

The Portrait of a Persecuted Preacher

Luke 3:15-20

1. Introduction.

- a. Review.
- b. Before Luke shifts focus onto Jesus Christ, He records some concluding events involving John the Baptist.
- c. The narrative continues the flow of the story, but it's also an insightful model for faithful preaching.
 - i. This is not only true for formal preachers, but any who would claim to be a disciple of Christ.
 - ii. This episode not only reveals the standard for Christian preaching, but also what any faithful disciple can expect when they faithfully preach Christ.

2. Five Marks of Faithful Preaching.

- a. Faithful preaching engages the mind (15).
 - i. We live in a consumeristic culture in which we're trained in being passive. Many churches have learned that this is what people like, so they've followed in step.
 - ii. John's preaching engaged the mind. He did everything opposite of what his culture was doing (Mk. 1:6).
 1. He starts preaching judgment and repentance.
 2. He preaches in a manner that's offensive.
 - a. Harsh in language and tone.
 - b. Giving commands – something in our day that's often regarded to be legalistic.

- c. Exposing sin, revealing the corrupt nature of the people's hearts.
 - d. Refuses to tickle ears with his words. He could care less how big his following becomes.
- iii. Yet in all this, he's preaching to the minds of the people. Fundamentally, repentance is an issue of the mind. As such, he must engage the mind in order for them to change their mind.
 1. The term for "wonder" is the Greek word from which we get "dialogue" (διαλογίζομαι).
 - a. It speaks of reasoning and creating an intellectual debate.
 - b. This dialoguing is taking place in their hearts. Remember, the Hebrew concept for "heart" is a reference to the control factory of a person's entire will.
 - c. So whatever John was doing in his preaching, it was engaging the entire faculty of a person's being and mind.
 2. John's preaching provoked thought.
 - a. They wondered if John might be the Christ.
 - b. This meant they had to interact with Old Testament Scripture.
 - c. As they reflected on what John said and did, it then caused a dialogue in their minds as to who he was, and what God might be doing in terms of His historical plans regarding the Messiah.
 3. The goal of preaching is to pierce the heart, but through the gateway of the mind.
 - a. True preaching is anything but a manipulation of the emotions and will.
 - b. The goal is always to transform the heart by engaging the mind.

- c. C.f., Acts 2:37.
 - i. True preaching is a project of the mind.
 - ii. It's the task of making arguments from Scripture, but always to pierce the heart.
- b. Faithful preaching preaches Christ (16).
 - i. One of the greatest evidences of the death of a church is when the pulpit becomes man-centered.
 - ii. Yet faithful preaching has Christ as its content, where the goal is to exalt Jesus in both the hearts and lives of the people. And this is exactly what John is doing.
 - iii. This passage gets into the nature of Spirit-Baptism (*c.f.*, *Faith & Fable*, *ep. 9*, where we dealt with this verse, as well as the topic, in full).
 - iv. The point to understand with this verse is that John's preaching completely points away from Himself, and then onto Jesus Christ – Christ was his content.
 - 1. His role as a faithful preacher was to elevate Christ and make Him known.
 - 2. He was to identify the Christ as the Savior of the world.
 - v. The coming Messiah is said by John to be "mightier."
 - 1. In the context, what would make Christ mightier was not only that He was the Son of God, but precisely because of what He was coming to accomplish.
 - 2. John's ministry was one of words and water. Jesus' ministry would be one of salvation and judgment.
 - 3. Untying the thong of a sandal was something reserved for Gentile slaves. It was so shameful that not even Jewish slaves would do this.
 - a. This is how much John is seeking to elevate Christ.

- b. As a faithful preacher of Christ, John understands humility.
- c. Faithful preaching preaches both salvation and judgment (17).
 - i. If the focus of John’s preaching is Christ, then the content must be the work of Christ.
 - ii. There’s some debate as to what this verse means, but the parallel makes it clear.
 - 1. The work of the Spirit (end of v. 16) is paralleled with the gathering of the wheat into the barn (v.17). **This speaks of salvation.**
 - 2. The fire (end of v. 16) is paralleled with the burning of the chaff (end of v. 17). **This speaks of judgment and condemnation.**
 - 3. Both of these speak of the coming two-fold work of Jesus, and therefore what makes Him “mighty (16).
 - iii. The point to understand is that John preaches a perfect balance between both salvation and judgment.
 - 1. You can’t have salvation if a person doesn’t know what their being saved from.
 - 2. And the preaching of judgment is useless if you don’t point people to the way of escape.
 - 3. So John preaches Christ as both Savior and Judge.
- d. Faithful preaching preaches both truth and commands (18).
 - i. All truly converted people will obey the commands of Christ, but the assumption is that they actually know what those commands are.
 - ii. How can a person truly follow after Christ, as a faithful disciple, if they’ve never been instructed in what faithful discipleship looks like?
 - iii. Cheap grace vs. costly grace (Bonhoeffer).
 - iv. True preaching preaches forgiveness, but then immediately calls people to live a life which reflects that forgiveness.

- e. Faithful preaching often results in persecution (19-20).
 - i. Luke doesn't give the full account of John's imprisonment and execution because it's not the main point (c.f., Matt. 14; Mk. 6).
 - ii. However, it's clear that John gets his head chopped off for preaching repentance. Specifically, for exposing sin—the necessary first step when preaching repentance.
 - iii. The term “but (v.19)” is showing a contrast between the response of Herodias, and the response of the previous three groups of people (10-14).
 - 1. The point is that when a person's sin is exposed, they'll either repent, or despise you for doing such a thing.
 - 2. But faithful preaching, if it's to be truly transformative, must begin with the message of sin.
 - iv. True preaching divides (c.f., Matt. 10:34-38).
 - v. True preaching is costly.
 - 1. Matt. 10:22.
 - 2. Matt. 24:9.
 - 3. Lk. 21:16-17.
 - 4. Matt. 5:11.
 - 5. Jn. 15:18-20.
 - 6. Phil. 1:29.
 - vi. True preaching brings strong indictments (c.f., Jn. 3:19-20).
 - 1. Christ was killed because He exposed sin, and the people hated Him for it.
 - 2. Yet every true disciple is to follow in His steps and bring the very same message.

3. The promise of Christ is that if they hated Him, they'll also hate those who follow Him.

4. Lk. 6:26.

3. Conclusion.

- a. The point of the passage is to reveal how much greater Jesus is.
- b. This is a pivotal moment in the Gospel in which Jesus is about to take center-stage.
- c. Everything John preached, concerning salvation, we're about to see accomplished (and realized) through the person and work of Jesus Christ.