PREACHING IS CULTURALLY DETERMINED

Posted on May 24, 2022 by Eddie

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When it comes to listening to a regular preaching ministry, I have a strong preference for regular expository ministry which works through a book of the Bible.

There are a couple of reasons for this. The first is that it is the tradition in which I was formed and as a result, I'm more comfortable in it. The second reason is that it forces a discipline on the preacher. If you are preaching systematically through books of the Bible, you can't avoid those difficult passages in Leviticus, even if you want to. I should say that I prefer systematic preaching that takes natural chunks of text and explains those, rather than the variety which takes a verse or a sentence or two and then throttles the life out of it.

However, I have to admit that this is not the only valid sort of preaching out there. People in my tradition often point to CH Spurgeon as a model for good preaching. To be honest, I often wonder if some of the folks who praise Spurgeon have ever read any of his sermons. Though there is a real devotional depth to them, they are anything but regular and systematic. Texts are picked, seemingly, at random. There is a famous section in his autobiography which describes how, at the last minute, he had not found a text for the sermon he was due to preach when he happened to look out of the window. There he saw a canary being mobbed by sparrows, which led him to preach on Jeremiah 12:9. Personally, I'm not convinced that this is the best way to pick a text for a sermon - but Spurgeon is Spurgeon and I'm me, so who am I to comment?

Regular, systematic exposition lends itself to analytical, structured and argued sermons. Preachers delight to highlight the therefores, and buts in Paul's letters, showing how his thoughts flow in reasoned patterns. This sort of approach appeals to people whose thinking has been shaped by a reading culture and Enlightenment culture. However, in other cultures a more narrative approach is much more appropriate - and I suspect that this will be increasingly the case in the UK as we undergo a series of significant cultural and philosophical shifts. Those of us who like our tightly argued sermons can be dismissive of narrative preaching as "telling stories" though we would probably be reluctant to accuse Jesus of that. Actually, it is one of the anomalies of systematic expository preaching that preachers will take one of Jesus' wonderful self-explanatory parables and turn them into three tightly argued (alliterative) points.

In the end, there is no such thing as biblical preaching. There is preaching that is biblical, certainly. However, there is no one, universal model or approach to preaching which can be universally applied and called "biblical". Just as the New Testament does not set out a definite model for church governance, nor does it describe a particular way in which the "Apostles doctrine" should be taught. Our job is to faithfully open up the Scriptures in a way which speaks to people in their particular

historic and geographical situation.