

Characteristics of a Good Sermon Invitation

By Roy Fish

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Invitations should be extended with confidence. Every message preached and every invitation extended should be done so in the confidence that God wants things to happen and the preacher should expect them.

There is a story about a young student who came to Spurgeon and complained that he was not seeing conversions in his preaching. Spurgeon's response was, "You don't expect conversions every time you preach, do you?" The young man replied, "Well, I suppose not." Spurgeon declared, "That's precisely why you are not having them."

Real **expectation** and **confidence** in God will seldom be disappointed. Even the very words used in the invitation should express confidence and expectancy. For that reason, it is not honoring to the Lord to say Sunday after Sunday, "Isn't there one person here today who will respond to the claims of Christ and come?" That question should be asked like this: Not "Isn't there one?" but "How many of you here today will receive Christ as your Savior?" Rather than "Won't you come?" make it, "As you come, I will be here to greet you."

In thinking of words used in an invitation, clarity about what the preacher desires should always characterize his appeal. People should be told clearly how to receive Christ as their Savior and Lord. Then with the same clarity, they should be encouraged to make an open commitment that they are receiving Him.

Words something like this should be expressed: "This morning, if you are willing to turn from your sins and trust Jesus Christ as your Savior, I invite you to slip out from where you're standing and come forward. I will be here at the front of the auditorium to meet you as you come."

If one has ever watched evangelist Billy Graham give an invitation, he leaves little question as to what he wants people to do and precisely how he wants them to express the fact that they are doing it. The preacher should leave no question in the minds of hearers about how he wants them to respond.

Urgency should characterize any invitation on the part of the preacher who is preaching evangelistically. The New Testament says, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2 KJV). Until a person responds affirmatively to Jesus as Savior and Lord, he is living in rebellion against Him. Jesus is a king who is the rightful ruler of every person's life.

Until people positively decide for Him as Lord and Savior, they are living in revolt against the king. People should not be encouraged to leave the service without being brought face-to-face with their responsibility of responding to Christ. We should not invite them to go away and think over whether they are to receive Him or not.

A classic story out of the life of Dwight L. Moody has to do with an experience in which he gave his hearers the opportunity of leaving the service to meditate on the question, "What will you do with Jesus?" At the close of the sermon, he said, "I wish you would take this text home with you and turn it over in your minds during the week and at next Sabbath we will come to Calvary and the cross, and we will decide what to do with Jesus of Nazareth." Then he turned to Ira Sankey and asked him to sing a closing hymn. Sankey sang: Today the Savior calls, For refuge now draw nigh; The storm of justice falls And death is nigh. The next morning much of Chicago lay in ashes because it was on that Sunday night of October 8, 1871, that Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicked a lantern over and the great Chicago fire began. Many of Moody's congregation died in the fire. To his dying day, Moody regretted that he had told the congregation to wait. He later testified:

I have never dared to give an audience a week to think of their salvation since. If they were lost, they might rise up in judgment against me. I have never seen that congregation since. I will never meet those people until I meet them in another world. But I want to tell of one lesson I learned that night which I have never forgotten; and that is, when I preach, to press Christ upon the people then and there, and try to bring them to a decision on the spot. I would rather have that right hand cut off than to give an audience

a week now to decide what to do with Jesus. (Clarence E. Macartney, *The Greatest Questions of the Bible and of Life*, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948)

Every preacher should learn a lesson from Moody's painful statement. Give an invitation with urgency.

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