PREACHING & TEACHING

Sermon on Grace

Preaching notes on grace, including Paul's own objection to his doctrine in Romans 6 and why a grace sermon that nobody could possibly object to has probably not preached grace at all.

topic notes · 4 segments

Topic notes. Movement three uses Paul's test: if nobody could misunderstand you, you have understated it.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Grace is the doctrine congregations can recite and not believe. Most people can define it and still live as if approval is being calculated somewhere, so the sermon's job is rarely definition.
- One concrete story of grace received does more than twenty minutes of exposition. Choose it carefully and do not explain it afterwards.

01. Three texts, three costs

choose one

[Luke 15 if you want it felt rather than argued]

Ephesians 2:1-10. The clearest statement and the most abstract. By grace you have been saved through faith, not of works. Easy to preach accurately and hard to make anyone feel.

Luke 15:11-32. The same doctrine as a story, and stories do what propositions cannot. Costs you precision and buys you the room.

Romans 6:1-4. Paul raising the obvious objection to his own teaching and answering it. The most intellectually interesting option.

02. Paul's test

the sharp bit

[this is the best idea available on this subject]

Romans 6 opens with Paul anticipating the objection: shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase. He raises it because people were evidently saying it about his preaching.

That is a useful test for a grace sermon. If your version could not possibly be misheard as permission, you have probably preached something safer than grace. Paul's was misheard constantly, and he answered the objection rather than trimming the doctrine to avoid it.

03. The trap

avoid this

[grace as a synonym for leniency]

Grace reduced to niceness, or to the idea that nothing much matters. In the New Testament it is expensive and specific, and it does not remove consequences, it removes the question of standing. Those are different things and congregations conflate them constantly.

04. An angle worth taking

if you want it

[the older brother is the congregation]

Luke 15 is usually preached to the younger son, and the room is mostly older brothers: people who stayed, did the work, and are quietly furious that it appears to have bought them nothing. Preaching the second half of that parable to a faithful congregation is far more uncomfortable and far more useful.

USAGE

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