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Epistles

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“To be known and read” by all. . .

Foolishness of Preaching

The sermon I remember best out of 65 years of attending Seventh-day Adventist churches (I don't think I have missed more than five Sabbaths in all those years) was preached some 25-30 years ago. We were living in Brewster, Washington, at the time. The preacher was our local Adventist dentist. He began by pointing out how quickly we forget things. The point of this was to tell us how soon we would forget the sermon of that Sabbath morning. I do not recall the figures he gave. But according to psychologists, we would have forgotten most of what he said by the following Sabbath. I realized he was telling the truth.

I must confess that at first I was troubled by this revelation. By that time if I counted only the Sabbath sermons I had heard, it meant that I had heard 1,976 sermons. Counting prayer meetings and camp meetings would add a significant sum to that number. And I could remember very little of all those sermons. As I ruminated over this troubling thought, I realized that during that same period I had eaten some 41,610 meals

and could hardly remember anything I ate—except the Ruskets I ate each morning during my college years. But it didn't really make that much difference whether I remembered what I ate.

Each meal had sustained me until the next one. And if I had gone without very many meals I would have been in trouble. So it is with preaching. I know that I have heard many moving, inspiring, thought-provoking sermons over the years. They have caused me to make commitments, change my thinking, develop new habits, and discard certain old habits. They have compelled me to go places and do things that I doubt I would have done had I not heard them. They gave me a lift, fed me, and sustained me until the next sermon.

We have some mighty preachers in our church, for which I praise the Lord. I am convicted that many of them have already impacted eternity. And I believe the best is yet to come.

Now for a few short words about what I think makes a sermon great. It is one in which the preacher speaks with conviction and passion. One like Paul when he “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” (Acts 24:25,

KJV) that made the heathen ruler Felix tremble. We need sermons that will awaken us out of our carnal slumber; that will cause us to cease our love affair with the world; that will cause us to see that “the night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light” (Rom. 13:12, KJV).

Dr. Donald Casebolt
Colorado

Preaching Has Its Perils

Thomas A Davis’s article on preaching stimulated my thinking. To begin with, those who preach the Word are not there to entertain.

Sit in the synagogue on a Sabbath when the greatest Teacher of all time is in the pulpit. He opens Scripture to Isaiah 61:1, 2 and reads, and sits down. Every eyes is fixed on him. Why? Because he applies the Scripture to them, pointing out that though there were many lepers in the time of Elisha the prophet, not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.

The people in the synagogue were so furious they took the Preacher out and sought to throw him off a cliff. Preaching the Word and applying it as it should be has its perils.

Yes, even today. Of course, we don’t seek to kill the preacher—though we may want to! So why do we keep coming back? Because we feel we have to be good church-going Christians. We complain about the sermons but don’t even tell the preacher what we feel is lacking in his or her preaching. At the least, we want something faith-building. Paul says, “So then faith [growth] comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17, NKJV). Preachers shouldn’t choose a subject because it is popular; whatever its content, it should expound the Scriptures concerning Jesus (Luke 24:13-27).

If I wished to learn something of biblical history, I wouldn’t go to a television repair shop. And that’s not where pastors should go for the information they share with the congregation. I think it would be well if from time to time the pastor asked the congregation what they would like to hear.

Steve C. James
Florence, Arizona

God’s Command Center

The grand article “God’s Command Center,” about the author’s gratefulness that by the virtue of Jesus he is being brought before the

heavenly throne of the Most High, leads me to share a thought about those who sound frightened of the sanctuary, with thoughts that their name could come up this very day for a decision regarding their eternal destiny.

John 12:48 says his word will judge the world “in the last day” (KJV). Ellen White by the power of inspiration explains that the cleansing of the sanctuary, which the Bible says is now taking place, can only mean that the eternal position of the deceased is being acknowledged by Jesus. Since he already knows everything, I assume this means he is revealing this to the recording angels. Is he judging the living today or next week? Why would he, when he is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, KJV). Could there not be four last days? (1) At death (for the lost); (2) the day before the next plague falls; (3) the day Jesus returns (for those with the mark of the beast); (4) the day death and hades are “cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14, KJV).

A Reader

The Cleansing Stream

Ocean water, lake water, river water, creek water, pond water, swimming pool water, tank water, barrel water, soft water, hard water, rain water, cold water, warm water, icy water. These waters and more may be used for baptism. Could you use milk—it’s mostly water? No, the Bible says “water.” What if you’re a Seventh-day Adventist hospital chaplain dealing with patients of other faiths who want an infant baptized or an adult baptized with wet towels, as Clover Fields (pseudonym) explained he or she had to do in this article? I would ask Clover if in lieu of baptism, Jesus called down from heaven 100 gallons of water for the head of the repentant thief on the cross? The answer is No. The kind of water we use isn’t specified, but to whom it is applied and the way it is applied are specified. May we not exceed the liberties God has given us is my prayer.

No Name

• The various methods of baptism by Adventist hospital personnel have raised interesting questions and not a few hackles. Watch for further missives.—Editor.