

WHAT THE PREACHING EXPERTS SAY

By Roelf L. Ruffner

Abilene Christian University (ACU) recently announced the speaker for their June 22nd “Lunch and Learn” event on campus. It will be Dr. Thomas G. Long, Bandy Professor of Preaching at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology. He will speak on the topic, *Preaching in More Than One Voice: Addressing the Multiple Needs of Congregations Today*. The announcement of the event was quite revealing.

“Noting that congregations increasingly contain people with multiple needs, varying faith relationships and many different listening patterns, Long poses the question, ‘How can preachers, without losing the integrity of their own ministry, speak in differing voices to these hearers, and what are the voices most urgently needed today?’”

Knowing ACU’s College of the Bible it did not surprise me that they would search out an “expert” on preaching from a Methodist seminary (a cemetery of faith) to lecture them on preaching. But at least they did not import a woman preacher (a walking abomination - 1 Tim.2:11-12) like Lipscomb University did recently to lecture on preaching.

I consulted the inspired textbook of preaching, the Holy Bible, how one MUST approach preaching to an audience with “with multiple needs, varying faith relationships and many different listening patterns.” Its experts are all inspired of the Holy Spirit.

The rough hewn John the Baptizer, to warm up a professionally religious audience (Pharisees and Sadducees) said, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mat. 3:2) and, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Mat. 3:7). I doubt if ACU’s College of Bible would pay John’s bus ticket back to the wilderness of Judea if he delivered this sermon to them.

The fisher of men Peter told an audience of thousands of intensely religious folk in Jerusalem, at least some of whom had helped murder the Messiah fifty days before, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). That reads to me like he “offered the invitation.” Three thousand did repent that Pentecost day in A.D. 30 and were baptized. I wonder how many preachers at that ACU luncheon even offer an invitation anymore. Do they plead with their audience to repent of their sins and be baptized (immersed in water) for remission of sins? But that would offend someone and they might stop contributing money to the building fund!

The bold deacon Stephen, full with righteousness concluded his sermon before a kangaroo court of the Jewish Sanhedrin with these stirring words, “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers” (Acts 7:52). I imagine even those with “different listening patterns” understood what he was saying. Their response was not polite applause or even scattered “amens” but gnashing of teeth and screams of a mob. For Stephen’s proclamation of the Truth he was not given a hefty speaking fee but a public lynching.

One of those who lynched Stephen, Saul of Tarsus, later became a preacher and an apostle of Jesus Christ. He was given the opportunity of a lifetime by being invited to speak before an audience of idolaters at the Areopagus in Athens, the center of Greek philosophy. What “voice” did Paul use? It was the voice of loving concern for these educated pagans. He pointed out to them the futility and illogic of idolatry and the need for faith in the living God. He also implored his listeners to repent of their sins because the Judgment Day was coming. “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:30,31).

Dear reader, I believe now more than at any other time in recent history the doctrine of repentance needs to be proclaimed to all men. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

It must be done with love and urgency. Preaching “experts” and the professional pulpitering class says this will just turn off the audience. They say the “millennials” don’t like it. But they forget the power of the gospel to touch the human heart (Rom. 1:16). It is not the exhorter’s eloquence which should bring others to the Truth but the innate thirst of us all for God’s word and the realization of the eternal consequence of not being forgiven of their sins. The greatest preacher who ever lived once said, “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

<http://www.acu.edu/news/2015/150615-emory-university-preaching-expert-speak.html> as of June 17, 2015