

It Is Written

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PREACH THE TEXT

By David Posey

I'm very concerned with what I perceive to be an approach to preaching (and listening) which, more and more, seems to place the Word of God in the background. I've heard some sermons recently which illustrate the point. In one, I wasn't required to open a Bible for the first 20 minutes; in another, one verse was referred to as a "launching pad," and then the Bible was closed from that point on. I heard another "sermon" in which the preacher (who had a degree in psychology) expressed his opinion about certain problems in our relationship with God, then quoted psychological theories to validate his opinion, and then threw in a little Bible, presumably to validate the psychology. If these are examples of "preaching the text," I'm very worried about the future of preaching!

We need a fresh reminder of the lesson of Nehemiah 8, where Ezra stood in the pulpit (v. 4) and opened the book (v. 5), reading distinctly from it and helped them to understand what the book said (v. 8). If that does not describe our function as "preachers of the Word," then I'm at a loss as to what I'm supposed to be doing as a full-time gospel preacher and teacher. Of course, I'm not sure the problem is all in the pulpit. In fact, I'm pretty convinced it's not. I preached a meeting recently in which the majority of people didn't have a Bible in their possession. Since I was attempting to present an exposition of one of the minor prophets, needless to say, I was at a disadvantage.

I can't pretend to understand why people of God would enter a building, presumably to hear the Word of God preached, and not have a Bible with them. What's going through a person's mind? What are they expecting to hear? What do they want to hear? Platitudes? Maxims? Jokes? God said through Amos, many years ago, that there would be a "famine in the land, not of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (8:11). Such a famine came and the people of Israel suffered the spiritual consequences. There's no such famine now, except when it's self-imposed. In too many places and in the sermons of too many preachers (one is too many), such a famine exists. It extends to the pew and people are beginning to get along quite well without the Word of God ... after all, if we hear only opinions, we have a choice to accept them or reject them, don't we? "My opinion is surely as good as his, though perhaps not as eloquent."

Perhaps I'm sounding an alarm which isn't needed (though I know many others who share my concern). Jeremiah said to beware of those who cry "peace, peace when there is no peace" (4:10). These are just my observations — but if they ring true, in your experience, I'd like to make a couple of short suggestions. To those who occupy the pews each week and listen to preaching, demand (yes, demand) Bible preaching — accept no substitutes. In addition, bring your Bibles, open them, take notes, and listen. Challenge the preacher to present the Word of God as the only solution to every problem he presents. We need to be challenged, checked, and sometimes, corrected. And, to my fellow preachers, let's "just preach the text" (2 Timothy 4:2).

Delighting In God

By Gary Henry

The Grand Canyon of the Colorado River. Never have I stood before its awesome vastness and its exquisite beauty without being moved spontaneously to say, however inadequately, how glorious it is. And I have never failed to hear others burst forth in words of wonder. Indeed, one would pity the person who

either failed to delight in such grandeur or was incapable of sharing his delight.

C.S. Lewis has reminded us, in his inimitable way, that enjoyment not only overflows into praise, but that the praise is an important part of the enjoyment. Delight is incomplete until expressed, as any young lover knows. And the worthier the object, the more intense is the desire to enjoy and praise. Since God is the most worthy of all praiseworthy objects in the universe, we have here a clue to the joy of worship.

It may well be true that the chief end of man is "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." If so, God's command to glorify Him is actually an invitation to enjoy Him, since the glorifying is part of the joy. If the enjoyment of the Grand Canyon is somehow not complete unless we praise it, how much more is that true of Him who could make the Grand Canyon! Thomas Carlyle has said that "wonder is the basis of worship." He was right. And one would be pitiable indeed who either was not filled with wonder before God or did not experience joy in the expressing of that wonder through worship.

How exactly would we define "worship?" It is the expression of loving reverence and honor, the combination of adoration and veneration. As we have already hinted, it has very much to do with God's worth.

Interestingly enough, our English word "worship" descends from the Old English word "*weorthscipe*" which literally meant "worth + ship." Practically speaking, worship is the expression of tribute to God's "worth" - His praiseworthy nature, attributes and works. The worshipper praises God, glorifies God, honors God.

The Bible is chock-full of worship to God. Consider just two examples. In Revelations 5:13, the innumerable hosts in heaven and earth are pictured worshipping God in these words: "Blessings and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" And in 1 Timothy 1:17, there is one of Paul's frequent doxologies (the Greek word *doxa* means "glory"): "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." In all such passages, the common denominator is the praise of God. A good many of the songs in our hymn books are songs of worship, and they are intended to be joyous songs in which we give expression to our delight in God. (Incidentally, a "hymn" is a song of praise, in distinction to other types of spiritual songs.) "Worthy Are Thou" is a good example of a human effort to "give to the Lord the glory due His name" (Psalm 96:9). The joy of singing such songs is the joy of the creature in the act of appreciating and expressing the worthiness and glory of his Creator. It is the most "natural" of the joys that can be experienced by a human being.

Now, it is undeniably true that the joy of worship must be kept within the bounds of God's own pleasure. He has taught us that His thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9) and we ought not to think any expression

of joyful reverence must be honoring to Him. Jesus was emphatic when He taught that those who truly worship do so "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24) When, however, a Christian does worship like that, he knows the joy that naturally flows from praising the Most Praiseworthy.

Now here is our point: this uplifting joy of worship is and ought to be a personal thing, a daily experience. The joy that Christians have together when they assemble as a congregation for worship is a very special treasure. (To minimize or neglect it may mean being lost.) But the child of God does not have to wait until he goes "to church" to experience the joy of worship. He can enjoy that every day he lives. He can joyously sing and pray, as did Paul and Silas even in prison in Acts 16:25. He can joyously meditate upon the praises of God and His word, as did the "blessed" man in Psalm 1:2.

When he makes personal worship a way of life, the Christian finds joy to be just one of several benefits: closer fellowship with God, spiritual strength and maturity, and more meaningful congregational worship. As he

sets aside specific daily times of personal devotion and praise, and as he allows himself spontaneously to praise God throughout the day, the Christian discovers the joyous goodness of fellowship with God. And when he does, he is getting but a foretaste of heaven, where the joy of worship will be complete and unending!