galatians 1:6-10). Their doctrine was the doctrine of Christ, without additions, without omissions, without perversions. To alter the gospel in any way was to be accursed (Galatians 1: 6-10). "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds." (2 John 9-11). We must teach the doctrine of Christ regardless of whether or not it pleases men. Paul stated in Galatians 1:10, "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ." Paul even warned Timothy of the time when men would secure teachers to teach what they wanted to hear (2 Timothy 4:3-4): "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." The scriptures clearly point out that some teachers will not teach the doctrine of Christ. They are called "false teachers," "false prophets," and "false apostles" (Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22; Acts 13:6; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1).

Some hold to the shallow opinion that preachers should not point out falsehood or error in another person's teaching. Those who maintain such are obviously led by something other than the word of God! Notice: (a) Jesus said to the Sadducees, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God." (Matthew 22:29; see also 1 John 4:6 concerning the spirit of truth and the spirit of error). Note one of the reasons why men err: they do not know what the scriptures teach! (b) Paul warned the young preacher Timothy of teachers that had "gone astray from the faith" (1 Timothy 6:21). These individuals, by their error, had the capability to "upset the faith of some" (2 Timothy 2:18; see also 2 Peter. 3:17). Notice carefully the statement made by James: "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." (James 5:19-20). Jesus and the inspired apostles taught the word of

God, and that is exactly what gospel preachers must teach today, even if it means making enemies by exposing error. "So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16).

3. Jesus Taught the Truth of God Without Being Afraid of the Consequences.

Jesus never changed His teaching in order to escape ridicule, evil, accusations, denunciation, persecution, humiliation, pressure from the religious leaders of the day, etc. (Matthew 9:34; 12:2, 10, 14, 24; 13:53-58; 21:15, 45-46; 22:15; 26:3-4, 47-68; 27:1-56). Jesus came "into the world, to testify to the truth" (John 18:37), knowing that it would cost His life (Matthew 20:28; John 10:17-18). He spoke the truth in very definite and concrete terms (Matt. 7:29) that would leave no doubt about what heaven's position was on a given subject: "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." (Mark 16:16); and, "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." (John 8:24).

Jesus was not a man of double talk or self-contradiction, nor was His life based upon situation ethics. There was no confusion about where He stood with the issues of the day, regardless of how controversial they were. One of the most controversial issues of that day was the identity of the Christ, and He left no doubt among the intellectually honest as to his being the very Son of God (Matthew 3:17; 16:13-20; 20:17-19; John 8:28).

Another controversial issue then and very much so now is the subject of divorce and remarriage. Those that would disagree with Jesus never kept Him from stating God's law on the subject: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9). With Jesus Christ, no subject was taboo.

Today some say there are two subjects too controversial for profitable discussion: politics and religion. Jesus dealt with both! Individuals that misunderstood what He said or placed a multiplicity of interpretations on His words were those that were closed-minded, prejudiced, worldly-wise, unwilling to examine the evidence fairly, and unbelieving (Luke 10:21; John 7:17; 8:31-59; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Jesus was no half-hearted, faltering, compromising coward! He spoke the truth of God without fear of what men would do! Oh how we need preachers today that will do that very thing!

4. Men Need That Which Is True, Not False!

If a preacher does not know the word of God, he has no business preaching. If he knows the word of God and does not preach it, he has no business preaching. To withhold the truth is to place a barrier between God and man. The truth has the power to make men free from sin (John 8:32; Romans 1:16). The truth will accomplish salvation, not the wisdom of men (1 Corinthians 1 and 2), not the religious traditions and doctrines of men (Matt. 15:1-20), not the doctrine one chooses to believe because he likes it the best (Jeremiah 10:23). We must receive the word of God on every subject lest we judge ourselves unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46). Men must believe and practice the truth in order to please God (John 3:21; 1 John 1:6; 1 Timothy 2:4). Preaching needs to reflect that principle (1 Corinthians 1:21).

Conclusion:

What is a good sermon? We are not saying that it is wrong to tell the preacher that he had a good sermon. We are not saying that a good sermon is one that condemns everybody at all times. We are not saying that a good sermon is one that pleases nobody or even everybody. We are simply saying that a sermon that is truly good is one that is designed to teach the truth, the word of God, without being altered by sugar-coated words from friends or the desires of charlatans to get something from you. The good sermon is heaven's powerful message that results in salvation. It is effective because it can be understood and it is appealing because of the superior blessings it delivers to all who hear and obey.

- Gary Smalley

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- * "If Christ means much to you then live so He will mean much to others!"
 - * "When you face the Son the shadows will fall behind you!"
 - * "Your obedience to God today determines what you will be for God tomorrow!"
 - * "If you want to be a leader with a large following, just obey the speed limit on a winding, two-lane road!"
 - * "Thanksgiving was never meant to be limited to a one day observance!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSON: The sermon for Sunday morning is: "*Death By Sermon!*" (Text: Acts 20:7-12).

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)