

## Complexity of Scripture

This morning I want to share with you a small glimpse into the world of preaching. A lot of material that we have covered has been very complex. In our current culture complexity is an enemy of great communication.

I think that everyone here knows what I am talking about. I am certain that many people who have sat through sermons and teaching sessions have felt lost. I have seen it in my own ministry and in the ministry of almost every bible preaching, God fearing minister.

Have you ever sat back and wondered why?

You see complexity is also a natural companion of preachers...

Now before you tune me out. Let me explain and illustrate.

I have come to discover that there is difficulty in relating God's word with our world. I mean our world is complex. And scripture... well, scripture is complex as it comes from an ancient set of texts that in order to be interpreted and understood properly and studied. So there is a natural predisposition to reflect that background. If we think about it right now, even the human condition within each of us and around each of us is quite complex.

There are some mighty men of God who at times, some more than others, present company included that get immersed in the complexity of the text and how it relates to our human condition. This complexity flies in the face of trying to communicate a great message in a clear, concise format.

Being afraid of the detail of scripture has caused many preacher to only preach homiletic or story based messages. These messages are far more entertaining and make valid points as well. I am of the mind that both have their place, but the simplistic message often misses the mark.

Did you know that every week there is a struggle between relating the word of God to a congregation with all its complexities, implications and so on and the simplicity of the message.

Just as some congregation members do not care to understand the detail of scripture so it is that some preachers don't want the work of wrestling through what the scriptures are really saying and so dump unresolved, contradictory, confusing and complicated ideas out and call it a sermon. People walk away confused.

Others such as myself try to fight the pull between simplicity and content. I am not always successful, but I try to make the complex as simple as possible.

As a result of this tight rope walk between content and complexity many churches have sacrificed content for familiarity.

Not pointing fingers at anyone, but I have been in many churches where the pastor is simply retelling Sunday school stories.

Today's sermon – Noah's ark the great flood or perhaps Daniel and the lions den. While these are truths and significant to God's message, simply relating narratives and principles without a call to change is not the job.

Let's turn to scripture for a minute here:

1 Corinthians 3:2

*I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready,*

This shows that this is not a new problem. Even the apostle Paul struggled with this.

Hebrews 5:12-14

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

So it is clear that when individuals in the church have been Christian for some time are to be weaned from milk alone.

Let me return now to our main thought.

Simplicity

Simplicity and complexity are two sides of the same coin.

So how do preachers and sharers of the word deal with the complex issues that arise in scripture?

- Some don't and only stick with the basics and so stunt the spiritual growth of their churches
- Some take the challenges out of their sermons to make them easier to understand and absorb. This defeats the purpose.
- Some use one liners to make a point, but fail to relate appropriately to the scripture being taught or in fact deal with a life issue appropriately (You see this on FB all the time)

Have you ever heard things like "God cares and so loves your prayers" or maybe "God never gives us a reason out of season"

Nice! But what do they really mean?

I mean... they rhyme and express an idea, but they are simplistic and never really address anything and so carry no weight in the lives of a believer.

I will always distil the scripture down as best I can, but If there is one thing that you can take away from this sermon this morning it is this:

Simplistic answers never weather the storms that life brings.

Most simplistic answers really say, at least to me, that the speaker hasn't really put any thought into the issue.

So...

At this point we have seen that complexity is bad, it makes things hard to understand and if a complex issue is not distilled properly and the answers to it not properly formed, it can cause more confusion, frustration and suffering than saying nothing at all.

By now you should be starting to see the tension between teaching the word of God completely in a detailed fashion which will apply to life's situations and simplicity for simplicity sake.

Here is the secret folks... Complexity distilled properly is powerful. The pastor or teacher has typically lived the experience or struggled to understand the full intent of a passage of text. They have worked out their faith and are continuing to do so. Providing someone context to fully understand what is happening and Gods position on it can at times be complex. When a pastor can relate the nuances of an issue, challenge or problem in light of Gods word it is powerful.

Notice here that introducing simplicity before the work of scripture study is lazy and causes problems. Unfortunately, it is also a very popular way of dealing with the issue. However, simplicity is not bad... It is just that simplicity must be applied after understanding is in place otherwise the message will miss its mark.

Many preachers, teachers and Christians who study the word have wrestled with the texts, their faith, their walk, Issues in their lives, understanding God and his angels and even understanding demons and their activities. We live in a complex world and God has not let us down, he has given us what we need in scripture. It is up to us to read in context and understand what is being said to us by our God.

Let me give you an example:

A computer programmer used to deal with archaic commands that they had to type into the computer. They had to memorize or lookup all kinds of settings and so forth just to accomplish a task. For the most part this worked really well...

But someone sat down and thought, what If I could get the person to simply click on a picture on the computer screen and the computer could do all the heavy lifting...

Well... it makes a good analogy because this is where many are at today. Some people can do some things on the computer, they can enter data, they can run software, they can type and edit letters and sermons, they can do their taxes and so on...

Now... what if something happens – let's call it a problem, wherein, you can't solve the problem with clicking on the picture anymore. Now an understanding of why and how things work on the computer is needed, but in most cases that knowledge is missing and the person relies on a computer tech or another with in depth knowledge to solve the problem. You are dependent on someone else to solve your problem.

Now the bible is your guide to knowing God. In our culture so many have become accustomed to the automatic and simple, that when a problem occurs they find themselves ill equipped to deal with it and so must rely on others knowledge or experience or they will continue to have the issue.

How much more important is your life and relationship with God?

Should we not want to understand him better?

Should we not seek to really understand the meat of what God's word is saying to us today?

Preachers and teachers can simplify ideas, but it is a constant struggle with how much information to release in context and when. Scripture is a rich resource. Every time I study a scripture, I get something new out of it.

I sometimes use humor, albeit maybe not your sense of humor to create memory triggers. I try to make complex issues digestible by adding some simplicity.

It should be noted here though that if a concept or problem is complex it may require a bit of thought to resolve the issue. I cannot think of a single Christian who when suffering likes moral pronouncements, platitudes, cute cliché's and so on. They give the message that the issue is not being taken seriously nor is it being given the thought it deserves. What message is being related? Is it love, compassion and care or is it merely flippant?

Einstein is correct when he said: "You cannot solve problems with the same level of thinking that got you into the problem in the first place."

Simplicity and complexity each have their places and their purposes. I for one would rather wrestle with simplifying a complex issue and ensure that is understood, than to simply toss out meaningless platitudes and ill considered direction.

My friends, We NEED to understand Jesus!

Life is not always simple... Preaching isn't done to simply correct thinking folks. It is done to transform lives. The messages from the word of God are powerful and if applied will transform lives.

The bottom line is this...

Be aware of sermons that do not have a challenge to change. Be aware of sermons that tell you only what you want to hear or simply relate a narrative of which you are abundantly familiar. Sermons are meant to challenge you to move forward in your relationship with Jesus. Just like in college sometimes we need to stretch to grasp what is being said, but in the end it is worth it. Most teachers try to distil down the complex and make it digestible.

The tension between complex and simple applies to every person in this place. We need to own our salvation, and we need to understand why we believe what we believe or our belief won't stand up when challenged.

Every mature Christian knows the story of Jonah, or Noah, or Daniel. If I asked you about Daniel right now, would you tell me the narrative about his struggle. Probably...

This morning how many of you can tell me the significance of the statue in the dream. How many this morning know and can clearly tell me the significance of Daniel as it relates to the book of revelation?

Jesus was asked for a denarius. Which is a coin with Caesars face on it. If I said this morning: "Give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar, but give unto God what belongs to God most will remember the narrative, but why a denarius?"

The Pharisees were in violation of their own law as they were not permitted to carry the image of any God. In this way they were already in violation and their trap was useless.

There is so much richness in scripture, understanding why we need to know and understand his word is vital to our Christian Walk. I want to own my salvation. I am invested in my eternal life. I want to understand what and why Jesus did what he did. I don't want to rely ONLY on what I hear preachers say... I want to know why they are saying it and how it applies to my life.

I have shown how Complexity is a tightrope because it is harder than just a simple pat answer and it requires some work at times to understand.

Simplicity is easy, but simplicity with understanding of the complexity is not and it is the key to successfully using the scripture in our lives.

2 Timothy 3:16

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*

If that's what his word is used for, should we strive to eat the strong meat or stay on the milk?

Let me close with this scripture:

Hebrews 5:12-14

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*