

Possessing Ears To Hear

Introduction. Although the pulpit can be misused as a “whipping post,” the proclamation of the soul-saving gospel will always feel like, at times, preaching “at me.” As one would expect, a lot of people are uncomfortable with that concept and are angered by the approach.

But think about this from a different angle — one in relation to the message and not the motive of the messenger. Is it bad for a preacher to identify sin in my life? Is the preacher only allowed to convict someone when he does not know they need it? Would we be happier with pleasant lessons that do not inform and convict us? When it came to teaching about tough subjects, Jesus said, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 43; Luke 14:35; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), and we need to possess ears that hear.

I. Preaching We Need

- A. Can you fathom anyone complaining to Amos, Haggai, or Malachi that their sermons were “preached at them” and God care about that complaint? Of course not!
- B. If we are unwilling to acknowledge our own guilt and address our own need, we will find ourselves like the people back then.
 1. Amos begins with God’s judgment upon Israel’s enemies one by one (1:2-2:3). Israel no doubt exclaims, “Amen!” Discomfort grows as he brings the message closer to home (2:4-5). Finally, he hits home (2:6-8). Israel has forgotten what God has done for her (2:9-11). The people told the prophets to shut up (2:12).
 2. Amaziah told Amos basically to go away because his words were unpleasant (Amos 7:10-13; cp. Isaiah 30:9-10).
- C. We need the word no matter how much it stings, no matter what our feelings are toward the messenger. The messenger is only doing what God commanded (1 Timothy 1:3-4; 4:6-7; 2 Timothy 2:14; 4:2).

II. In The Company Of The Pharisees

- A. Those who get upset with the preacher for preaching “at them” or at their need are not placed in very good company (Matthew 15:12; Mark 12:12; Luke 16:14).
- B. What should the Pharisees have done when they realized He had spoken against them? Should it follow that since we help the preacher pay his bills then we should be exempt from ever being rebuked? If being a preacher means that he can never say anything that might upset the “employer,” then preaching has lost its purpose.

- C. A congregation will be adversely affected by this mentality in many ways.
1. An eldership might become disenchanted with the local preacher because he emphasized that elders are not to lord over the flock or that they were not taking a situation seriously enough or dealing with it aggressively enough.
 2. A preacher might get tuned out when he addresses unpopular subjects like modesty, gambling, the sin of drinking, or the perils of lascivious dance because people prefer pleasure and sin above the truth.
 3. Warnings about the evils of materialism might fall on deaf ears because a love for this world has already overtaken the hearts of the hearers.
 4. Pointing out less-than-righteous behavior in the home might be very unpopular: wives' submission to their husbands, husbands' loving their wives and treating them appropriately, and children's obedience to parents.

III. Truth And Truth "Preached At Me"

- A. If we have ears to hear, we will make no differentiation between truth and truth "preached at me."
1. It is hypocritical to change our opinion of a message at the point when we realize it applies to us.
 2. In 1 Kings 20:1-10, Benhadad of Syria boasts of his impending defeat of King Ahab and Samaria.
 - a) Ahab responds in vs. 11. A prophet promises victory in vs. 13. Shortly thereafter, they clash again (vs. 28).
 - b) Benhadad pleads for mercy in vs. 34. Ahab made a grave mistake in not listening to the word of the Lord (vss. 35-43).
 - c) Ahab's response was easy (vs. 40) until he realized that the parable was aimed at him (vs. 43).
 3. Ahab's poor reaction to God's messages that were designed to hit home stands in stark contrast to David's reaction to Nathan's condemnation in 2 Samuel 12:13!
- B. Whether we can accept God's righteousness is completely up to you and me.
1. After responding to Jesus's teaching about divorce and remarriage, He retorted in Matthew 19:11-12 by essentially saying, "If you are of a disposition to listen and respond favorably, then do so. But if you are not, then you must live with the consequences of rejecting My instruction."
 2. The seemingly successful response is to find flaws in the source, thereby lessening the blows of the pointed teaching.

- a) Jesus, though sinless, stood accused — He allegedly associated with sinners (Mark 2:16) and was in league with the devil (Matthew 12:24).
 - b) Paul, though an apostle, was accused of false teaching (Romans 3:8). He was also accused of being strong in letters but weak in person (2 Corinthians 10:1, 10).
 - c) Should I say, "I am not going to listen to anything Peter says in 1-2 Peter because of Peter's sin recorded in Galatians 2:11-14?"
 - d) It will not take long for you to find faults and inconsistencies in me, but the search for faults is not the same as the search for truth.
3. How many have developed animosity toward the messenger because the truthfulness of the message hit home (Galatians 4:16)? This was never God's intent!

Conclusion. Preaching from the pulpit has one aim (James 5:19-20). All of us are challenged to be doers of the word (James 1:22-25). Do not develop the notion that you have fixed everything and no room is left for spiritual growth. Instead, be receptive to the preaching of God's word: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).