

Preaching for a Verdict

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Isaiah 28:14-16

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Several years ago my friend brother Rolfe Barnard said to me, “Henry, God’s preachers must and should preach for a verdict.”

Like this judge says to the jury. “Ladies and gentlemen, have you reached a verdict? Do you have an opinion?”

Preaching is not debating. I hear people debating the Church of Christ in other denominations. I am not a debater. I am a proclaimer of truth. Preaching is not a lecture on theology. Preaching is the proclamation of God’s truth.

Our Lord said, “The Spirit of God is upon me. He hath sent me to...” What? Argue, debate, quarrel? To proclaim the gospel of his grace to sinners. That is what God called us to do. And God’s advocate, thank God we have an advocate, but he deals only in truth.

Are you guilty or are you not guilty? That is what I am talking about tonight. Preaching for a verdict. Are you guilty of sin or are you not guilty of sin against God? Do you sincerely believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Or do you call him a liar. There is no middle ground.

Christ said, “He that is not with me is against me.” Are you with the master or are you against him?

Paul said to King Agrippa, “Agrippa, the death of Jesus Christ was not done in a corner. It wasn’t performed in a remote place. These things are not hidden from you. What say you? Come on.”

Turn with me to 1 Kings chapter 18, 1 Kings chapter 18 and verse 21, 1 Kings 18 verse 21.

And Elijah came unto all the people and he said, “How long, how long halt ye between two thoughts, two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him. If Baal be God, follow him.” And the people, what did they do? They didn’t answer him a word, not a word, not a word. They answered not a word.

Well, I will tell you. They answered. They said, "Baal." In there with their silence, their refusal to be committed to God they were following Baal.

In regard to religion, in regard to religion, in regard to life and death most men and women in this generation, most men and women in this generation pretend to have this opinion about four things. Here is the four things. They think there is a God. They think there is a God. Oh, they may call him the man upstairs. Or they may call him somebody up there likes me. And John Wayne said one time, "Well, if he or she or whoever it is...whoever it is..." But they think there is a God.

How long halt ye between one...between two things thinking, opinion.

The second thing. The people of this generation think there is life after death. They do. They think so. Every obituary that I read in our Virginia paper starts out this way. So and so died and he is with the Lord. Every one.

I looked over them one day. Every single one of them said that. "He is with the Lord." There is life after death. That's what they think.

And most people think that judgment, some kind of judgment and eternity follows death. They say, "Well, it is appointed unto men once to death and after that the judgment." They agree with that. And most of them think that they need some kind of refuge in the event that these things take place. They think there is a God. They think there is life after death. They think there is going to be a judgment and eternity. And they have got to have some kind of refuge. They have got to have some reason for hope of eternal life. And many, Christ said, "Will say unto me in that day, 'Lord, have we not preached in your name? Have we not cast out devils in your name? Have we not done many wonderful works in your name?' And then I will profess unto them, 'I never knew you. I never knew you.'"

I want you to listen to the prophet Isaiah. Turn over to Isaiah chapter 28, Isaiah chapter 28. I want you to listen to these two verses. The first verse, I believe, is verse...Isaiah 28 verse 14 and 15.

Now I believe Isaiah is speaking to people on that day and he is speaking to people on this day and this day because they have the same...how long halt ye between two opinions? Answered not a word.

All right. Watch this. Isaiah 28:14, "Wherefore hear the Word of the Lord ye scornful men that rule this people which is in Jerusalem because you have said you think we have a covenant with death. We are not afraid to...of death. Let it come. We have a covenant." That word "hell" is the grave. They don't know any thing about hell. They do know something about the grave. We have a covenant with death and the grave. We are in accord. We are in accord. We are in agreement with the grave. It is all right. It is all right. So and so died. He is with the Lord. It is all right."

And when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, when God comes to this earth and judges these people, the overflowing scourge shall pass the...it won't come to us. It won't come to us.

Why? For we have a refuge. We have a hope. We have made lies our refuge and under falsehood have we hid ourselves.

And I have five refuges that these people hide in. I hope nobody here is hiding in any of these, but there are some refuges. We have a refuge. Yeah. We are not afraid of death. With the grave we are in agreement. When the overflowing scourge and judgment of God comes to...it won't touch me. I have got a hope. I have got a refuge. It is a refuge of lies God says, but I have got a refuge.

All right. Here they are. Five of them.

Number one, this false refuge is a wrong opinion of ourselves.

The Pharisees said to our Lord, "We be not sinners. We be not sinners."

One of them said, "Lord," he said, "I thank you I am not like other men."

Well, my friends I am like other men and you are like other men. Christ Jesus came into the world to save on type of people, sinners. And that is what we are, all sinners. And this generation has a wrong opinion about themselves. We be not sinners.

Turn with me to Romans chapter three, Romans chapter three. Listen to this. Romans the third chapter verse 10. It is our obituary. No. It is our biography. That is what it is. It is our biography.

In Romans chapter three verse 10, Romans three verse 10. This is our biography. "As it is written there is none righteousness, no not one. There is none that understandeth. There is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way. They are together become unprofitable. There is none that doeth good, no not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher. With their tongues they have used deceit. The poison of asps is under their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness and their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their way. And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

And here is the summary. Now we know, here is the right opinion. Now e know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law that every mouth may be stopped and all the world become guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty before God.

My friends, you will never be found until you are lost. The Lord came into the world to save that which was lost. You will never be clothed with that righteous garment, that whit robe unless you are naked, stripped naked, naked in the sight of him with whom we have to do.

A wrong opinion of ourselves.

Secondly, the second false refuge is a wrong idea about the love of God. The popular teaching today, this is it, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. And this teaching of the fatherhood of God has led men to believe that every son of Adam is a son of God. Every son of Adam is an object of God's love. And that is not so. Every man is not an object of God's love. No, sir. That's right. That's just not so. And this teaching that God loves everybody, this teaching is three things that we have got to do deal with.

Number one, this teaching encourages people to continue in their rebellion against God. For they say, "God...Smile, God loves you. Smile God loves you."

Well, if God loves me I don't have to be afraid of God. But Noah moved with fear. Noah moved with fear. When God appeared to Noah he moved with fear.

What kind of fear?

Fear of the Lord. The Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

Come, my children, I will teach you something: The fear of the Lord.

Secondly, this universal love of God encourages men to ignore Christ. If God loves men...outside of Christ I don't need Christ. Isn't that true? If God loves me outside of Christ I don't need Christ. Who needs Christ? People who are under the judgment of God because of sin.

Thirdly. This universal love of God brings God's character up for question. What is our nature? What are we? We are evil. We are sinners.

Does God love evil? No, he doesn't. God doesn't love evil. He said in Ephesians two, "At that time you were without Christ, strangers from the covenant of promise. You had no hope and without God in this world."

And if you are without God, you are without Christ and if you are without Christ you are without the love of God.

The wrath of God, the wrath of God is upon the wicked. God is angry with the wicked. The love of God is in Christ. That is where it is. The love of God is in Christ Jesus. He said in John three, listen. "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life. He that believeth not on the Son shall not see life. The wrath of God abideth on him."

The wrath of God doesn't abide on the same people. It abides on evil people. He put a difference between Israel and Egypt. There is a difference. God's love is in Christ. You love Christ? You are in the love of God. You believe Christ? You are in the love of God. That's true.

Thirdly, another false refuge is this. Another false refuge is a profession of religion that does not demand obedience. That is a false refuge. Any profession of religion, any hope of eternal life that does not demand obedience and discipleship is a false refuge.

Now this is today's popular Christianity. I know this and you do, too. People profess to believe the Bible and then they make a profession of faith. And then they attend Church. They join a church and attend church occasionally. And they observe the regular religious holidays, holy days, Christmas... They sing Christmas carols and give gifts and Easter and all these different holy days. But there is no particular sacrifice. There is no devotion, devotion to God. There is no consecration. There is no love for God. There is no love for his Word. There is no love for Christ. There is no love for others. There is no giving, no bearing or forbearing. There is no forgiveness. There is no faith. There is no godliness. So there is no refuge.

Turn to James chapter two. Listen to James here in James chapter two verse 19 and 20, this verse 19 and 20, James chapter two. Thou believest there is one God. That is what we have been talking about. You think there is none God? You do well. The devil believes there is one God and trembles. But wilt thou know, oh vain man, that a faith without works is dead, a faith that doesn't obey God, love God, love God's people, love God's Word, love God's way, love God's truth. That is a vain, that faith is dead, dead.

Like we used to go hunting quail, you know, and shoot one and the dogs just start trembling, running. And we say to the dogs, dead, dead bird, dead.

And that kind of faith is dead. You don't need to run and pick that bird up. He is dead.

Fourthly, here is another false refuge, false opinion of ourselves and this fatherhood of God, God loves everybody and a religion, a profession of religion that does not lead to obedience and discipleship is false.

And here is the fourth one. That is, an old experience that stays old.

A fellow said to me one time. "I'm saved. I was there when it happened."

Is that the last account you've had?

"I was there when it happened. That was the last time I thought about it, talked about it, said anything about."

But here it is. Todd told this to us a while ago. Repentance and faith, repentance and faith. And Paul said, "That is my whole message, repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith, repentance toward God and faith in Christ is not, I repeat is not a once for all experience. It is not. It is not. Repentance toward God and faith in Christ is not a once for all experience and decision. Repentance and faith is a continuing state.

I have been saved. I am being saved. And my salvation is nearer than when I believed.

That's right. That's right.

Peter said that. There is a growth in grace. A person comes to know Christ.

The Lord talks about babes in Christ, young men in Christ and fathers in Christ. There is a growth in grace. It is a continuous state. Keep on repenting. Keep on believing. Keep on coming to Christ.

Turn to 2 Peter, 2 Peter chapter one, 2 Peter chapter one. Now listen to this. Here is what I am saying. A false profession, a refuge of lies, is an old experience that says old. It stays old.

Here is 2 Peter chapter one verse four. Listen. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, great and precious promises that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And besides this partake of a new nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world. Besides this, give to...giving all diligence add to your faith virtue and to virtue knowledge and to knowledge temperance and to temperance patience and to patience godliness and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness charity, for if these things be in you and abound in you they shall...they make you that you shall not be barren, barren, idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That old experience that stays old is dead.

Anything that is alive grows. This pulpit is dead. And it will never change. This man is not dead. He is alive. That's right.

All right. Here is the fifth false refuge. Another false refuge is tomorrow, tomorrow. What a pitfall is tomorrow? Let me show you something, Acts 24. Acts chapter 24. Acts 24, verse 24 and listen to it.

And after certain days when Felix came with his wife Drusilla she was a Jewish woman. He sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as Paul reasoned of righteousness temperance and judgment to come, Felix trembled.

Can't you just imagine that old ruler standing there, his knees knocking together and his arms shaking? He trembled. Paul was one of the greatest preachers that ever lived. The man was sent by God to preach the gospel. And this old ruler was there before him and he was shaking. He trembled. He trembled. And he said, "Go your way, Paul, not for ever, for a little while. Wait until tomorrow. Wait until Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow. When I have a convenient season I will call for you."

He never did. He never did. Tomorrow...Felix trembled. It was real. It was real. That was

a real sermon he was hearing. Oh, what a sermon. A child of God witnessing to him about the eternal mercy of God. He trembled.

He was impressed, but he said, "Tomorrow. I am going to do something about this tomorrow."

But God said, "Boast not yourself of tomorrow. You don't know what a day will bring forth." You just don't know.

A wise old preacher once said this. Listen to it, now. Some of these old guys could think up some good things. He said, "Every person, at least, should repent and believe the gospel the day before he dies."

And some scoffer looked at him and said, "That's foolish. No man knows the day of his death. It could be tomorrow."

And the old preacher said, "Well, my friend, if you plan on dying tomorrow, you had better repent today. You had better repent today. You had better lay hold of Christ today because God almighty said don't you boast about tomorrow. You have today. You don't have tomorrow. You just don't have tomorrow."

Turn to Proverbs chapter one, Proverbs chapter one verse. That's the reason we preachers need to preach for a verdict. We have got people that are dying. We have got people out on the highways in danger of death. We have got to urge them to repent, believe the gospel. They hold...

Now is the accepted time. This is the day of salvation, just right now is the day of salvation. Proverbs chapter one, verse 24. Listen. The Lord said, "Because I have called and you refused I stretched out my hand. No man regarded."

They answered him not a word.

"Well, you set at naught my counsel, all my counsel and you would none of my reproof. I will laugh. I will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your fear cometh. And when your fear cometh as a desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind and when distress and anguish come upon you, then shall you call upon me, old Felix, then but I will not answer you. And then you will seek me early, but you will never find me."

But, my friends, I can't close this message without stating positively and definitely according to the Word of God, there is a refuge. There is a hiding place. It is not unto lies. It is not a refuge of lies. It is a refuge of truth. It is a refuge of God's grace and mercy in Christ Jesus.

David said in the psalms, "Lord, if thou should charge iniquity, who is going to stand? But there is forgiveness with thee."

God delights to show mercy today. God delights to show mercy today. Now is the accepted time. Today is the salvation.

I never will forget but David Robinette said.... and I preached up here some time ago, you have been hearing brother Tom and brother...me and others here. And he is sitting right there. And I talked about loving Christ, believing on Christ, trusting in Christ. And David got up. Tom was sitting over here. David got up and walked over here and sat down beside Tom and he said, "I want to be baptized today."

Tom said, "We don't have any water in the pool."

"Well," he said, "I'll wait. Fill the pool."

So we went downstairs and had dinner and we... you know, while the pastor filled the pool. And like the Ethiopian eunuch he said to him when he heard Paul preach he said, "Here is water. What doth hinder me to be baptized?"

Paul said, "Well, you can if you believe with all your heart."

He said, "I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

Fill the pool. Fill the pool.

And that's what we did, didn't we, David. We filled the pool.

He didn't have a change of clothes. He had to go home, you know. But fill the pool.

Listen to me. There was a flood, but God provided an ark. There was a manslayer, but I'll tell you. That man to whom God provided the ark. He moved with fear. He moved. He started driving nails right then. And there was a manslayer, but there is a city of refuge. And the man ran to it.

When the serpents had bitten the people there was a remedy, but they had better look.

There was a thirst for water, but God smote a rock and that rock was Christ. And they drank.

There was food in the wilderness.