Preaching and the Clock
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: QA96

Preaching and the Clock

John MacArthur

How long should a sermon be?

As long as it takes to cover the passage adequately! I do not think the length of the sermon is as important as its content. At times I have preached fifty minutes and it has been ten minutes too long. Other times, I have preached an hour and twenty-five minutes and it has been just right. The important thing is to cover the main point so that people are convinced of its truth and comprehend its requirements.

If you have nothing worthwhile to say, even twenty minutes will seem like an eternity to your people. If you are interesting, they will stay with you. Do not mistake persuasion for long-windedness, however. If you preach longer than you should, you will sacrifice persuasiveness.

I am convinced that biblical exposition requires at least forty minutes. Less than this just is not sufficient to probe the text deeply. If it takes fifteen to twenty minutes to give the setting, ten to fifteen minutes to draw out the principles, five to ten minutes to cross-reference them, and five to ten minutes for a conclusion, you already have about fifty minutes. Rarely does a man preaching twenty-five to thirty minutes do doctrinal exposition.

That is why developing the logical flow of a sermon is crucial. If your message is clearly outlined and you lead your people through the process of discovery, you will hold their attention. Your sermon must be going somewhere. You cannot merely give a number of assorted truths unrelated to each other. If your sermon lacks interest because it is disjointed, your people will lose interest.

If you are going to be a Bible expositor, forget the twenty- and thirty-minute sermons. You are looking at forty or fifty minutes. In any less than that, you can't exposit the Scripture. The purpose of a sermon is not to get it over, but rather to explain the Word of God. My goal is not accomplished because I am

brief. My goal is accomplished when I am clear and I have exposited the Word of God.

Won’t people get bored if you preach too long in the same book?

I think people will be bored if you are boring. It is not related to how much time you spend in a book. As long as you are saying things that capture their interest and challenge their lives, they will not care what book you are in or for how long.

I think, however, that a balance is desirable. If you are preaching through a heavily doctrinal book like Romans or Hebrews, it is good to give your people a break from that periodically. If you are preaching through one of the Gospels, such may not be necessary. When I preached through Matthew over an eight-year period, I rarely felt the need to take a break. Matthew contains such a mixture of doctrinal passages, parables, and narrative passages that it changes pace frequently on its own.

At times, too, you will need to deal with a specific topic. You may find that people in your church are being influenced by an unbiblical teaching that you must combat. Or they may be confused over a Bible passage or a theological issue. Also, you may occasionally see a need to preach about the biblical view of a significant world event. In general, though, preaching through a book will not bore people if you are an interesting preacher. This is the purest form of expository preaching.

For a insider's look into John's pastoral heart, consider the audio series *Insight into a Pastor's Heart*, a rare opportunity to hear what makes him tick.

Adapted from the Q&A section of**Rediscovering Expository Preaching** (Nelson, 1997).

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).