

Nelson's Preacher's Sourcebook: Apologetics Edition

Kent Spann and David Wheeler (eds)
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The preacher's constant companion is the relentless approach of next Sunday's sermon. Seasoned preachers Kent Spann and David Wheeler know from experience that preaching is a daunting responsibility. In *Nelson's Preacher's Sourcebook*, they offer help and inspiration for those called to preach and plan worship services. This substantial resource contains helpful sermons, worship plans and articles on shepherding and preaching.

In the Introduction, the editors issue a salutary caution, "The sermons that follow are not meant to be a substitute for your study of the text and personal preparation of the sermon . . . These sermons are simply kindling to get the fire going" (p. IX). Preachers are also encouraged to use their own illustrations, apply truths to the specific needs of their audience and adapt the sermon outlines to their ministry setting and preaching style.

No less than thirty-six teachers and preachers contribute to this Sourcebook. Some of the better-known contributors are John A. Broadus, Jonathan Edwards, Gary

Habermas, Robert G. Lee, Calvin Miller, Charles H. Spurgeon and Jerry Vines. The editors lay out a convincing case for the advantages of preaching in series. Series topics include the Book of Joshua, a study of Ephesians, important Old Testament characters and Jesus Christ, apologetics, the Ten Commandments, the life of David, prayer, classic preachers and Advent.

As might be expected from such a large Sourcebook, the sermons vary in structure, style and quality. For example, sermon titles range from the clever: “No Chance” (the sermon’s introduction refers to the evolutionary teaching that humans are a product of chance); the arresting: “Sex, Lies, and Sin’s Red Tape!” and the straight forward: “Connecting Through Apologetics.”

Some sermon introductions are not particularly compelling: “Ask someone if he or she has ever heard the words ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,’ and you will probably get an affirmative answer. The person will likely even know that the statement is found in the opening sentence of the Bible. This most famous of all Bible verses is found, of course, in the book of Genesis” (p. 150).

Other sermon introductions secure attention instantly: “A guy was in his swimming pool, relaxing on a float, when another guy walked up and said, ‘There you are, lying around in the lap of luxury, while thousands of people around the world are suffering.’ The fellow lying on the float looked at the guy and said, ‘Name one of them’” (p. 131).

Some of the sermon outlines do not evidence a readily identifiable proposition or big idea. Other outlines have main points that are not direct, contemporary, personal or

prescriptive. Some use pronouns inconsistently: 1. "He . . ." 2. "He . . ." 3. "Joshua . . ." 4. "Joshua . . ." (pp. 22-24). There are main points, which are not anchored with Bible verses, and some points are questions rather than statements.

On the other hand, there are some well-crafted sermon outlines which emerge from the biblical text: Heb. 12:1-2 "God calls us to win the race . . . 1. Look to the saints (Heb. 12:1). 2. Look to the sin (Heb. 12:1). 3. Look to the Savior (Heb. 12:2)" (p. 91). 1 Cor. 13 "Love is to be practiced biblically because it is the only preeminent thing with permanence. 1. Love is preeminent (13:1-3). 2. Love is to be practiced (13:4-7). 3. Love is permanent (13:8-13)" (p.149). Eph. 1:7-10 "We believers have the greatest cause for celebration . . . 1. We can praise God for the work of redemption (1:7). 2. We can praise God for the blessings of redemption (1:7, 8). 3. We can praise God for the consummation of redemption (1:9, 10)" (p. 28).

The sermon conclusions are instructive. For example, is there a better way to say the following? "If we will refuse to lose our focus, pursuing what we know, expecting God to work, and be ready to use what we receive, God will bring us through and use us beyond your imagination!" (p. 217). A sermon Eph. 3:20-21 opens as follows: "The infamous words of the church are 'With all due respect, Pastor, what you're thinking can't be done!' Paul shatters these words! (*The preacher should build this message to a crescendo*)" (p. 89). This sermon actually does build to a crescendo! What qualities in the following conclusion help it to build to a crescendo? "He is able throughout all generations, including ours. He wants to demonstrate His superabundant power through us and His church. a. Let's partner with God to do great things through us for

His glory. b. Let's pray for God to do great things through us for His glory. c. Let's prepare for God to do great things through us for His glory. With all due respect, it *can* be done – because our God is able!" (p. 90).

There is plenty of superb supporting material in the form of quotes and illustrations: "Only in Christianity does human blood hold a redemptive – really breathtaking – symbolism" (p. 117). "Legendary British philosopher and atheist Anthony Flew turned from atheism at the age of eighty-one. . . . [Dr. Gary] Habermas interviewed Flew in 2004 after he turned from atheism. A piece of their discussion follows:

HABERMAS: Which arguments for God's existence did you find most persuasive?

FLEW: I think that the most impressive arguments for God's existence are those that are supported by recent scientific discoveries . . . I think the argument to Intelligent Design is enormously stronger than when I first met it." (p. 152).

"The hard times of life are the very province of God's most impressive miracles" (p.346).

The "extras" in this book include 52 weeks of creative worship plans, articles intended to strengthen and encourage pastors, and a CD that contains a digital version of the entire Sourcebook. In my humble opinion, preachers should not consult this Sourcebook until their work in the biblical text is completed and their outline is already constructed. The healthiest way to use this book is as a source of inspiration with homiletical ideas that are suggestive.

