

Theocentric Preaching

York-Simcoe Association - Thursday, March 22, 2007

1. The challenge of theocentric preaching

- 1.1. Sermons must be about God
- 1.2. Good sermons must also connect with people
- 1.3. The challenge: how to preach sermons that are both relevant and about God

2. Options

- 2.1. To preach theocentrically in a way that is irrelevant

Examples: Biblical sermons that are high on content and doctrine but low on application

- 2.2. To preach with relevance in a way that is anthropocentric

Examples:

- Jesus calms the storm (Mark 4:35-41) - “Jesus will calm the storms in your life” or “how to handle our anxieties when we travel”
- David defeats Goliath (1 Samuel 17) - “God can help you slay the giants in your life”
- Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3) - “Moses was afraid to walk through the door set before him, but he walked through it anyway. We too face doors that we must walk through.”
- Joseph learns that Mary is pregnant (Matthew 1) - “How to handle stress in your marriage”

According to a study by Preaching and Pulpit Digest, 80.5% of sermons are anthropocentric. Most sermons are not grounded in the character, nature, and will of God.¹

- 2.3. To preach sermons that are both relevant and theocentric

Relevant, theocentric sermons will:

- Proclaim, from Scripture, who God is, what he wills, and what he has done, is doing, and will do

¹ David F. Wells, “The D-Min-ization of Ministry,” in *No God but God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age*, ed. Os Guinness and John Seel (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 184-185.

- Recount the divine drama of creation and re-creation, which finds its centre in Jesus - it connects to the main storyline of the Bible
- Helps us learn our roles within the theo-drama (i.e. is still relevant)

3. Mistakes to avoid

3.1. Hermeneutical mistakes

- Allegorizing - e.g. from John 2 (the wedding in Cana): “Where we are at the end of our resources, Jesus provides and shows his glory”
- Spiritualizing - e.g. “Jesus is present in the storms of life”
- Moralizing - transforming the Bible into a set of moral precepts and examples
- Imitating Bible characters - This one is controversial!
- Separating the moral commands from gospel

3.2. Homiletical mistakes

- Self-help preaching - Is this sermon a Christian version of what could appear on Oprah or Dr. Phil?
- Sermons that focus on application at the expense of theology

4. Some advice

- 4.1. Take preaching seriously!
- 4.2. Remember that our greatest need is to see reality differently - to interpret this world in the light of what God has, is, and will do through the work of Jesus Christ.
- 4.3. Trust that all of Scripture is relevant. Our job is not to make it relevant; it is to show its relevance.
- 4.4. Connect every part of Scripture - and our lives - to the storyline of the Bible, or the theo-drama, the adventure of what God is doing in the world.