

SERMONS NEED TO BE BEGUN IN GOOD TIME

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A minister friend once told me that he would drink a bottle of red wine on a Saturday evening, and then get up early the following day to write his Sunday morning sermon; while the evening sermon he would write after lunch. To be fair to my friend, he would have been reading voraciously during the week, and so he had a good deal of material to draw upon by the time he came to write his sermon. And yet, much as I admired my friend in many ways, I could never commend him for this particular practice. If we are to be responsible stewards of our time, then we need to give the task of sermon-writing a higher priority during the week.

In this respect I confess that Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that great Baptist ‘prince of preachers’, was not always the best of role models. For it was often not until Saturday night before he could settle on a text. As admittedly a lesser mortal, I cannot see any justification to get so close to Sunday before settling on the text for the day. To my mind, the use of the lectionary or the creation of a sermon series of one’s own saves so much time. I am always amazed how very often a passage, chosen perhaps months previously, all of a sudden gains a special relevance on the day.

No, I strongly believe that sermon preparation is not something to be left to the end of the week. Ministers need to heed the advice of James Stewart, in his book *Teach Yourself Preaching*: “I would urge you, for your own peace of mind, to systematize your days. Aim at having one sermon finished by Wednesday night, the other by Friday”. For me, Tuesday is always sermon preparation day – by then I have recovered from the rigours of Sunday and am ready to begin the task of writing my sermon. Ideally, I will have already read through the passage and done some commentary work on the Monday afternoon, but if not, then that is the first task for Tuesday morning. And then I write. I never manage to write a sermon in one sitting – I always need a break to allow the ideas to filter through and for the sermon to ‘fall’ into its natural parts. So the sermon often is not finished off until the Wednesday. Indeed, if I am having to prepare two sermons, then it must be finished by Wednesday morning, since I have a rule that my sermons must always be finished by Thursday evening. This allows me to enjoy Friday as my day off – and means that on Saturday morning I can concentrate on my prayers and other aspects of the worship. Finishing early also means that I can pass my sermons on to a friend, who then provides a PowerPoint presentation to go with the sermon.

In my book, sermons need to be begun – and finished – in good time.

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