

LESSON 12

THE SERMON AND WORSHIP

Introduction

For the sermon to be most effective, the other parts of the service should be planned around it. For example, a sermon on prayer would call for the selection of Scripture readings, hymns, and special music to emphasize prayer. In previous lessons, the sermon has been looked at by itself in order to simplify instruction in planning preaching programmes and in preparation and delivery of sermons. The previous emphases should not be interpreted to mean that the sermon is an end within itself. Its purpose must be understood as an act of public worship, and it should be related to other parts of the worship service.

Worship is a divine-human encounter. It includes God's revelation of Himself through grace and man's response through faith. An Old Testament illustration of this is the angels' ascending and descending on Jacob's ladder. The angels descended from God's presence in heaven with His revelation to and blessings for Jacob. They ascended from Jacob to the throne of God with the praises and prayers of God's servant. They bridged the distance between God and man and established a relationship.

The reading of Scripture and the preaching of the Word set forth God's blessings for man. Prayers and hymns express man's praise of God and dependence upon Him. The sermon fills the role in worship of setting forth God's revelation and grace to which man responds by faith. The first part of the service is dedicated to man's speaking to God; therefore, the congregation should participate in praising God's name through hymns, prayer, and the reading of selected Scriptures. The latter part of the service is dedicated to God's speaking to man. A spiritually prepared preacher becomes the prophet or vessel who enunciates what God has to say to His people. In the first part of public worship, the minister stands before God on behalf of man, pleading for mercy and grace. Through the sermon, he serves more as a prophet who appears before man in the name of God.

Worship is a _____
encounter.

(divine-human)

Use the following endings to complete the statements below:

God's speaking to man
man's speaking to God

1. The first part of the service is dedicated to _____.
2. The latter part of the service is dedicated to _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The Meaning of Worship

Worship is man's search for God; it is the attempt of sinful man to be accepted by a righteous God. Pride causes a person to feel superior and independent in his relationship with others. When he is confronted with the vastness of the universe and the threatening forces which can destroy him, he recognizes his finiteness and mortality. Danger and death, which are beyond man's control, cause him to reach out in search of the Being who has power over threatening forces and death. The mystery of man's origin, his aspirations to live a meaningful life, his seriousness about life which comes his way but once, and his destiny force him to reach beyond his own experience and limitations in search of higher meaning. Worship is man's attempt to relate to God in order to find meaning and purpose in life.

Elements of Worship

Recognizing God's presence

Worship requires that man be assured that God is present to hear him when he cries out. Numerous Scriptures speak of God's presence with man. In Psalm 139, the writer was impressed with the omnipresence of God:

Whither shall I go from thy spirit
or whither shall I flee from thy
presence? If I ascend up into heaven,
thou art there: if I make my bed in
hell, behold, thou art there. If I
take the wings of the morning, and
dwell in the uttermost parts of the
sea; even there shall thy hand lead
me, and thy right hand shall hold me
(vv. 7-10).

Jesus stated that where two or three are gathered in His name, He is in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20).

The invocation at the beginning of a service invites God to be present. The call to worship and opening hymn recognize His presence. The call to worship can be in the form either of a hymn which greets God and expresses adoration for Him or a Scripture which addresses God.

Experiencing God's acceptance

After Adam and Eve sinned, they were not prepared to meet God. They needed to be cleansed of sin. Cleansing requires confession and a recognition that the God of grace forgives. Confession and

Man searches for God in his attempt to be
_____ by a righteous God.

(accepted)

The invocation _____ God to be
_____.

The call to worship and opening hymn
_____ His _____.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

forgiveness should be expressed early in the service and in the form of prayers, hymns, and Scripture.

One who confesses and prays for forgiveness recognizes the evil in his life and seeks to dispose of it. The Hebrew people placed their sins on a scapegoat and drove him into the wilderness. Christians confess their sins to Christ whose shed blood keeps on cleansing them from all sins (1 John 1:7-9). Confession means to "say with" or "say the same thing about" ourselves that God says about us. It is to agree with God that our sins are wrong, but we are powerless to do anything about them. It is to ask God to remove our sins.

Jesus taught that attempts to worship are ineffective if a person has committed a wrong which causes his brother to have aught against him (Matt. 5:23ff.). He is instructed to leave his gift, which he has brought as an act of worship, at the altar and to become reconciled to his brother before he offers his worship to God. If he holds resentment against his brother, he is to forgive him.

Expressing gratitude to God

The next stage of worship is recognition of the privileges and blessings that come from one's relationship to God. Often man takes God's gift of grace for granted and fails to express gratitude to the Giver. The word worship is a contraction of "worth-ship." It refers to God's worthiness of man's praise, gratitude, and devotion.

Paul spoke of dedicated service as an act of worship (Rom. 12:1-2). John stated the true concept of worship in the words, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). In worship, our love for God is expressed by words of praise, by making offerings and gifts, by expressing thanksgiving, and by presenting our lives to Him in service.

Listening to God speak

The first part of the service focuses on what man says to God, but the time comes when man must listen to what God says to him. God speaks to man through His Word. His Word includes both Scriptures and inspired sermons.

A sermon can be just a speech or it can be the dynamic Word of God. The preacher is the vessel through whom the words are uttered. The Bible as the recorded Word of God is the source of the divinely revealed truth to be shared. The Holy Spirit must be active in the preaching situation by guiding the minister and by illuminating and making the message personal to the listener. In the preaching situation, the

Prayers, hymns, and Scriptures of confession and _____ should be expressed _____ in the service.

(When)

(Compare your answer with the text, first paragraph.)

Gratitude to God is expressed by giving _____ and gifts.

(offerings)

God's Word includes both Scriptures and inspired _____.

(sermons)

For a sermon to be the dynamic Word of God, the _____ must be active in the preaching situation.

(Holy Spirit)

minister serves more as a prophet who appears before men in the name of God to proclaim "thus saith the Lord."

Responding to God's Word

The experience of worship is incomplete until man has responded to God's Word. After their deliverance, the Israelites were led to a camp at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:2ff.). Moses ascended the mountain into the presence of the Lord and received God's Word. God's Word stated conditions for Israel's acceptance as God's people and made heavy demands upon her: "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exod. 19:5f.). After Moses descended from the mountain, he assumed the role of a prophet and placed the Word of the Lord before the people. Upon the conclusion of his address, the people were given an opportunity to respond: "And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord" (Exod. 19:8). As leader of the people, Moses filled both the role of priest and of prophet. As priest, he told the words of the people to the Lord and represented them before God. As prophet, he related the Word of God to the people.

Requirements for Successful Worship

A worship service can be no more than going through rituals or it can become a genuine divine-human encounter. To become genuine and significant, the people must be led to an awareness of God's awesome presence. Human life is transformed when it confronts the living God. The example of Isaiah's entering the Temple after the death of his king illustrates the change effected by man's encounter with the Wholly Other. Isaiah had shared in the despair of his countrymen as a result of the death of the king. The enemy from the North, the Assyrian army, was threatening to overrun his defenceless nation. According to Chapter 6, Isaiah experienced an awareness of God's presence through a vision of God seated on the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies. The experience caused him to take his eyes off the uncertainties of life and the threatening circumstances which surrounded him. He was enabled to see his life in relation to higher reality. He recognized that his sin robbed him of the privilege of relating to the Eternal Power who could not be overthrown, nor would He ever die. He came to understand that the Almighty God provided for his forgiveness as symbolized by the coal from off the altar. The purpose of his life became apparent, not in relation to temporal or

At the conclusion of the worship service, people should be given the opportunity to _____.

(respond)

In a genuine worship experience-- people are led to an awareness of God's awesome _____, and human life is _____.

(presence, transformed)

perishable earthly things but in relation to the God who created him.

Sometimes the preacher labours under the delusion that the success of the service depends solely on the words which he speaks. Actually, a successful service depends on man's awareness of God's presence, which should be experienced before the sermon. The sermon then becomes God's Word confronting him. The service must transcend the ability of man to interest and challenge the people. The leader makes people aware of God's presence and is the vessel of God's Word; however, the living Spirit must make Himself known in the hearts of the people. The Holy Spirit speaks through the speaker and his message.

For the sermon to be the powerful Word of God, it must be steeped in prayer. No amount of labour in preparation nor superiority of style in delivery will make it the Word of God. Sermons should be prepared carefully, and the minister should give attention to principles in delivery; but these are not enough. Since the sermon is proclamation of a message from God and not a human address, it is a divine pronouncement and needs divine power. The preacher needs a word from God before he speaks. He becomes a herald of that word, not an orator who delivers his own views about life. Prayer is essential if he is to distinguish the Word of God from his own words.

W. E. Sangster suggests that the man who prays much in his preaching will keep to centralities.¹ Prayer will keep him focused on the grace and favour of God when the temptation arises to wander off into areas of personal concern. His preaching will be centred in God rather than in man because his prayers keep him focused on God.

The sermon must be based on God's recorded Word. It is to be concerned with the mighty acts and purposes of God. The minister states the unfathomable truths that God is love, that He came to earth in the flesh, and that He is merciful and gracious in receiving sinful men. He knows the God of whom he speaks through personal experience of forgiveness, prayer, and Bible study. The more he prays, the better he knows God. The better he knows God, the better he understands the Bible and the more he has to tell about the deep nature of God. He is also more aware of God's presence.

¹Power in Preaching (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), p. 100.

What is the key to making a sermon the powerful Word of God? _____

Prayer is essential in order for the preacher to distinguish the Word of _____ from his own _____.

(prayer, God, words)

Prayer will keep the preacher centred in _____ rather than in _____.

(God, man)

Prayer causes the preacher to know God better, understand the _____ better, and be more aware of God's _____.

(Bible, presence)

Unfortunately, many preachers work hard in preparing each message and, when it is ready to be delivered, they pray that God will bless it. Instead, the very inception of the thought of the sermon should be in the midst of prayer. When a particular sermon originates as a thought or as a biblical text in the mind and heart, which have been prepared by prayer, the preacher can be confident he speaks the Word of God and not his own word. If he has the assurance that God has given to him the idea, he knows that God will give to him the development and delivery of that idea. When God is recognized as the source of the sermon, the preacher is not fearful of failing but delivers it with the confidence of a "thus saith the Lord."

Prayer enables the preacher to see the theme from God's perspective. He is not concerned with how original or how unique or clever he can be in the developing of the idea but with what God wants him to do with it. Prayer delivers the preacher from seeking his own glory and enables him to focus on the sole glory of God. The Lord will honour with the presence of His Spirit a message which is dedicated to His glory.

Prayer will deliver the preacher from anxiety about the results of the sermon. James Denney remarked that a preacher cannot give the impression that he is clever and that Jesus is wonderful at the same time. If the preacher's concern is to impress the people, he will hunger for praise when the sermon has ended. If the praise does not come, he goes away feeling dejected and discouraged. Prayer enables the preacher to put himself behind the cross and desire that the people will see Jesus rather than the cleverness of a man. He will be more concerned about the conversion of sinners and the strengthening of believers than his impressiveness as a speaker. He will seek changed lives rather than the praise of people.

Sometimes the preacher approaches the hour of speaking with a feeling of coldness and indifference towards the message. His only concern is to get finished with the difficult task. He may become too familiar with holy things and lose the joy and wonder of the Gospel. To overcome these negative feelings, he needs to pray until the truth of God's Word glows in his heart and creates a burning desire to be proclaimed. Truth is more than feelings, but if it is uttered without feelings and conviction, the sermon will have little vitality and warmth. When the sermon takes on fire and is Spirit-filled, the people know they have been in the presence of the Lord.

The evidence of the Spirit's presence in the message is essential for a successful sermon. The preacher cannot control the Spirit for his own benefit and glory, but the Spirit can control the preacher and his message if permitted to do so. The movement of the Spirit is mysterious, but there are certain factors

Prayer enables the preacher to see the theme from God's _____.

(perspective)

Prayer will relieve the preacher of anxiety about the _____ of the sermon.

(results)

Prayer will kindle a burning desire within the preacher to proclaim _____.

(God's Word)

which assure the preacher of His presence. Without the Holy Spirit's power, the sermon will not be effective even though it has a good outline, contains helpful spiritual insight, shows wise understanding, and utilizes eloquence in deliverance.

The Holy Spirit is not a tool to be used by man for self-glory but is the power of God to bring honour and glory to the Heavenly Father. When the preacher's motive in speaking is to honour Christ, the Son of God, and His Father, the message becomes a tool which can be used by the Spirit. Through confession and forgiveness the minister must cleanse his heart of wrong motives and evil desires. Because of his sinful nature, his pride and self-interest desire personal credit and honour for the success of the message. He must recognize the unholy traits and deal with them before he speaks. Jesus warned His disciples not to follow the example of the hypocrites who prayed standing in the synagogues and on street corners in order that they might be seen of men. Since their purpose was to impress men rather than be heard of God, they would receive their reward of getting praise from men but not the answer to their prayers. Hypocritical and deceitful living bring unprofitable rewards. Sometimes the sermon produces poor results because the motive behind its proclamation is to impress the people and thus to bring honour to the speaker. The preacher must deal with this temptation before he attempts to deliver the eternal Word of God.

The Bible assures us that "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12—RSV). When the preacher proclaims his own word, he has no assurance of eternal results. When he proclaims God's Word, he can know the Spirit will make it dynamic and vital.

The effectiveness of the proclaimed Word does not depend on the visible result, that is, the number who respond during the invitation. True spirituality is internal. The correct response of believers is to hide the Word in their hearts so they will not sin against God. Such a response does not mean a public rededication and commitment but an inner surrender to be guided by God's Word and controlled by His Spirit. Opportunity should be given for public expression of decisions made by those whom God moves to that kind of response. However, the minister should not expect the people who listen to his preaching Sunday after Sunday to respond publicly at the conclusion of each service.

If there are no visible decisions over a period of time, the preacher needs to answer three questions: Am I preaching the Word of God or my own word? Am I preaching to honour Christ and glorify God or to impress people? Is the presence of the Spirit evident

Underline the correct ending for this statement.

The Holy Spirit will be present when the preacher's motive is--

- 1. to honour Christ, the Son of God, and His Father.*
- 2. to impress the people and bring honour to the speaker.*

(1)

Underline the words which make this statement true.

When the preacher proclaims (his word, God's Word), he can know the Spirit will make it dynamic and vital.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Is this statement true or false?

The effectiveness of a sermon is always measured by the number who respond during the invitation. _____

(false)

in my preaching? If the sermons are the Word of God, delivered to honour God, and bathed in prayer and faith, the preacher can confidently leave the results in the hands of God.

Faith is a requirement for powerful preaching. God has promised that His Word will not return to Him void. By faith, the preacher expects results and depends on the power of the Spirit in the preaching situation. He recognizes that his own words and efforts are inadequate, but he knows also that he is standing behind the pulpit because God has called him and assigned him to that responsibility. If he is following the will of God, he can be assured that the Lord will not forsake him. In preparing His disciples for their mission, Jesus warned them that they would meet opposition as they carried out their work. Men would go so far as to deliver them up to counsels, publicly beat them in synagogues (churches), and bring them to trial before governors and kings. They would not be forsaken in their trials by the One who commissioned them to the task, but they would experience the presence of the Spirit who would guide them in what to say (Matt. 10:17ff.). This Scripture does not promise that the Spirit will deliver the preacher from the toil of preparing his sermons by giving him a message as he speaks, but it does assure him that he will not be forsaken in the work that he does for his Lord.

The Importance of Preaching

Every aspect of public worship should be considered important and not referred to as "preliminaries" or as "setting the stage for the sermon." On the other hand, the sermon should not be relegated to a place of insignificance. The service of worship is to be understood as neither a "preaching service" nor a "liturgical service." The minister serves as priest, prophet, and evangelist. His priestly representation of the people before God is important (the liturgical part of the service), but this role is not to overshadow the prophetic or evangelistic role (the preaching part of the service). Song, prayer, and Scripture reading are valued in worship along with the sermon.

Preaching is a part of worship, and the total experience of worship is more important than any of the parts. Since worship is man's relating to the Wholly Other, he needs both to speak to God and to have God speak to him. The sermon truly becomes an act of worship when the listener hears the Word of God as it ought to be heard—with penitence, contrition, faith, self-consecration, and vows of new obedience. Since the opening part of the service and the sermon are both acts of worship, there should be no contrast or contradiction between them. The service is not

A requirement for powerful preaching is _____.

(faith)

The two roles of a minister are--

1. _____, representing the people before God and
2. _____, preaching the Word of God.

Use priestly and prophetic in the blanks.

The _____ part of the service should not overshadow the _____ part.

(priest, prophet, priestly, prophetic)

looked upon as two halves but as different parts of a total experience.

Andrew W. Blackwood suggests that if every minister looked upon the sermon as an act of worship, many a pulpit would gain dignity and power.² Paul emphasized the importance of preaching the gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 1:17), which has reference both to the content of the message and the act of sharing it. The content focuses on the death and resurrection of Jesus. The method of delivery emphasizes the sharing of a joyful message from God. The word or doctrine of the Cross is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe (1 Cor. 1:18). Rejection of the proclaimed message means to perish. Paul stated that "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

The importance of preaching is set forth in the Book of Revelation. The two witnesses were given power to prophesy: "And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies; and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed" (Rev. 11:5). The prophets would be preserved until their testimony had been completed and then they would be killed. The inhabitants of the earth would rejoice over their deaths because the prophets had tormented them with their words while they lived. The old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceives the whole world, is to be defeated "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony" (Rev. 12:11). The writer emphasized that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). The Faithful and True One who judges and makes war is described as having eyes as a flame of fire, "and his name is called The Word of God" (Rev. 19:13). His offensive weapon was a sharp sword which went out of his mouth (the Word of God—Rev. 19:15). The Conqueror who sat on a horse disposed of his enemies who had been taken captive by casting them into the lake of fire burning with brimstone, "and the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth" (Rev. 19:21).

Even though the conflict in Revelation is described as a historical battle, victory does not come through physical power or military might but by the Word of God, which is the only effective weapon on the level of spiritual conquest. Revelation speaks of the importance of preaching and destroying the works of the devil and spreading the Kingdom of God. The writer anticipated a time when the devil would be loosed for a season and the people of the nations would be deceived and no longer respond to preaching. But

Paul emphasized both

the _____ of the message and

the _____ of sharing it.

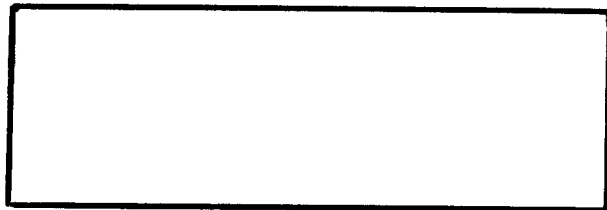
(content, act)

*Satan's defeat is to come through the
_____ of the Word of God.*

(preaching)

²The Preparation of Sermons (New York: Abingdon Press, 1948), p. 255.

preaching remains God's plan for calling His people from evil in the world to righteousness in His Kingdom. It is the means by which God has chosen to bring men into a right relationship with Himself and to restore the world to its original purpose.



Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. What is worship? _____

2. How does the first part of a worship service differ from the latter part? _____

3. What causes man to search for God? _____

4. Briefly state the purpose of each element in the worship service. _____

5. What does a successful worship service accomplish? _____

6. Give five reasons why sermons for successful worship require prayer. _____

7. How does prayer prepare the preacher for speaking? _____

8. What factors assure the presence of the Spirit? _____

9. How should the effectiveness of the sermon be measured? _____

10. What two roles does the minister fill in the worship service? _____

11. How does the priestly part of the service compare in importance to the prophetic part? _____

12. What was Paul's evaluation of preaching? _____

13. According to Revelation, how is Satan to be defeated? _____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3):

Read pages 171-184 in Planning Your Preaching by Pearce and do the following:

1. Give three reasons the Bible should be read in public worship.
2. Give four reasons the Bible is read poorly.
3. State two attitudes which will help the minister to read the Bible more effectively.
4. Explain why Pearce recommends the using of a lectionary and why he discourages the congregation's reading their own Bibles as the minister reads.

Advanced activity (Level 3):

Read pages 164-170 in Planning Your Preaching by Pearce and do the following:

1. List five suggestions Pearce gives for involving people in prayer at the midweek service.
2. List five suggestions which will give variety and interest to the midweek service.

Seminar Discussion

1. What is worship?
2. Outline the steps in a successful worship experience.
3. What is the role and importance of the sermon in worship?
4. Is the reading of Scripture an effective part of worship in the church you attend? Give reasons for your answer.

Week	Special Emphasis	Sunday Morning	Sunday Evening	Midweek
1		Sunday Morning Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____	Sunday Evening Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____	Midweek Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____
2		Sunday Morning Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____	Sunday Evening Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____	Midweek Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____
3		Sunday Morning Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____	Sunday Evening Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____	Midweek Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____
4		Sunday Morning Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____	Sunday Evening Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____	Midweek Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____
5		Sunday Morning Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____	Sunday Evening Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____	Midweek Major obj. _____ Title _____ Script. _____ Outline _____