

One Listener's Observations

by Wayne Goff

Preachers don't often get to **listen** to sermons. They are obviously the ones delivering them. So I enjoy the opportunity, *especially* when the visiting preacher has something to say. Here are a few of my observations:

The Gospel of the King

An excellent lesson explaining *especially* from the Gospel of Matthew how the “good news” centers around the King and His spiritual kingdom. One denominational preacher *discouraged* his audience from emphasizing the kingdom! It was because this required *submission*, a thing deplored by us today. Numerous Scriptures were given to prove that Jesus came to establish His kingdom, but remember that both John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministries with the words: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” Jesus was raised up from the dead in order to be the King (Christ), Acts 2:30.

When I Hear “Baptism”

This lesson centered on what the word “*baptism*” means to different religious people. In order to understand one another, the term must be defined. A proper *biblical* understanding of the word and its importance goes a long way to finding common ground with those who have been taught differently. What do **you** think when you hear “baptism”?

Culture, Context & Scripture

Perhaps the most important sermon of the week, this lesson centered on *carefully* studying the text of Scripture in its context to understand exactly what the inspired writer meant. While Scripture can be appreciated even without understanding its cultural background, the lessons intended by God are magnified even more when one understands it. For example, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10), understanding the hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans makes this parable literally jump off the page! Jesus was rebuking the religious ruling body with uncaring hypocrisy while making a despised Samaritan the hero of the story! Not only is Jesus telling us in this parable to “love our neighbor,” but also He is saying “love your neighbor even if he is your enemy!”

The lesson also went on to show that Christianity was **not** a reflection of first century culture — Jewish or Roman — but in fact *completely contrary to any culture of the day, then or now!* Christianity has a culture of its own, and disciples of Christ are commanded to come out of the world and into this spiritual environment.

Strangers & Pilgrims

Similar to the lesson on **Culture, Context & Scripture**, this lesson pointed out to us that we are **in** the world but not **of** the world. Too many professed Christians try to practice a comfortable Christianity that doesn't require the sacrifice of being separate from the sinful world around them. One passage that proves otherwise is 1 Peter 2:11, “*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.*” We are called to live a different life before the world so that some might observe and be converted. Dear reader, do you fit into the world a bit too well?

Lessons from the Oxcart

This message centered on respecting the silence of the Scriptures while honoring the instructions of God. We all know the story of Uzzah being struck dead when he touched the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 6:1-11). Sometimes we feel a bit of pity for him because of his good intentions. But this lesson centers on the **importance** of following God's instructions while *not* leaning on one's own understanding (Prov. 3:5-6). It emphasized David's angry reaction to Uzzah's death, and how he changed his disposition when he understood what he and Israel had done wrong (1 Chron. 15). *When one argues from silence, he is ignoring what God has said in order to do what God has not said!*