

Are You Getting Nothing out of the Sermon?

Hebrews 4:2 (New American Standard Bible)

*For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also did; but **the word they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united with those who listened with faith.***

Introduction

This morning, I am going to talk about sermon. The proclaimed message of God's Word.

Many of you have been a believer in Christ for years. I praise God for that. That means, by now, you have listened to hundreds of sermons, if not thousands. You may still remember a very good sermon or two, but most of them you don't. Don't feel bad, even myself don't always remember what I preached a week ago. 😊

Sermon, by nature, is like a meal you take. You may not remember what you ate the night before, let alone a week ago, but because you take the meal every day, it sustains your body and keeps you healthy. Same with God's message. You hear with good heart, you put it into practice, then you will bear its fruit so that you may stay healthy and strong in your walk with the Lord.

Sometimes, though, you don't get anything out of the message on a given Sunday. And you wonder why. Here are some possible reasons for that. One reason lies on the preacher, that is, some sermons are indeed not worth listening to. Here's what happens. When the preacher preaches a message without truth, without clarity, or without conviction, of course, you don't get anything out of it, because there's no substance in the sermon. Sometimes, even though the sermon is full of secular 'feel good' stories and quotes, yet without one single mention of the Scripture, you may not get any spiritual food from that sermon, either. Believe me, there are some preachers who open the Bible only for the sermon preparation during the entire week, yes, folks, I am painfully aware of such possibility. May it never be with the preachers. May it never be with me! Pray to God that He would help the preachers of the gospel!

The other possibility lies on the listener, you. Even though the preacher prepares the message with much care and prayer spending hours upon hours each week, even though the preacher proclaims the Word of God with clarity, truth, and passion, unless you unite your heart and faith with the hearing of God's Word, you will not benefit from the sermon. Even though Jesus Himself preaches, you still will not get anything from it. Some of you even reject God's Word due to your stubbornness. The outcome? You will miss God's blessing that comes from the Word of God. And that's not good for your soul.

Here's the third possibility. Our enemy the devil and his minions are at work. Beware of what's going on in your heart when you try to concentrate on the sermon. This is what typically happens. I preach the Word of God. As soon as it is being sown into your heart, the devil comes right on and snatches it away from your heart without you knowing it, typically through distractions, then you miss the whole message. And you go home wondering why you got nothing from the message that morning, because the devil snatched it away from you.

So, folks, let's talk a little more about three parties that are responsible for us getting nothing from the sermon: **preacher, you, and the enemy the devil.**

Content

1. Preacher: Who's the preacher? A messenger of God. What's his job? What is his responsibility? To proclaim God's message to God's people. Sometimes, God's message is a call to repentance. Other times, a message of hope and reconciliation. More other times, a message of comfort and encouragement. No matter what the message is, one thing is clear. Their job is to bring God's message faithfully to God's people, not their own thoughts or convictions, but unadulterated Word of God.

In reality, there have been compromised messengers of God. They preach not God's Word but their own thoughts and convictions, even the messages that contradict God's Word. They claim that their message is from God for God's people, but not really. In the past thirty years, I have seen some false preachers and prophets in the Church with my own eyes and ears. E.g., There was one pastor who was put on church trial. The issue? He was divorcing his wife and children for no other reason than his desire to be with his new partner. Now, listen carefully. We are not to condemn the man, but we are to discern. The man defended himself in front of 200 pastors claiming, "It is the Holy Spirit who directed me to do so." Wait a minute.

Since when does the Spirit of God contradict God's Word that forbids adultery?
Another pastor openly admits that he doesn't believe in Christ's resurrection, yet still carries on his pastoral duty. Folks, pray for your preachers. Cry out to God on their behalf.

Here's why you need to pray for God's messengers: proclaiming and teaching God's Word is a very serious business. This calling should be taken lightly by no one. Let me repeat: Preaching is God's calling. It is God who chooses and calls preachers for His divine purpose, that is, to proclaim His Word. There's a fine difference between preaching and any other jobs out there. Most of the jobs you take and retire from, you are not responsible for eternity, are you? When you retire, that's it. However, with the preachers, teachers of the Bible, and prophets, God will hold them accountable in the final judgment for what they have preached and taught for God's people. That's why James the Apostle said: *Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly* (James 3:1). Fully aware of this and its eternal consequences, every Sunday morning before the service, I say the following prayer for myself: *"Lord, I present myself approved to You as a workman unashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. O, Holy Spirit, teach me in this hour what to say. Help me to teach the way of God in truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15, Luke 12:12, Luke 20:21). Pray for me and pray for preachers that they may preach God's Word as God expects.

2. You: One day, the LORD God spoke to Jeremiah the Prophet as He was sending him to the people of Israel with His message: ⁴ *Say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, ⁵ and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (**though you have not listened**)*(Jeremiah 26:4-5).

Throughout history, the people of God do not have a stellar record of listening to God's prophets. They kept rejecting God's messengers even when God sent them again and again. You didn't know about it? Read the Old Testament, particularly, the Prophets, you will see my point. Many prophets of God were mistreated, persecuted, rejected, stoned, imprisoned, and even put to death by God's own people.

Here's another example. Jesus Himself was rejected by His hometown folks. His ministry of healing, teaching, and preaching were not well received by them. In fact, Jesus marveled at their unbelief. Their unbelief kept Him from performing

miracles for them except a few sick people. Think about it. It cost them God's blessings on them.

Jesus was also rejected by the religious leaders. Once again, the problem wasn't the messenger. It was the audience. They called Jesus devil's agent, insane, glutton and drunkard. They challenged His authority to forgive sins. Here's another one. The same religious leaders also refused to come to John the Baptist for baptism of forgiveness. The point? When you don't bring your belief and faith to God's proclaimed message, and when you reject God's messenger for whatever reasons, you lose the benefits from God's healing, teaching, and blessing. Beware of the hardened heart.

3. the devil: Even though the sermon is biblically sound and clear, even though you want to hear the sermon with open heart and mind, sometimes you totally miss the blessings of God's Word. How? This is how. Unless you are vigilant in spirit during the time of sermon, the devil can and will attempt to take the Word of truth away from you without you knowing it.

Listen to Jesus in Luke 8: 5-12. Jesus spoke a parable: ⁵“The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the sky ate it up. ⁶Other seed fell on rocky soil, and when it came up, it withered away because it had no moisture. ⁷Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. ⁸And yet other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as much.” As He said these things, He would call out, “The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.”...

¹¹“Now this is the parable: **the seed is the word of God.** ¹²And those beside the road are the ones who have heard, then **the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.**

The lesson? Beware of the devil lurking in your heart while the Word of God is proclaimed and being sown in your heart. He will make every effort to snatch the Word of God from your heart to steal eternal life from you. Three distractions we must beware of.

#1. A distracting thought. Many of you would testify that's true. That's exactly what we experience during the sermon. In fact, such distraction never happens when we watch our favorite shows or movies, does it? But it always happens when we listen to the sermon. You follow the thought of distraction and by the time you come back to the sermon, you totally miss the sermon points. While you were distracted, while you were busy with other thoughts, God's Word was snatched away from your heart.

#2. Phone calls. #3. Beware of bathroom calls during sermon, too, especially if it happens almost every Sunday. The point? The devil uses all these distractions in your heart, and when you follow the distractions, he snatches away the Word from your heart. Please do not underestimate your enemy's strategy. Instead, understand why the devil does this during sermon. To derail you from the heaven-bound train. So that you will have no chance to believe God's Word and be saved. By the way, if you want to stay focused during the sermon, I recommend you taking a sermon copy to follow along. Just ask the ushers.

Conclusion

The LORD lamented that His people are destroyed from lack of knowledge of God (Hosea 4:6). Where can you get the knowledge of God? From the Word of God. Where do you hear the Word of God? From sermon. Or, from the Bible you read or listen. Cherish and guard the time of listening to God's message. As I said it before, consider you have wasted your time during worship, if you don't get anything from the sermon.

Recap: How do you benefit from God's Word? First, pray for me the preacher so that I may handle the Word of God accurately (2 Timothy 2:15) on your behalf. Pray for the Church so that it may be free from false prophets and teachers, unbelieving members, from deceiving spirits and the worldly influences. Next, pray for yourself that you take God's Word with undivided attention and with a good heart so that you may believe and be saved. Pray also for yourself throughout the week that you will stay focused on the sermon discerning and accepting only pure and unadulterated Word of God. Finally, beware of the devil your enemy at work. Do not give him a chance to jeopardize your salvation.

Let us pray.