

WBNP #4

Good Evening. A Puritan's Mind brings you The Wild Boar News Podcast from Sunny South Florida. Welcome, I'm Dr. Matthew McMahon.

Pastors. Do you believe you are a Pastor? Do you believe you have been called to the ministry? How do you know you are a Pastor? Do you think, as ministers measure up, that you are one in a thousand? Yes, that's what Elihu said to Job, "one in a thousand," in Job 33:23.

If these are ominous questions for you to ask, or answer, then take some time and ponder the dreadfulness of the pulpit. Most ministers in the church today would not even be able to apply for membership in the times of the Puritans; their lives and knowledge would be dubious in their eyes. The level of giftedness from Christ and ministerial commitment needed to function biblically in the office of Elder is all but lost in our day. Bible knowledge seems to have been placed at the wayside. Now the criteria for Eldership is not 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, but rather the marketing strategy and CEO talent which may be prevalent in the "job applicant." Many Pastors do not even know the books of the Bible! Very few men are really qualified to minister to God's chosen people, and care for the flock of Christ. Jeremiah spoke God's words here when he said, "My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have lead them astray;" Jeremiah 50:6a

If you are a preacher, what do you see when you stand in the empty church and look down the center aisle at the pulpit you preach from? Is it a sublime place? It is a comfortable place where you enjoy being? It is a place where fuzzy feelings come over you when as you orate various concepts which have been worked through for an hour or two during the week? Is it a place where the people's needs are met through your psychologized advice to them? What is the pulpit all about? What should the pulpit be about? What does the Bible say about the pulpit?

Nehemiah 8:4, "And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose..."

The text of Nehemiah 8:4 was a most solemn and important time in the life of Israel. Here we find the Scribe, Ezra, climbing upon the wooden pulpit made especially for the

reading of the Law in a "restored" Jerusalem. From this wooden pulpit the scribe read to the tribes of Israel who had gathered about. Here Ezra would reiterate the Torah of God to the chosen people of God. Here, for the first time, after a long period of years, the Law was going to be publicly read and heard by the elect of God while the very soles of their feet stood upon the ground of the City of Peace. Who was to take up this great task of reading and expounding the Law to the people? Who was learned enough, privileged enough, ready, willing and able enough for the task? It was Ezra, who, as we find in Ezra 7:10, prepared his heart to seek the Law, to prepare for it, to do it, and then to teach Israel. Ezra knew the task he had was very weighty. He did not take it lightly. He had prepared himself before he ever walked upon the wooden platform.

Imagine being Ezra, holding the book of the Law in your hands as you watched your fellow country men assemble this wooden pulpit for you to preach to them. They were building it for an intended purpose. Thousands would gather before you. God's wrath had come to the people of Israel, had exiled them, had brought them back, and now, this reading and expounding of the Law, was going to be a beginning (hopefully) of restoration of spiritual vigor. Imagine that you were going to stand in the pulpit and give the people the Law---as the voice of God. Your mouth would speak the words of life. Your mouth would teach these words. Your mouth would lift up or cast down. Your mouth would bring people closer to heaven or closer to hell. You would be the vessel whereby the chosen people of God would hear God's voice. You are the voice piece.

A minister once said, "The pulpit is the most dreadful place on the earth." We may ask why a called minister of the Gospel would say such a thing. Why? Why is the pulpit so dreadful? Its just a place where a man, twice a week, or so, gives a short address to people from the Bible on a spiritual lesson which may help them make better decisions in life. If that is your view of the pulpit, then an early retirement, before next Sunday, is very much in order for you. Get out of the pulpit and into the pew. Stop wasting God's time.

Rather, the pulpit is the place where the voice of God is heard. The minister is used by the Holy Spirit in such a way as to communicate the rational Biblical message which has been burning in the bosom of that preacher's heart

night and day all week long. It is the place where God speaks to His people in a unique manner. The Word of God is audibly expressed and expounded by careful and responsible exegesis to God's chosen people. Here we see the dreadful and gravity of the situation. God has chosen weak vessels, feeble frames made of dust, to communicate His message of good news. How careful can the preacher be? How responsible a measure can he take in his work to bring forth the Word of God?

There must be a dread about the minister; one which works in such a way as to render him wholly dependant upon the Spirit of God to communicate the Word of God through him by means of his message. There must be a complete reliance on God and an utter destitute of self, or the pulpit is nothing more than an exercise in babbling.

If a preacher does not see this, then he is no preacher. If a preacher does not live this, he is not called to preach. Butterflies before preaching a sermon is not a warrant for understanding the weightiness of the task at hand. You can get butterflies before you speak at a bar-b-que, or at a PTA meeting. There must be a day to day cry from the closet of the preacher to the throne room- of heaven, a besieging of heaven with a holy fervor that this man knows he is unable to bring any good to the people lest God is with him. This preacher knows the dread of the pulpit. He knows God looks upon those who are of a contrite spirit, those who tremble at God's Word, and desires that look from God, that long look, which enables him to step up before the chosen people of God and their never dying souls to bring a message of hope to them. He prays that his preparation has been adequate, that his thoughts are clear, that his message is true and biblical and that the unction of the Holy Spirit is with him. How could any preacher stand before the pulpit and not see it as a most dreadful place? Is this man so bold as to say he is able to deliver the message of Christ, the Lord of glory, to a holy ends with confidence, fervor and effectuation easily and without a week of prayer? Christ must enable him to do this, and without that enablement, he will simply be another speaker or lecturer who advises a group of low-self esteemed men and women to 8 steps to an enriched life.

Such a task, the eternal life and death of the human race, is set before every minister who stands in the pulpit. It

ought to be a place of utter reverence, and seen by every minister as a place of dread. Here is God's voice.

When the people of God, they who trust you as a preacher, look upon you in the pulpit, what do they see? In many churches they see a clown, and do not even know it. In some churches they see a stiff, in some they see a jester, in some they see a sluggard, in some they see carelessness, and in very few they see a preacher who knows the dreadfulness of the place upon which he stands, as Ezra did.

This is Dr. Matthew McMahon signing off.