

Outdated Preaching

By Trent Kennedy

Born to a priestly family, set apart from birth, sent with the spirit and power of Elijah, and called the greatest among women, John the Immerser was a man among men. He was part prophet, part trailblazer, John was all preacher. The gospel account of Luke records more of the content of John's preaching and specifics of his ministry than Matthew or Mark (Luke 3:1-21). When the word of the Lord came to John (Luke 3:2), like with other prophets, it was powerful. When he stood, he spoke, unshaken by the winds of apathy or tradition, as an oracle of the Almighty. To some, this type of preaching might be labeled old-fashioned, outdated, and out of style. What can we learn today about the content of preaching from the life, lessons, and language of this great preacher?

Preaching Should Be Doctrinal (Luke 3:3)

With a message that consisted of the unholy nature of sin, the necessity of repentance, and immersion in water unto the forgiveness of sins, John's message was that of doctrinal substance. His sermons spoke of the coming Messianic kingdom (Matt. 3:2), the church of our Lord. Why would preachers today not want to follow this Biblical example and lessons based in sound doctrine? Certainly, the topics of sin, repentance, baptism, and the church have not declined in importance with the passing of time.

Preaching Should Point the Way to Jesus (Luke 3:4-6)
John's ministry, as we see from Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 40:3-5), was to be one of trailblazing for the coming ministry of Jesus. He was to prepare people's hearts and minds to hear Christ and become obedient to the One who could save them from death. While John's work was very particular in coming before Jesus (cf. Mal. 4:6), there is reverberation from John's work to that of every faithful gospel preacher today: we want our ministry and message to point people to Christ. In fact, when people looked a little too hard at John, he pointed them even more forcefully to the Christ (cf. John 3:27-36; Matt. 11:2ff). Today we hold these words

near to our hearts: He must increase but I must decrease.

Preaching Should Confront and Rebuke Sin (Luke 3:7-9)

John's preaching was very direct: he called his audience sons of snakes and warned them like a good watchman of the wrath that would come without a change of life. Sin is so vile and rotten that men of God throughout Scripture stood tall to tell those around them of the grave evil done, of the great disappointment caused to God, and of the coming destruction. Why would preachers today fold from this direct confrontation of and admonition against sin? John did not preach a come as you are, stay as you are gospel. Instead, he called his audience to create a change in their life based on a conviction in their mind; that is repentance. Because, without repentance, no man shall be saved (Luke 13:3, 5). Sin and sinners must be confronted today. That does not mean that the preacher needs to spend his sermon telling the church about other sinners. While these warnings are fair and fine, people who hear us need to know when their lives are amiss. We need watchmen today to herald the dangers of sin to congregations across the world.

Preaching Should Be Consistent with the Bible (Luke 3:10-11)

What would fruit worthy of repentance look like for the common person? It would look similar to the second commandment: love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27; Lev. 19:18). We should not expect John's preaching to deviate from the Old Testament Scriptures, and it did not. So to with us today, our preaching must be filtered through and saturated with God's Word. When studying for our sermons, the Bible should be the first and the last resource considered on any given topic, on any given passage. No matter what other resource might be consulted, no matter what the religious elite of the day may say, no matter what oral

traditions stand, the man of God will preach only those things consistent with Biblical truth.

Preaching Should Be Relevant and Practical (Luke 3:12-14)

For some people, simple commands like “love your neighbor” are enough to spur them to immediate action. Yet, for many of us, we need help from time to time to see exactly how a simple passage like that applies directly and specifically in our lives. John found this same need in his audience. Questioners came from two groups that would not have been the most popular among the Jewish leadership: publicans and soldiers. When they sought to apply the direct preaching of John to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance and love their neighbors, John gave them relevant and practical advice. Vague preaching is not worth much. God’s word is a standard, a plumbline, and it is often very direct. When the Scriptures are clear, let the sermon reflect that. There is no need to leave people wondering how the Bible applies to them. Preachers should know their audience whether publican or Pharisee, soldier or Sadducee, farmer or financier and bring relevant, practical messages.

Preaching Should Exalt Jesus (Luke 3:15-17)

There was no place in the preaching of John for self-glorification, no place for the tribes of traditionalism, no place for the status of society, and no place words of human wisdom. John’s work was to exalt Jesus. In John’s eyes, he saw himself as unable to do the lowliest chore (loosening the sandal) of the lowliest, most incompetent bondservant. What humility! When the

greatest among us sees himself in this light, God will be magnified, and Christ will be glorified. If people ever praise our good work or good words, may we have the attitude that says there is One who is mightier than me. When tempted to put on a show or bow to the popular opinion, may we ever remember the One who holds the winnowing fan in his hand and will thoroughly purge his threshing floor. And, perhaps more importantly, may those who hear us preach notice that our preaching exalts Christ.

Preaching Should Give the Audience Hope (Luke 3:18)

The message of John was that of good news (“good tidings” – ASV). Even when the faithful man of God confronts sin and the realities which follow, preaching should always leave people with hope. Until Jesus comes again and this world melts away, every living human has hope (2 Pet. 3:9). Even “hard preaching” should be hopeful; Isaiah’s was (Isa. 1:13-20). Today, when men stand to preach, we set forth the unsearchable riches of Christ which will lead souls to salvation. It’s no wonder that the tradition developed within the churches of Christ in the US to end every sermon with an invitation.

To some, John’s preaching would be outdated (and Jesus and Paul for that matter too). However, when we examine the content of John’s message and ministry, we see today a pattern for preachers, young and old to mimic in the pulpit, behind the lectern, and across the kitchen table. And we see the kind of preaching that elders and members should demand from the pulpit where they worship.

A River Runs through It

Article written by Glen Elliott; Image is of the Jordan River north of the Sea of Galilee from Bible Land Passages Images

When the banks of a river are clearly defined, the inhabitants of the region enjoy peace of mind. Even in the midst of a stormy deluge, the water swiftly passes through within its banks. But, when a river overflows its banks, there is great potential for havoc and destruction.

A river well-defined is like a person hungering and thirsting after righteousness (Mt. 5:6). In the pursuit of righteousness there is safety and satisfaction because, in such pursuit, there is a continual deepening of the river bottom, a sharpening view of the river’s boundaries, and a corresponding swelling of assurance in the favor of God. Dangerous waters pass by swiftly, finding no outlet into our lives. In stark contrast, the one who lingers long at the water’s edge is soon swept away by its raging torrent.



Without hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the river soon begins to fill with run-off from the world around us. We lose clarity in our perspective and our priorities are misplaced. The river becomes shallow and its banks indistinctive. Swift currents which once passed harmlessly by begin gushing over eroding, poorly-defined banks, sweeping away souls which once had enjoyed security in the way of righteousness.

Are you listening America? Deepen the river in the pursuit of true righteousness. Fill up sandbags and shore up the river’s edge. Know with certainty that it is God who rules in the affairs of mankind and that it is in righteousness that a nation is exalted (Dan. 4:32; Prov. 14:34).

Upcoming Events

TONIGHT!—Teen/Parent meeting after evening service. The main focus for the Teen activities will be to help the teens grow spiritually with God and their fellow Christians their age. These activities will also be aimed to help them grow socially with their fellow man “and Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

Sept. 24—Family Game night at 6:30p.m. here at the building. Please bring games and finger foods.

Sat. Oct. 2—Work Day to prepare for our gospel meeting. Please bring yard equipment, power washer, chain saws, etc. More details to come.

Oct. 3—Monthly potluck luncheon with a 1pm service.

Save the Date: Oct. 17-20 Midtown will be hosting our Fall Gospel meeting with Mike Bonner. Please make plans to attend and bring a friend. Flyers are in the foyer. There will be a potluck luncheon on Oct. 17 after the morning worship and we will have a 1 pm service in lieu of the 5pm.

Area Events

Sept. 26-29—Gospel Meeting at Portland c of C.

Oct. 9, 2021-Mathis church of Christ Ladies’ Day. Speakers include Emily Cammock and Athena Scherffius. More information is on the bulletin board in the hallway.

Prayer List

Prayer Requests

Pheobe O’Donnell, the young girl who has lymphoma cancer in New Zealand. She has stage 2A, which means the spread is limited.

Members

Jeff Cannady, Les Daltry, Scott DeDear, Ken and Sandra Marie, Mike McVey, Ann Pantel, Veronica Serenil, Clark Withers, Dee Gilpatrick, Faye Henderson, Charlie Mabe, Sandy Malone.

Service Roster

Week of September 19, 2021

Sunday Morning

Announcements..... Doug Jobs
Scripture Reading..... Kirk FitzSimmons
Song Leader Kevin Sheeran

Opening Prayer..... Leon Morales
Closing Prayer..... Doug Jobs

Lord’s Supper & Offering

Bread..... James Cammock
Cup..... Lupe Escojido
Offering..... Bryant Siegel
Assist..... Doug Jobs
Assist..... Isaac Jobs
Assist..... Fred Scherffius

Sunday Evening

Announcements..... Doug Jobs
Song Leader Fred Scherffius

Opening Prayer..... Ronnie Scherffius
Closing Prayer..... Ken Dorries

Lord’s Supper & Offering..... Lupe Escojido & Bryant Siegel

Wednesday Evening

Adult Class..... Ronnie Scherffius
Song Leader Ken Dorries
Devotional Jesse Moser

Other

Usher..... Allen Clifton
Prepare Communion Escojido Family

Congregational News

Birthdays

Dan Fielder Sept. 20
Jack Jobs..... Sept. 25

Anniversaries

Bill & Pat Davis Sept. 19

If you have any prayer requests or upcoming events to be announced, please contact our secretary, Nina Siegel, at (361) 573-0030.

Our Elders

Mark FitzSimmons
Ronnie Scherffius
Ron White

Our Deacons

James Cammock—Evangelism
Lupe Escojido— Benevolence
Bryant Siegel—Education and Finance

Our Preacher

Ronnie Scherffius

Weekly Reading

“Then I looked on all the works that my hands
had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.” Ecclesiastes 2:11

Service Times

Sunday Morning Bible Class.....9:00 A.M.
Sunday Morning Worship.....10:00 A.M.
Sunday Evening Worship.....5:00 P.M.
Wednesday Bible Class.....7:00 P.M.

Attendance Records

Week of September 12, 2021

A.M. Bible Class.....61
A.M. Worship.....76
P.M. Worship.....61
Wednesday Bible Class.....48

Offering week of September 12, 2021.....\$ 3,289

Supported Works

Mani Pagidipalli *India*
John & Carla Moore *Bible Land Passages*
Anthony Scherffius *Southwest School of Bible Studies*

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Weekly Communication! To receive the *Midtown Messenger* and other congregational news to your inbox each week, please email events.midtowncoc@gmail.com.