

PREACH

the Word

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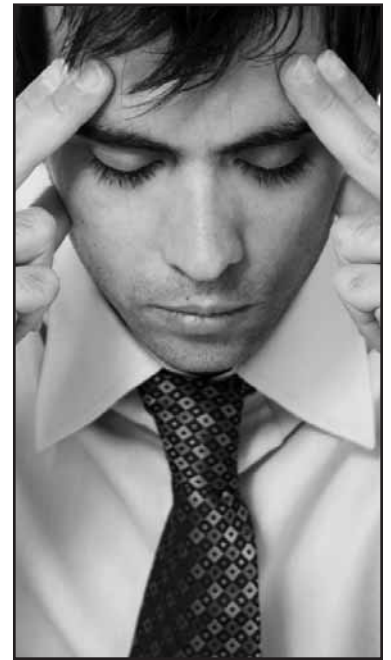
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HA! HA! AMONG THE TRUMPETS

Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane? Do you make him leap like a locust, striking terror with his proud snorting? He paws fiercely, rejoicing in his strength, and charges into the fray. He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing; he does not shy away from the sword . . . In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground; he cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds. At the blast of the trumpet he snorts, 'Aha!' (Job 39:19-22,24,25a).

"God has made him a horse, a steed of war. He delights in being a horse; he is glad to work like a horse and to fight like a steed of war. He hears the trumpets of war, and he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet; that trumpet is God's call to him to be what God has made him. And he greets that call with an equine Alleluia! He snuffs the air, and stamps the ground, and 'saith among the trumpets, "Ha! Ha!"' (pp. 3,4)!



These words of Martin Franzmann call preachers to arms. Weary preachers. Busied preachers. Hesitant preachers. Preachers robbed of passion by the tyranny of the urgent. Desperate preachers.

These words summon preachers to preach if for no other reason than God has made us to be preachers. His preachers. His steeds of war.

God has something to say through us, but first, to us. Listen for the trumpet call of God and then don't stand still. Laugh at fear because heaven is your glory. Rejoice in your strength forged inside the tomb. Strike terror in Satan's camp. Step into the pulpit as a horse paws the trembling battleground calling him to be what God has made him to be.

Daron Lindemann

(NOTE: The book *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets: Sermons* by Martin Franzmann is a compilation of fifteen sermons preached by Franzmann at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. It is a little paperback available for \$11 from Concordia Publishing House. The encouragement from God's Word and examples of preaching in the book make it a treasure for any preacher.)

SAMPLE SERMON

This Lenten sermon masterfully weaves focused law and gospel throughout a single unified aim: Jesus taking on and taking away our shame. The preacher doesn't leave that thought at any point during the sermon. He exposes the text of John 18:12-14 to present direct, specific, text-colored law and gospel. And he illustrates the single thought with picture and precision. Editorial comments in the right column offer further explanation.

SERMON	COMMENTS
<p>Next to the guilt of sin, there are few things that trouble us more than the shame of sin. I'm talking about the fear we have of losing respect, of having the mask ripped off and being exposed for all the world to see.</p> <p>Just ask Adam and Eve.... Sure they were afraid of being punished. But the Bible tells us that they were also so ashamed that they couldn't bear to be seen. Not by God, not even by each other.</p> <p>And so it is today. Human beings, impelled by sinful instinct, will run for cover any time there is a danger of losing face. They'll keep on arguing long after they know they haven't a leg to stand on. They'll play the hypocrite. They'll lie. They'll cheat and steal. They'll even kill. And while none of us may have gone that far, can anyone here say that they have never been afraid of being "found out"? What about the last time you answered the phone when you were in the middle of a heated family debate? Did you answer, "Yeah, whaddya want?" Or did you put on your best "company" voice and say, "Blather residence: Mr. Blather speaking."</p> <p>Shame is a very lonely feeling. A cold room with you naked in the middle and big windows all around. You are cut off from everyone, but everybody's looking at you all the same. You would just as soon crawl into a hole and hide away forever, rather than meet anyone's eyes. If you're lucky, you'll be an object of pity; and if you're not, you'll become a joke to talk about at parties, an object of contempt. That's why people can't bear it.</p> <p>We are not surprised to see a sense of shame at work in the passion history. It is the cause of many of the cover-up games we see in it, and lies behind many of the terrible things that we've done. None of this surprises us because it's all part of the same pathetic record of humanity we're used to. It's what we see day after day.</p> <p>What is surprising, absolutely astounding in fact, is that we also see One man willingly walking into that lonely room of shame. He is willing to let himself be looked at as a criminal, to be numbered with the transgressors. As we walk to where Jesus is tonight, we find him in a garden, surrounded by those who hate him. Was the man with 12 legions of angels at his command helpless at that point? Then why did he let them take him? Why did he go into that place where nothing but shame and lies and death waited for him? We'll find the answer to this question, and in it discover the antidote to our own shame....</p> <p>A lot of shameful things had lead up to this point... I suppose we think of the greed of Judas, who was attracted by the glitter of money and by the dreams he had of all the glorious things he could do with that money... Then there were the Jewish leaders [who] cared a whole lot more about the praise of human beings than the praise of God (John 12:43). It was far more important to them to <i>look</i> right</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>This sermon introduction creates interest and doesn't miss the opportunity to narrow the focus of the sermon immediately to the topic of the sermon's aim: shame. It accomplishes this by 1) a general statement of truth, and 2) a biblical illustration of that truth. Remember, introductions should do more than just begin the sermon. They should define its single thought.</i> ◆ <i>The sermon's third paragraph, even before digging into the text, exposes its malady with focused law preaching. Note how the preacher begins with a universal statement true of "human beings," which can make it easy for listeners to point fingers at "the world out there." But his set up is obvious as he switches to the first person and asks with undertones of implication, "Can any of us say we haven't tried to cover up shame?" This kind of law questioning is more focused than asking a series of questions about bad behavior. It cuts to the heart, and with only one illustration about answering the phone, the focused law has hit its mark.</i> ◆ <i>Emotions stir as the listener sees himself or herself in this metaphor of a cold, lonely place. Unbearable. Inescapable. Focused law preaching utilizes not just the intellect (e.g. "Yes, I've sinned that way.") but the emotions (e.g. "Yes, I've felt that way in my sin.").</i> ◆ <i>The preacher now takes us by the hand and leads us into the portion of God's Word that develops this sermon. He does this by means of a surprising realization. That surprise is the very answer and antidote to the personal shame we have just felt and confessed: Jesus took on our shame and took away our shame. Notice how, in one sentence that begins the second paragraph in this section, the gospel can be pointed and focused – precisely because the preceding law had been focused just the same.</i> 

(continued on next page)

SERMON

than to *be* right. That's why they were more than willing to entertain the idea of killing Jesus – so they wouldn't lose their earthly prominence and power and position. That is what Caiaphas meant when he said, "One has to die for the people." And that sounds okay – yes it sounds like a perfectly reasonable and even a holy thought – until you realize that he's advocating murder, the murder of an innocent man. A pious-sounding mouthful of poison... Then there is Peter. Remember, he had been the one who was going to suffer all even death rather than deny his Lord. He had been willing to go out in a blaze of glory, fighting at Jesus' side against the soldiers. But he found it a whole lot tougher to follow Jesus into shame. Was he to be exposed by a servant girl? "You were with him too, weren't you?" "No ma'am! No sir. Jesus? Who's he? Never heard of him."

How easy it is to fall into the thinking that, if we're looking good, we are good. That as long as our public mask is in place, it can truly hide our private disgrace. So many times the sinful thought enters our head that it is better to seem clean than it is to really come clean. It is not to pagans, but to Christians that John writes, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). Who're we fooling? Others? Maybe. Ourselves? Undoubtedly! God? Not one bit! Nothing can cover up the ugliness here.

To say it even more strongly than this: those who try to hide their sin and shame are a disgrace to Christ and are saying to him – in effect – "Jesus, I think you are the Savior of the pretty good; the ones who seem good, anyway. And I'll let you be my Savior so long as you don't expect any real, heartfelt repentance, or expose my sinful state. Cause you see, I just couldn't bear that." Well, if we can't bear it, than we can't bear Jesus: because he doesn't die for the pretty good, the folks who mostly got their act together. He died for sinners – shameful sinners like you and me.

Reading over this account, I was struck by a sentence occurring earlier in the chapter: "Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, 'Who is it you want' (John 18:4)? He knew; he *knew*, but still he goes. Judas didn't catch *him*; he went to meet *Judas*. What a strange glory that is, to let yourself be treated like a criminal for crimes you didn't do – to stand in that shameful place where by rights you and I should stand. Yet isn't it the same glory that warms our heart and makes us want to sing for sheer joy! He says, "Father, hold me accountable for every vile and shameful thing man has ever done. Let it all be heaped on me." Then he walks forward to meet those who will arrest him. See how he loves us!

More than this: see how our Father loves us. Instead of letting us go, instead of giving us up to the misery of sin and the horror of hell, he takes our sin away. He atones for it – which means he covers it over completely. How? Not with lies, not with pretense. That's man's way. No, God covers it over with the precious blood of his Son!

And so right here in the middle of this dark story, in the middle of all this double-talk and duplicity, all the pretense and the lies, we become aware of the all-seeing, all-knowing, all-loving God at work in accomplishing his eternal purpose for you and me. Jesus walks into shame – arrested for the people – to set us free from our sin and bring us safely back to be with him. To that place where there will be no more lies, no more shame, no more need to hide away: just the clean bright glory of our God. Dear friends let us put aside the shameful things of darkness, and walk in the light of his love.

COMMENTS

- *The law preaching continues but no longer in the form of direct accusation. Now the preacher tells the story, the story of shame that has led up to this moment. Specifically, he tells three stories of shame in the hearts of Judas, the Jewish leaders, and Peter. Listeners begin to nod their heads in agreement that such shame is sad and sinful.*
- *This is the part where the preacher says, "What is true of them is true of us." The better the sermon presents the "them" in explaining the sin in its story context, the less the preacher needs to say to convince hearers that they have done the same. The appropriation of the law will take place already when they hear the story.*
- *This paragraph is key to the preaching of the law. Focused law preaching doesn't just stop at identifying the symptoms; it deals with the sickness. To put it another way, it doesn't only mention the bad behavior but it pronounces the curse that is the consequence for such bad behavior. This is where all sins find their destiny in the First Commandment.*
- *The focused gospel preaching treats the text, remains committed to the unifying thought (shame), and shows the Savior within those elements.*
- *The gospel has the exact answer and antidote to counteract our curse! We cover up sin shamefully and unsuccessfully. God covers up sin completely and for our salvation!*
- *This final paragraph of the sermon wraps it all up with a fine gospel summary statement. It then leaves us with a single sentence exhortation to sanctified living. This third use of the law in sanctification preaching ought not budge justification out of its rightful prominence in our sermons, but we might admit it finds less space in our preaching than it deserves. The preacher might have added another paragraph with focused sanctification preaching: the empowering gospel that "set us free" and the third use of the law guiding listeners in sanctified living. Following that paragraph a final truth or illustration could also be added as a more fitting conclusion.*

WALTHER: TAKE AIM BEFORE YOU PREACH LAW AND GOSPEL

What a surprise! In the middle of the meaty doctrine of law and gospel presented by C.F.W. Walther there's a parenthetically practical lecture he presented to his students in the middle of winter in 1884. The healthy tension of the law and gospel rests, if only for a moment, as Walther interludes into the emphasis of this volume of *Preach the Word*: focused law and gospel preaching. And if you read all the way to the end you might think he's a bit too enthusiastic about his topic.

"The worst fault in modern preaching, my dear friends, is this, that sermons lack point and purpose ... preachers, as a rule, imagine that they have fully discharged their office, provided what they have preached has been the Word of God.

That is about as correct a view as when a ranger imagines he has discharged his office by sallying forth with his loaded gun and discharging it into the forest; or as when an artilleryman thinks he has done his duty by taking up his position with his cannon in the line of battle and by discharging his cannon. Just as poor rangers and soldiers as these latter are ... so poor and useless preachers are those who have no plan in mind and take no aim when they are preaching.

Granted their sermons contain beautiful thoughts; they do not, for that matter, take effect. They may occasionally make the thunders of the Law roll in their sermons, yet there is no lightning that strikes. Again, they may water the garden assigned to them with the fructifying waters of the Gospel, but they are pouring water on the beds and the paths of the garden indiscriminately, and their labor is lost....

May God help you in your future ministry not to become aimless prattlers, so that you will have to complain that you have accomplished so little, when nobody but yourselves is at fault because you have no definite aim when preparing your sermons....

However, while it is important that sermons do not lack a special aim, it is equally important that your aim be the right one. If you do not aim properly, your preaching, after all, will be useless, whether you preach the Law or the Gospel" (pp. 99-100).

(Walther, C. F. W. *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1986).

WHAT IS FOCUSED LAW AND GOSPEL?

Focused law preaching aims at a particular point. It specifies a particular sin from the text that finds its ultimate destiny in the First Commandment. Such focused law preaching allows no listener to escape the curse of the law.

Preachers are often tempted to enumerate a list of bad behaviors so that we catch everyone in the pew with one sin or another. Realize, however, that this method allows for the possibility that a listener has avoided at least some bad behaviors on the list, at least recently. Consequently, the little Pharisee in each listener brags about the points of law that he or she has kept, thus avoiding the need to repent.

As an alternative to an enumeration of bad behaviors consider focusing more intensely on a particular sin of the heart. That's not to say that preachers should never list bad behaviors. A sin of the heart will, indeed, manifest itself in certain behaviors. Remember, however, that it was not just the quality of what Cain offered but the condition of Cain's heart that displeased the Lord.

NEW! DISCUSSION BOARD FOR PREACHERS

Preach the Word has created a space on the internet for preachers to collaborate, discuss, question, and share. Log on to www.wels.net/ptw and click on the link to explore the new discussion board. The page includes a welcome message that provides more details about using this exciting new tool for your preaching, including how to log into the board as a new user.



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