

Sermon on Therapeutic Preaching

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THERAPEUTIC PREACHING IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

TEXT: Psalms 46:1

INTRODUCTION

Biblical Preaching is proclamation done for God's glory and man's growth. In view of our world today and its complexities, contradictions, traumas, turmoil, pain, problems, wars and worries, many in the pew are seeking relevance in the pulpit. Biblical Preaching is effective when preachers focus on its primary purpose.

Six (6) purposes of preaching that must be developed in formulating a theology of preaching are proclamation, confrontation, reconciliation, edification, application and evaluation. Each purpose must be employed if preaching is truly therapeutic.

In the proclamation of the gospel man is confronted with God. The mind of man confronts the mind of God. The heart of man confronts the spirit of God. The sins and needs of man confront the grace of God and the soul of man confronts the Son of God. It is the event known as preaching that the natural, sensual, material man comes face to face with the spiritual and eternal truths of God. Such a confrontation is needed if man is to know God and eternal life in His Son. (John 17:3)

The purpose of preaching, then, is to effect changes among members of the body of Christ that build them up individually and that build up the body as

a whole. Individually, good pastoral preaching helps each person in the congregation to grow in his faith, conforming his life more and more to biblical standards. Corporately, such preaching builds up the church and influences the world.

Since preaching involves at least two responsibilities; An explanation of the Bible and how it relates to life, and life explained in light of scripture. Therefore effective preaching has of necessity always been powerful, persuasive, purposeful, relevant and therapeutic. Effective preaching (1.) finds God or divine initiative in a text, (2.) notes the nature of God's involvement throughout the text, (3.) makes a concrete connection between God's presence and the lives of the listening congregation and (4.) demonstrates with creativity and keen insight how God's power is used on behalf of the people of faith.

PREACHING THAT EXEMPLIFY THE AIM OF GOD

Therapeutic preaching is designed to reach each ache of the soul. Let's look with eyes of discernment and see a formula in dissecting the word "preach". Remove the letter "P" from the word "preach" and you'll see "reach". Remove the letter "r" from the word "reach" and you have the word "each". Remove the letter "e" from the word "each" and place it on the end and you will have the word "ache".

Therapeutic preaching then is designed to *reach each ache* of the soul. Those aches are translated by the author as hurts, habits and hang-ups.

Conversely, therapeutic preaching approaches the text with two fundamental questions.

1. How do I demonstrate to God's people today, through the proclamation of the Word, the mighty gracious acts of God on their behalf?

2. How best shall I join scripture and their life situations, in order to address their plight in a meaningful and practical manner? Thereby helping them overcome their hurts, habits and hang ups.

Therefore, from beginning to end, therapeutic preaching has as its goal the creation of a meaningful connection between an all-powerful God and a powerless people struggling to overcome the world, the flesh and the devil. [1]

The preacher who preaches therapeutically is likely to be accused of preaching too much psychology and not enough Bible. However, you should keep in mind that the word psychology comes from the Greek word “psuche”, which means soul. Psychology is the study of the soul. [2] Whose job is it to study the soul, if it is not the preacher’s job? Traditional psychology treats man’s soul as if it is comprised of only the intellect and emotions. Orthomolecular psychology ascends to a higher level. The word orthomolecular is made up of the word “Ortho” which means-correct, and the word molecular which means- components. Psychology is the study of the soul. The term literally means the correct components for the study of the soul. [3] The scriptures refer to man’s soul as his heart, or his inner being. The invisible part of us, that is the real us, can only be seen by God. (I Sam. 16:7). Since man has a body he is a *Physical being* and because he is a soul he is a *Rational being* (the Mind), a *Volitional being* (the Will), a *Moral being* (the Conscience), and emotional being (the Emotions). Above all, because man is a spirit, he has the capacity to be a *SPIRITUAL BEING*.

The **mind** is the center of our cognitive behavior. With it we think reason and understand (Proverbs 23:7 Mark 2:8 Matthew 9:4; Matthew 15:19; Romans 10:10), that includes knowing, remembering, perceiving, analyzing, synthesizing, as well as evaluating. The **will** is the center for our volitional behavior. It is the mental faculty by which one deliberately chooses or decides upon a course of action (Dan. 1:8). The **conscience** is the center for our ethical behavior. It is the faculty of recognizing the distinction between right and wrong in regard to one’s own conduct. (Acts 2:36, 37; Acts 5:33;

Acts 7:54) **Emotions** are the center of our affective behavior. They are the manifestation of feelings as a result of the agitation of our passions or sensibilities. (John 14:1) They include such complex feelings as love, fear, resentment, anger, compassion and a wide range of other human emotions. The ultimate challenge in making men whole is to recognize and systematically bring healing to all four components of the soul with the healing power of God's Word. The man of God must never forget that there is healing and overcoming power in the Word of God.

The Psalmist said it well in Psalms 107:20 *"He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."*

When the message has been proclaimed by God's man in the pulpit; when the person in the pew has been confronted with God's will; when the appeal has been made for man to be reconciled to God; and when souls have been edified and stirred to greater heights of service, the probing question that clearly must be answered is, "So what?" Preaching fails if it does not bring each listener to self-examination, self-evaluation and self-application.

Therapeutic Preaching and Clinical Theology asserts that every person we meet has some hurts, habits and hang-ups that must be overcome. It is an approach to preaching and counseling that meets that person where he is, exposes his present hurts, habits and hang-ups (religious, theological, traditional, personal, emotional or cultural) and leads him to not only knowledge of, but a deeper relationship with God, through Jesus, the Great Physician. [4]

The God we are taught in scripture is the God who is ever present, able and available. God is more than present; He is a present help. What good is it for God to be present but can not help or for Him to be able to help, but is not present? Therefore, Psalms 46:1 is a pivotal text for struggling saints. *"God is our refuge and strength, a **very present help** in trouble"*. The writer wonderfully comforts us, by informing us, that God is on our side because we are on his side, God is by our side, with God there is none beside; and, because of that, praise God, we have peace inside.

Psalms 46 reminds us that therapeutic preaching is preaching that establishes the authority of God, preaching that expresses the ability of God and preaching that explains the activity of God.

PREACHING THAT ESTABLISHES THE AUTHORITY OF GOD

God is helpful because of Who He is. Observe the name “God”. In it we find that His authority is communicated. The name of God that is used here, is known the Hebrew name “Elohim, ” and it denotes , “One who is strong and mighty”. God is God, because He does what He pleases, when He pleases, where He pleases, with whom He pleases, because He is the God who is sovereign. Read His record meticulously, you will never read anywhere that he said please, may I, or forgive me. Therefore, His name is a name that surmounts all other celebrities, and supersedes all other royalties. His name outshines all other majesties and outlives all other dignitaries. It is His name which makes atheist cringe, the infidel cry, and the skeptic choke. He is the Creator, the Controller, and the Conductor of all that is. He is God, and His authority is communicated in His name, Elohim.

God is an awesome God. When we speak of “THE AWESOMENESS OF God”, we are affirming there is something about God so great, that it strikes a holy reverence or fear within us. We are saying, there is something about Him that is unmatched, unequalled, and unrivaled by anything else that is known to man

We are saying, "God is in a class all by Himself.

He is unique in every way.

He is distinguished in every aspect.

He is different in every point.

He is distinct in every case.

He is special in every instance.

He is original in every feature.

He is unusual in every trait!"

As the "second" is but a slight representation of the "hour", or the "inch" is but a faint glimmer of the "mile" or the "ounce" can only express an infinitesimal degree of the "ton" or "one rain drop" is paralyzed by its own sense of proportionality when trying to portray the vastness of the "flood", God is so awesome that our vocabulary fails and our superlatives retreat to the closet of linguistic embarrassment. Our adjectives throw up their feeble hands as a gesture of descriptive inadequacy and we resolve that God has no equal. He is the God not subject to rivalry, because He is God all by himself.

God is helpful because of who he is, a refuge. In the midst of whatever we are facing today, God desires to be our refuge, our strength, and our help. God is our refuge even when what seems permanent is demolished. When the world crashes in around us, God is still there, protecting us. The word "refuge" literally means "to flee," as in running to a shelter. God wants us to run to Him for protection. The word "strength" implies that we can rely on His might when we feel weak and defenseless.

Note carefully, the text suggest He is a personal, powerful and permanent refuge. Nations find refuge in battalions and battleships, while men find refuge in positions and possessions. But unfortunately, battalions can be defeated, battleships can be sunk, positions can be taken away, and possessions can be lost.

PREACHING THAT EXPRESSES THE ABILITY OF GOD

God is helpful, because of where he is, present. The Word "present" denotes exactly what it says, a current and a present state. Here, the Psalmist is referring to the presence of a God that is much more than adequate, satisfactory, or sufficient. He is saying God's presence is more than enough to handle the job. It matters not what we face, because His presence always supersedes the need. It is not a mere average presence or just an adequate presence. It is "an abundantly available presence".

The word "trouble" literally means "in tight places", "present help" means "right now", while "very"-means "speedily". The phrase "ever-present help" means that God is quick to give assistance. It literally means that He has "proved" Himself to be such a help in the past and we can therefore trust in Him in the present. Consequently, we have no reason to fear when God is near.

The text does not say "in the time of trouble," because God has the help already there before the trouble arises. While you are trying to figure it out, God has already worked it out. You cannot be everywhere, but God can. He is never coming or going because He is always there. He is in all places at the same time. He is there in the midst of your trouble, storm and crisis. He was in the house with you before you left. When you entered the car, he was already there and He met you when you arrived where you were going. The unique thing is He never left your house; He is here and there at the same time.

Wherever you are, God is. If you are in a mess, He is right there in your mess. If you are on the mountain, He is on the mountain and if you are in the valley, He is in the valley. Wherever you are, God is. He is always near his beloved. He is watching over your possessions while you are away. He is dealing with your danger and your business, even while you praise him at worship. You cannot be everywhere, but He can. **GOD IS A PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE.** www.ja-kemconsorts.org

The paramedics may have to come, BUT HE DOESN'T.

The doctor may have to come

The ambulance may have to come

Your family may have to come

Your neighbors may have to come

Your friends may have to come

Your attorney may have to come

Your banker may have to come

Your father and mother may have to come

BUT GOD DOESN'T HAVE TO COME BECAUSE HE IS PRESENT. He is Jehovah Shammah, the God who is always there.

GOD IS NOT ON HIS WAY-God is already there. *"A present help in trouble."* While you are getting ready to call for help, He's already there! While you are trying to figure out who you can talk to, He is already there! While you are going through a test or a storm and don't know how you are going to make it, He's Jehovah Shammah, the God who is already there!

His ability is seen by us in times of danger and shown to us in times of demand. He is our refuge and our strength. The word "refuge" is a military term, and it describes a place of shelter. The word speaks of one surrounded by an enemy who finds a place of hiding to protect them. The word "strength" denotes the meaning of "might, force, and power." The word speaks of the idea of one who has grown weary, weak and worn, and is in great need of help and strength.

In times of worried-ness or weariness, He is our refuge and our strength. I don't know about you, but there have been times when I have grown tired, weary and weighted down beneath the load. But, then, God has demonstrated His strength to my weary heart and given me strength to persevere.

PREACHING THAT EXPLAINS THE ACTIVITY OF GOD

God is helpful because of what He does; He helps. Nothing will happen to you, this week, month or this year that you and God can't handle. This is true because God can handle it by himself, so I know the both of you can handle it. *"God is our refuge and strength, a very **present help in trouble**".* God is our source of security and stability. He helps those who are willing to be helped. In Psalms 46:2, the writer is imagining the worst calamity that could possibly happen to his people as he describes

earthquakes, volcanoes erupting and mountains slipping into the sea. Mountains provided refuge in times of war and were considered to be the most secure part of nature. Mountains were the most fixed and firm things on earth.

The text reminds us that the earth can give away, the mountains can fall into the sea, the waters can roar and foam, and the mountains quake, but God remains stable and secure. Even though the “earth gives way,” or the landscape suddenly changes, we do not fear, because God is near. When the economy collapses, wars break out, natural disasters destroy our homes, government fails, our health deteriorates, or friends betray us, God is the only place we can find safety, security and stability.

God helps those who are willing to be helped by Him. Trusting and obeying are the keys to receiving His help. The hymnologist spoke no small truth when he sang, “When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, What a glory He sheds on our way! While we do His good will, He abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey. Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey”.

The wise man Solomon who enrolled in the University of Divinity and walked away with a doctorate degree in wisdom, made a similar point; ***“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding, In all thy ways acknowledge him, and He shall direct thy paths”*** Proverbs 3:5,6. John the Beloved also thought and wrote in 2 John 9, ***“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son”***. The conclusion is crystal clear, God blesses those who bless Him. You cannot ignore his doctrine and expect to receive his favor. He celebrates those who celebrate Him. He promotes those who promote Him. He elevates those who elevate Him. He praises those who praise Him and He supports those who support Him.

Remember, you will not get a breakthrough every time you pray for one. Sometimes God says “I’m not going to keep trouble from you, or deliver you from the things that hinder you. However, I will give you enough grace to hold you where you are. People will then ask how you are making it and you will be able to answer, “God’s grace is holding me up. God’s grace is sufficient”.

YOU CAN’T MAKE ME DOUBT HIM, BECAUSE I KNOW TOO MUCH ABOUT HIM!

God is... Lustrous in His love ...
God is... Righteous in His rule ...
God is... Glorious in His grace.

YOU CAN’T MAKE ME DOUBT HIM, BECAUSE I KNOW TOO MUCH ABOUT HIM!

God is... Matchless in His mercy
God is... Bounteous in His blessings
God is... Constant in His care.

YOU CAN’T MAKE ME DOUBT HIM, BECAUSE I KNOW TOO MUCH ABOUT HIM!

When agony is aggravating you, He is your help.
When burdens are bothering you, He is your help.
When disaster is devastating you, He is your help.

YOU CAN’T MAKE ME DOUBT HIM, BECAUSE I KNOW TOO MUCH ABOUT HIM!

When fear is frustrating you, He is your help.
When grief is gripping you, He is your help.
When hurts are hurting you, He is your help.

YOU CAN’T MAKE ME DOUBT HIM, BECAUSE I KNOW TOO MUCH ABOUT HIM

When misery is mesmerizing you, He is your help.
When problems are pounding you, He is your help.
When trouble is traumatizing you, He is your help.
When tribulations are terrifying you, He is your help.

YOU CAN'T MAKE ME DOUBT HIM, BECAUSE I KNOW TOO MUCH ABOUT HIM!

He supports us
He keeps us
He motivates us
He encourages us
He enables us and
He empowers us

YOU CAN'T MAKE ME DOUBT HIM, BECAUSE I KNOW TOO MUCH ABOUT HIM!

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He is an author, scholar, psychotherapist, minister, international lecturer, theologian and one of the pioneers of therapeutic preaching. (He has been given two honorary doctorates for his work in therapeutic preaching.)

END NOTES

1. Lane, David L. Powerful Preaching To People With Problems (JaKem Publishing, New York; 1990) p. 39. He has been given two honorary doctorates for his work in therapeutic preaching.
2. Vine, W. E. Vines's Complete Expository Dictionary (Thomas Nelson Publishers; Nashville, Tenn 1996) page 588 .
3. Orthomolecular Psychology is a registered trademark that belongs to the intellectual property of David L. Lane, Ph.D., and the JaKem Research Institute. It was created in 1981 and filed in 1983.
4. My pioneer work in Clinical Theology, Therapeutic Preaching and Orthomolecular Psychology is the reflection of my insights compiled over the last thirty years.

My doctoral dissertation in 1990 was on Therapeutic Preaching entitled:
A PRACTICAL EVALUATION OF THERAPEUTIC PREACHING IN THE
BLACK CHURCH FOR THE TEACHING OF BLACK HOMILITICS
STUDENTS AS DEMONSTRATED IN THE TEACHING AND
PREACHING MODEL OF DAVID L. LANE.

The textbook version of the dissertation is entitled Powerful Preaching
to People with Problems

