WHY I RARELY LISTEN TO RECORDED SERMONS

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I don't listen to recordings of sermons. I mean, even when they are playing, I don't really listen, I do something else as well, and that's a problem.
Category: Observations

I mentioned yesterday that I rarely listen to recorded sermons and I thought that it might be worthwhile explaining why that is.

I Don't Listen: when I go to church, I listen to the sermon. I admit that I do get distracted from time to time, but my attention is pretty much fixed on the preacher and what they are saying. The same isn't true when I listen to an online sermon (or podcast, talk radio etc). I listen to things when I'm doing something else; running, reading, doing the washing up or brushing the dog. It's a personal thing, but I feel uneasy about half listening to a sermon which someone else has worked hard to prepare, while my attention is elsewhere.

I Listen Differently: when I hear a sermon in church, I'm listening to hear what the Lord is saying to me through the preaching. When I listen to a recorded sermon, I tend to concentrate on technicalities of exegesis, the preacher's vocal mannerisms and all sorts of other extraneous details.

Superstar Syndrome: this isn't an issue for me, but I have heard a number of preachers lament that they now almost feel as if they are in competition with the latest and greatest preaching super-stars. They know that members of their congregation are downloading sermons by the great and good and becoming increasingly dissatisfied with what they see as the inferior product offered up at home. At one time, ministers only faced this sort of thing when their congregation came home from Keswick or Sprig Harvest, now it's a feature of everyday life for some.

I Wasn't There: I think preaching is special, indeed, I would use the word prophetic. There is something happens when someone faithfully preaches from the Scriptures to a group of people. It may not be spectacular, but the Spirit works in this situation to convict and change people. At its best, a sermon is a prophetic word for a particular group of people in a particular situation. This can extend to people listening to a recording, but I don't think it usually does. Listening to a recorded sermon is more akin to listening to a lecture (see point 2, above) than it is listening to something prophetic.

I Belong To A Church: Sunday by Sunday, I meet with my church family to praise God and to listen to the Gospel being preached, not just to me, but to us. This is God's provision for his body. Yes, I could go home and listen to an amazing sermon by someone incredibly famous but even if I learned something, it would not be as a part of the family that God has placed me in. We learn and grow together.

What I am Not Saying!

Please note, I have not said that sermons should not be recorded and that people should not listen to them. I said that I rarely listen to recorded sermons and I gave the reasons why. I do think that there is something very different about the experience of listening to recorded sermons, however, that doesn't mean that I think it is always wrong. For people who are unable to get to church regularly, or who miss out on a particular sermon in a series, the ability to catch up with what the

church family are learning is invaluable. We used to love to receive sermon tapes from Above Bar Church when we lived in Africa. Aspiring preachers can learn a lot by listening to the way in which the 'experts' do it. There are all sorts of reasons why recorded sermons should be made available and I'm all in favour of it when it is used wisely.