

A Note About the Purpose of Preaching

As I wrote a prayer for Christmas Eve, it struck me that preaching is declaring to people “I’ve got some good news and some bad news. First the bad news: we are hostages in a fallen world. Now the good news: we are ransomed from sin and separation from God by Jesus Christ.

That is the flow of the gospel, and it needs to be the flow of every sermon. Whether observations on our brokenness arise from the preaching text or our commentary on contemporary life, we must first awaken in people a renewed sense of our human condition. Then we must pivot to the promise of reconciliation with God and one another through forgiveness of our sins and freedom from sin’s destructive power.

It is true that we can over do the bad news, giving the devil more due than he deserves, and inflicting harmful pain on those who already suffer from oppressive guilt. Hellfire and damnation preaching was often guilty of this. But modern preachers are too often guilty of preaching reconciliation with God, and forgiveness of sin, apart from helping people realize why these are desperately needed. We cannot separate the solution from the problem.

This Christmas Eve prayer is an example of the flow from bad news to good news and the joy that comes when we realize the power of the gospel message to us.