And Jesus Came Preaching . . .

Jesus is the greatest preacher the world has ever known. Yet we have only two of His sermons recorded in full: the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), and the Sermon on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24, 25).



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It could be argued that the Olives sermon really doesn't count as one because Jesus' congregation was limited to His disciples. There are, of course, other speeches or talks that Jesus gave: long ones like John 14–17, but these were given on a more personal level; and short ones that probably came from sermons, but we don't have the full text.

However, we have enough of the content and style of Jesus' preaching so that we can learn much from Him. Here are eight great principles that define Jesus as the great preacher that He was.

He preached the gospel

Gospel was the first priority in the preaching of Jesus. "'I must preach,'" He said, "'the good news [gospel] of the kingdom of God . . . because that is why I was sent'" (Luke 4:43).*

So Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching and "preaching the good news [gospel] of the kingdom" (Matt. 9:35). He called for repentance (Matt. 4:17). He healed. He told those whom He healed to go and sin no more. He fed the hungry. He performed many wonders.

But the bottom line of all that He did was preaching the gospel, the good news of the saving plan of God—the "eternal gospel" (Rev. 14:6).

He ministered with passion

Undoubtedly, passion marked the life and ministry of Jesus. When He saw Mary and Martha grieve over the loss of their brother, He wept. When He looked over Jerusalem indifferent to His messiahship, He wept. When He saw the holiness of the temple turned into the commonness of a marketplace, He was angry and whipped the money changers out of His Father's house.

Check the passion in Matthew 23. Feel the anger. Notice how focused He was as He used repetition in His stinging condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees. (Warning: Do this very carefully at home or in your pulpit. Jesus could do it well because He understood the heart and could throw a first stone well, with love and skill.)

On a life-and-death mission, Jesus knew that it was going to cost Him His life, but He'd committed Himself to the cause. This realization is important when we think of His preaching, for He was not preaching to give information, to entertain, or to prove a

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point—He preached to change people's lives.

No one can call Jesus a milk-sop preacher presenting a colorless, monotone message. He had enthusiasm. He had depth. He had commitment. He embodied His message.

He illustrated His preaching

How much would it dent your pride to be remembered not for the depth of your theology, your stunning logic and dramatic presentation, but for your storytelling? Jesus always had a story to tell; parables were an important means of His preaching (Matt. 13:34, 35). And if He didn't have a parable, He had an illustration.

Matthew 24 is a good example of this. First, there's an illustration from the Old Testament: "As it was in the days of Noah" (verse 37). Then there's an illustration from everyday life: "If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming" (verse 43). Then follows an illustration from employee-employer relationships: the faithful and wise servant who will continue to be faithful and wise even when the master is away (verses 45-51).

In this apocalyptic sermon, Jesus talked about the end time but did it through stories and illustrations. In Matthew 25 where the sermon continues, Jesus told three parables, each stressing the importance of living, even as we await the Second Coming.

Jesus was creative in His use of illustrations. See the Sermon on the Mount and His references to His followers being salt and light. Note His comment about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field—if God cares for them, doesn't He care for you? In another place He used a child as a visual aid when He said we must become like children if we were to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

And, yes, He used humor. His humor is sometimes difficult to appreciate in English translations and culture. The humor of His time tended toward wordplay and is often more subtle than the humor of today. However, there's no denying the humor of trying to take a speck out of someone else's eye when you have a plank in your own or straining out gnats yet eating camels.

He was relevant

Jesus was more than a great storyteller. He preached that which was relevant and touched the heart. Why else did people keep coming out to hear Him? He was more than a speaker with a clever sound byte that could be shared with friends, more than an oddity who challenged the religious thinking of the day. He spoke about issues that were of real concern. He answered people's needs.

The encounters with Nicodemus (John 3) and with the woman at the well of Sychar (John 4) demonstrate that He had an awareness of the real needs of people. He addressed those needs in His teaching and preaching. That's why His sermon in Matthew 24, 25 did more than simply answer the question the disciples asked.

How much would it dent your pride to be remembered not for the depth of your theology, your stunning logic, and dramatic presentation, but for your storytelling?

He focused on the big issues

Jesus spoke about big issues. Once again, read again the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes turn the popular thinking of His day, of any day, upside down. And there's more: Love your enemies; don't judge; be more righteous than those who claim to be righteous. Social issues? Give to the needy (without fanfare); don't make divorce easy; love the tax collector. What's important? Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

Again consider Matthew 24, 25. The big issue is the resolution of earth's experiment with sin at the Second Coming. That's what the gospel is all about ("'this gospel of the kingdom will be preached'"); it's universal ("'in the whole world as a testimony to all nations'"); and it's apocalyptic ("'and then the end will come'"—24:14). So, be alert, "'keep watch, because you do not know on what day the Lord will come'" (verse 42). These are big issues.

Jesus spoke on issues impacting Christian living that gave hope for the here and now and for the future. We preachers may be tempted to defend our sermon entitled "Headwear of the Bible" as being biblically based (even if it does have a three-yawn rating), but it just isn't in the same league with the kind of preaching Jesus did.

He was the complete preacher

The preaching of Jesus had a balance that is not only worth noting but worth imitating. He preached to help people become complete. His messages were designed to help more than the spiritual part of the person. He was concerned with the social aspects of life as well: to give to the needy, to be reconciled with your brother, to go the second mile.

He brought a new morality into the pulpit. He defined adultery as even the thought before it became an act. He saw the merciful not as the weak but as the blessed. He said only the pure in heart will see God.

His preaching contained an obvious concern for health, and He practiced what He preached. He went about healing. Even as He descended from His pulpit after the Sermon on the Mount, He healed a leper (Matt. 8:1-4).

And there was balance in His apocalyptic preaching. He didn't leave us with only grim warnings but with illustrations on the application, readiness, and rewards connected with His second coming.

He was a Bible-based preacher

Jesus was authoritative. That was one thing that set Him apart from the rabbis, and people did not fail to notice it (Matt. 7:29). However, Jesus never failed to turn to the Scriptures as a source of authority for His preaching and teaching.

"You have heard it said . . ." was a formula He used often. He expanded and expounded on an Old Testament passage, gave it greater depth, and used it as His base for proclamation. In Matthew 24, 25 He referred to Daniel and Noah—Jesus knew His Bible.

He was a model preacher

Jesus left us a model in preaching. As preachers of the gospel of Jesus, we are to

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coordinator for Shepherdess International since 1992.

Today there are Shepherdess International leaders in every Division, albeit under a variety of names which may be more palatable to some than the designation Shepherdess International. Coordinators have been appointed for most unions and conferences. These coordinators typically serve within the Ministerial Associations in the various church structures or local administrator's wives undertake the responsibility and privilege of nurturing the pastoral wives in their fields. Local conference chapters are the key to providing the best nurture to these special women.

Too often both church members and conference leadership expect a two-for-one special by assuming that when they hire a pastor they automatically get the wife as "free labor" although the reverse is never assumed for a man when a woman serves as pastor.

Because pastoral salaries are often insufficient to provide the educational and other needs of the pastoral family, many pastoral spouses must seek employment to supplement the family income. Add to this the consideration of her family's needs and it is easy to comprehend why there is ever-diminishing time left for volunteer church activities.

Unrealistic expectations of either the local church members or conference leadership can produce undue stress for the pastoral family. Such unrealistic expectations are a major concern of most pastoral spouses. Official removal of the spouse allowance for retired pastoral wives will add insult to injury for a group of workers who have already been too long ignored.

So should we expect less from pastoral wives today than when my Mom was a young pastor's wife fifty years ago? I repeat, the answer is no. We must continue to hold high expectations for our pastoral wives and we must not retreat in recognizing and supporting their faithful service to God's cause. ■

Eloquence and authority

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religious formulations. If it does nothing else, this mentality almost visibly destroys eloquence and authority in our preaching. God break us free of it!

But which way is freedom? I believe it is in a freshly quarried encounter with the foundational Christ and the Holy Spirit He has liberally given His ministers. With this comes the courage to break free, to be wise, insightful, and creative. I also believe freedom comes in immersing myself in the life of my fellow humans, that is in the lives of people. It lies in judicious, but broad-based, purposeful reading and exposure to the best resources available to me where I am.

A quiet yet determined concentration in these realms will bring to our lives and our preaching an unselfconscious, authentic eloquence and the authority we so profoundly need now in our churches. This edition of *Ministry* is dedicated to these principles. ■

[1] The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, Second Edition, Unabridged, 1987.

[2] Clarendon, quoted by J.C. Ryle in *Select Sermons of George Whitefield* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), 39.

[3] Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine. A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1990), 114.

[4] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 5:528, 529.

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preach as He did. His message must be our message. His authority must be our authority. His objective must be our objective. No matter how we dress it, no matter how we illustrate it, no matter how we present it, our preaching must be Christ-centered. That should drive us to our Bibles—the Word that reveals *the* Word. Then we will have the consistency of His life, the power of His influence, and the results of His touch. Then we will be like Him—a teacher, a pray-er, a friend. Then we will have His compassion and love as we preach. ■

*All Scripture passages in this article are from the New International Version.

Can preaching change behavior?

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family stories in the Old Testament.

Looking prayerfully and thoughtfully at preaching, we should be humbled by its demands. The challenge is not just to dispense information, even good information. The challenge is to dispense it in a way that can change lives. Of course, it is staggering even to presume that we finite creatures can deal effectively with the questions of sinners in the light of the person of God in Jesus. But that's what we are told to do; that's what preachers have done for centuries. Countless souls have been blessed and saved; countless lives have been impacted for the good; and an untold number of behavior patterns changed. To see God's presence thus demonstrated in believers' lives and to see this reality manifested in the way people behave—this becomes the essential reward of the preacher.

Can preaching change behavior?

It had better! ■

This article is the final of a three-part series.

The case against drinking

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moral powers, and so overcome the senses that Satan should have full control. Under the influence of liquor, men would be . . . made corrupt."[2]

"It is not mimic battles in which we are engaged. We are waging a warfare upon which hang eternal results. We have unseen enemies to meet. Evil angels are striving for the dominion of every human being."[3]

It is not surprising that a theologian as famous as Brunner wrote: "Today, abstaining Christians are not the ones who should justify this stand, but those who refuse it should justify theirs."[4] ■

[1] Rolando Rizzo, *Stretti sentieri di libert* (Firenze: ADV Editions, 1990).

[2] Ellen G. White, *Temperance* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1949), 12.

[3] ———, *Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1909), 128.

[4] Quoted in *Servir*, pastoral magazine of the Euro-African Division, January 1983, 37.