

Faces in the Congregation

Peter L. Meney | Added: May 07, 2007 | Category: Editorial

The woman with the thin face was captivated by the sermon. Her attention was fixed and her eyes widened with each new section introduced. She'd never heard the End Times preached so plainly. The speaker flitted expertly from Daniel to Revelation and back again.

She heard how the great bear of communism would stumble and collapse, how Islam was rising to persecute the church and what personal qualities would allow early identification of the Beast and the Man of Sin. It was heady stuff and she lapped it up. Next week it would be 'Creation', next month, 'The Role of Women in the Church'. She could hardly wait.

The young man with short hair sits bolt upright with almost military poise. For him the best sermons emphasise God's judgment on sin. He wants to hear about God's punishment on abortionists and sodomites. He is passionate about direct Christian action and is eager to know what protests and demonstrations are planned for the Spring campaign.

A young woman sits cradling a child in her arms. It distracts her occasionally but she is not concerned. All she needs is the closing application. The theology isn't unimportant but she has learned to leave thinking about it to the pastor. As long as he tells her what to do and when to do it she is content. She is particular about the length of her quiet-time, the length of her dress and the length of her hair.

The teenagers are getting restless. They need a good story. Quick, vivid language and expansive hand gestures re-capture their attention. The preacher's voice rises, he moves from behind the pulpit and leans towards the spellbound faces, he pauses ..., smiles, whispers gently. The moment is pure drama and he returns to his powerpoint presentation.

The society-rep is accomplished in his subject. He enlarges upon the scale of the task undone, "much has been achieved but there is still a mountain to climb". He shows how the nation's moral strength is ebbing and supports his claims with shocking examples and worrying statistics. His delivery is persuasive and everyone present is convinced he is right about everything he says.

But is the Lord Jesus Christ being preached? What is said may be true, but simply telling the truth from the pulpit is not enough. A holy nation may be desirable, but showing the congregation their duty is not enough.

Applying Biblical lessons and examples is not enough. Even enjoining the listeners to holy living and Christian service is insufficient. The skill of a storyteller or the passion of a preacher will not meet a congregation's true need if the person and work of Jesus Christ is not evidently and constantly set forth in their midst.

To preach Christ we must begin with Christ. "Behold the Lamb of God!" Time is short and men's souls are at stake so tell them who Christ is, as God and as Man. Preach His purpose in time and from eternity. Preach His words and His works, preach blood atonement, redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation. Preach grace and mercy and its meaning for guilty souls and needy sinners. Preach Christ's present closeness and future coming, by all means, but always preach Him.

There will be preaching until the end of time. There will be faces in the congregation. What will be the substance and who will be the subject of that preaching? It is all of our responsibility to lift up Jesus Christ in our midst so that all may look on Him, and seeing Him, to look and live.

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