

The Missing Note in Present-Day Preaching

by Henry Mahan

The missing note in present-day preaching is conviction of sin, which is necessary for salvation and spiritual growth.

Duration: 41:27

Scripture: Job 42:1-6, Matthew 7:21-23, Matthew 23:37, Luke 7:47, Luke 18:9-14, John 5:40, John 10:10

Topics: "Apostasy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher highlights the importance of preaching in shaping our beliefs and attitudes towards ourselves and others. He emphasizes that our faith and knowledge of God are dependent on the preaching we have heard. However, he points out that there is something missing in present-day preaching - the conviction that some individuals have never truly been lost and in need of salvation. The preacher criticizes the practice of rushing people through baptism and making them church members without ensuring they have truly received new life in Christ. He also highlights the prevalence of empty churches, unread Bibles, and superficial moral reformation, emphasizing the need for genuine spiritual transformation.

Transcript

Now, faith is the product of preaching. Scripture declares that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. And whatever faith that men have, whatever beliefs to which they hold, is a result of the preaching which they have heard.

Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. A knowledge of God, whatever attitude I have toward God Almighty, whatever attitude I have toward his word, toward his church, whatever beliefs I have about his purpose, his dealings with men through Christ, depend upon the preaching that I've heard. Our knowledge of God is the product of preaching.

Our religion is the product of preaching. Our attitude toward ourselves, what we believe about sin, about the fall, about our sins of omission, commission, of heart, of mind, of deed, of word. Our attitude toward our fellow man is formed by the preaching that we've heard.

Preaching is important. God had chosen by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. So faith, whatever faith I have, or you have, or whatever faith or belief that men have, is a result of the preaching they've heard.

It's amazing how important is this thing called preaching. Our religion, our knowledge of God, depends upon the preaching that we have heard. Now, something's missing.

I'm not being mean, but I know something's missing, and everybody knows something's missing. You know something's missing. We have large buildings today.

We have churches everywhere. We have churches with tall steeples pointing to the sky. We have large auditoriums, but most of them stand empty except on special occasions or special days or special seasons.

We have millions of Bibles. Bibles are everywhere. The Bible's been translated into over a thousand different languages, and everybody's got a Bible.

Some people have several of them, but most of them are unread. We have moral reformation, but most of it is just washing the dead bodies. There's no life inside.

You know it, and I know it, and everybody knows it. We have a superstitious regard for outward religion. People come into a church building, men take off their hats.

Why? They have superstitious regard for outward religion, for an outward building. A person wouldn't think of having a funeral without a preaching. You wouldn't think of marrying without a preaching.

People bring their babies to be dedicated. There are people all over this world who go to church four times in their life. They go when they're an infant to be sprinkled.

They go when they're 12 years old to be confirmed or catechized. They go when they're married, and then they roll them in when they die. But they have a superstitious regard for outward religion.

But men do not walk with God. Men believe in heaven, and they all want to go there. Men believe in hell, and nobody wants to go there.

But as for a personal living union with a living God, very few people know what it means, and very few people have experienced it. Now what's caused that? Must be the preaching we've heard. We have orthodox doctrine, most fundamental religionists, most church members, most people who are not in the church believe this book is God's word.

We've entitled it Holy Bible. Most people believe in the creation. There are few people who argue evolution, but I say most people believe in the creation.

Most people believe in the virgin birth. Most people believe in the cross. Most people believe in a resurrection.

Most people believe in a second coming. Fundamentally, we're orthodox. Our beliefs have been handed down, and we've accepted them without question.

We have orthodox doctrine. We're Baptists or Methodists or Presbyterian or Nazarenes or Catholics or Jews or something, but everybody's something. Everybody has denominational preference depending upon their tradition.

But love for God, love for one another, it's not there. Joy in God, rejoicing in the Lord, rejoicing in life, in death, in prosperity, in adversity, rejoicing in time of affliction, in time of trial, in time of success. Somebody said God and the soldier have a lot in common.

We just love them when we need them. Peace of heart, peace with God, peace with ourselves, peace with one another. Something's missing.

Patience, gentleness, goodness. These words are foreign. Faith to overcome, faith to walk through everyday difficulties.

Humility is a forgotten virtue. Today we're surrounded with pride of face, pride of race, pride of place, and unfortunately, pride of grace. Something's missing.

The religion is there, the orthodoxy is there, the system of belief is there, but something is missing. The life is missing, and the missing note is found in John 16, 8. Our Lord gives it to us in his own word. He said when he, the spirit of truth, when the Holy Ghost is come, he will convince the world of sin, and this is the missing note.

The world, the religious world I'm talking about, the church world, the professing world, has never been convinced of sin. The foundation work is missing. We have built buildings without foundations.

Preachers have gone forth to convince men that God loves them. Smile, God loves you. If you hear ten sermons on TV today or ten sermons on the radio, you'll hear just about ten sermons on the love of God, and they have neglected to preach the wrath of God, the wrath that sent his son to the tree, the wrath that nailed Christ to the cross.

There's not a word about God's anger against sin. Preachers have gone forth to convince men of God's willingness to save, and he is willing to save. He is plenteous in mercy, but that's not all the message.

Men have not been convinced of God's determination to punish sin. Somebody said to a man, one time you believe a man who had no use for the gospel or the church or the cross. He said, do you think that you'll go to heaven when you die? He said, why sure, God will send me to heaven.

That's what God's for. Men, preachers have gone forth to convince men of God's willingness to receive them. But very little has been said about our unwillingness to come to God.

Christ said, you will not come to me that you might have life. Christ said, O Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered you to myself, but you would not. Preachers have gone forth to comfort people.

Where is the prophet who disturbs? Preachers have gone forth to encourage people. Where is the man whom God said would reprove and rebuke and exhort with all longsuffering? We have plenty who are crying, peace, peace, when there is no peace, but where are the disturbers of Israel? Men are built up who've never been brought down. Men are filled who've never been emptied.

Men are given hope who've never been without hope. Men are saved who've never been lost. Men are healed who've never been wounded.

Men are exalted who've never been humbled. Men are given life who've never been the slain of the Lord. We sing amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch? Where are the wretches? I once was what? Lost, but now I'm found.

Was what? Blind, but now I see. We're talking about the found and the see, but we're not talking about the lost and the blind. Men are given grace who've never been guilty.

The Holy Spirit never, and underscore that word never, never takes a man to Calvary until he takes him first to Sinai. That was Saul of Tarsus' whole trouble. He had religion without the foundation work, without Holy Spirit conviction.

He had been lifted up, and he had never been humbled. He had been given hope, but he had never been without hope. He had been healed, but he'd never been wounded.

So he said, when the law came, I died. God slew him, God stripped him, God broke him, God emptied him, and then God healed him. The Holy Spirit never speaks peace to a person's heart until that person has grieved and mourned over his guilt before God.

Guilt so great, so enormous, that it can only be removed by the blood of the precious Son of God. Guilt so great that it enlited heaven of its choice jewel. Guilt so great that it brought down from heaven's glory the Son of God on a special mission.

Guilt so great that only Christ himself in the flesh could put it away. Guilt so great that our Lord must endure hell itself. Guilt so great and shame so terrible that our Lord had to suffer and to bleed and to die for it.

Have you ever been there? That's the mission note. We're clothing sinners, covering their self-righteous rags without stripping off the rags first. We're trying to build foundations under people who already have foundations without having those foundations of flesh, of fleshly hope, of ceremonialism, of religion, of superstition swept away to where they cry, Lord, save me or I perish.

Here's the missing note in our Lord's own words. You turn with me to Luke 18. In Luke 18, now here's the missing note in our Lord's own words.

What am I saying? I'm saying this, that preachers are crying peace when there is no peace. They're building up people who've never been broken. They're saving people who've never been lost.

They're giving men a hope for heaven without a union with Christ. And our churches are filled with people who are walking in custom, duty, tradition, ceremonialism, doctrine, and they're playing church. They're not approaching God with sincere hearts, earnest hearts, or broken hearts, or guilty hearts.

In Luke 18, verse 10, our Lord said two men went up to the temple to pray. The one a Pharisee, that Pharisee you know without my describing him, a religious man, a moral man, an orthodox man, a teacher of the scriptures. The other a publican, a common man, a sinful man, an ordinary man.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I'm not as other men are. They are extortioners, they are unjust, they are adulterers. I'm not even as this publican, and he pointed over there at this other gentleman.

For I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, our Master said, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful unto me, a sinner.

I tell you, Christ declared, this man went down to his house justified, forgiven, just as if he had never sinned, holy rather than the other. For everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself, or is humbled, or is broken, shall be exalted. Look at these two men.

The Pharisee made his way up to the altar. He was familiar with these holy things. The Pharisee stood.

That is, he came right into the holy place. He was familiar with the temple. He was familiar with the things of God.

He felt that he belonged there. He was a moral man. He was a religious man.

He was a studious man. He was a man who knew the doctrine. He was very comfortable in the temple and about the holy things.

The Publican, our Lord said he stood afar off. He didn't feel worthy of the presence of God. Someone said he stood afar off and left room between him and God for a mediator, for an intercessor, for an advocate.

Like the people of Israel in Exodus 20, verse 18, when Moses gave them the holy law, when Moses gave them from Sinai's mountain that holy law of God, that law which reaches not only the act but the thought, the attitude, not only the deed but the imagination. When Moses gave them that holy law, the scripture says that the people stood afar off and they cried, Moses, speak to God for us. Let not God speak to us lest we die.

The Pharisee was comfortable about the things of God, about the things of the temple, about the things of the house of God. He came in and walked right up to the holy place, up to the altar, and he stood there, and what else did he do? He evidently lifted his eyes toward heaven and spread his hands. That was their custom.

They lifted up holy hands in prayer, and he felt his were holy enough to lift up. In a matter of obedience, in a matter of self-satisfaction, like the song I was listening to before I came to church. You know, most religious singers don't pay any more attention to what they're singing, the words.

It's a beautiful melody, and they've got a beautiful voice, and so they render it regardless of what it says. It may butcher the gospel. And I was listening to my friend from Alabama sing on the record a while ago, and he was singing that at the end of the road, and this is the way one of the verses went.

With a gate open wide and a friend by my side, that's all that I ask as a crown for my task when I get to the end of the road. That's pride, pure old religious arrogant pride. The publican would not.

Christ didn't say he could not. He said he would not so much as lift his eyes, let alone his hands, toward heaven. He stood afar off.

He felt unworthy in the presence of God. He felt his guilt. He felt his shame, and his downcast eyes revealed his shame.

He wouldn't so much as lift his eyes to God, let alone his hands. Oh, the grief in his heart over guilt. The Pharisee literally denied his sins.

He didn't feel them. He wasn't aware of them. He wasn't conscious of them.

There's no confession of sin, therefore there's no prayer. There can be no prayer without a confession of sin. There's not one confession, nothing but a self-righteous listing of all his good deeds and his good character.

God, I thank you. I'm not like other men. Other men are extortioners.

Other men are unjust. Other men are adulterers, but not I. I've always lived a clean, moral, righteous life, and I thank you, God. The scripture says here, the publican would not so much as lift his eyes to heaven, his downcast eyes revealed the broken heart, and he smote upon his breast.

You know what I think? I think he knew where the trouble was. The Pharisee didn't. The Pharisee talked about outward acts and outward deeds.

I've never done this, and I've never done that, and I've never done the other. Other people do these things. I've never done these things.

The publican smote on the fountain of sin. He knew the source of sin. He knew the fountain of sin.

He smote on his breast. He cried, Oh, my heart, my heart, my wicked heart. God looketh on the heart.

Man looketh on the outward countenance. Aren't you glad folks can't see what you think? God can. Aren't you glad folks can't see your heart? God can.

Aren't you glad folks don't know what you dream and what you imagine and what you think? God does. Keep thy heart out of it or the issues of life. And as that publican stood there with his head down, not lifting his hands to heaven, but smote, smote upon his breast.

Oh, the fountain of sin, the source of sin. Turn to Matthew 15. Let's look at something the Lord says here.

Matthew 15. These religious Pharisees were so exact about keeping the Sabbath day. They were so exact about washing their hands before they ate.

They were so exact about not eating certain meats. They were so exact about not drinking certain drinks. They were so exact about all of these things.

And our Lord said in Matthew 15, 17, Don't you understand that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly and is cast out into the draft, goes through the digestive system, is cast out of the body. But those things which proceed out of the mouth, those words, they come from your heart. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.

And they defile the man, for out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemy. These are the things that defile a man. This is sin.

This religious world has never been convinced of sin. And you can start in the primary department, go through the juniors, intermediates, young peoples and adults, and you can ask people the question, Who's going to heaven? They'll say, Good people. Who's going to hell? Bad people.

And Satan has never conned this generation with a bigger lie than that lie. Our Lord died to save sinners. And there are no good people.

There's none good, no not one. You are superior to others only because they can't see your heart, and unfortunately you can't see it. Blind to sin.

Blind to sin. You've never been lost, therefore you've never been found. You've never been stripped, therefore you've never been clothed.

You've never been empty-handed, therefore you've never been filled. You've never been humble, therefore you've never been exalted. Oh, you've exalted yourself.

Look at that word again. Our Lord said in verse 14, Everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased. And that's what we've done.

The position before God that we have, we ourselves accomplished it. God didn't do it. The Pharisee dealt with trivial things.

Look at verse 12. I fast twice in the week. I get up every morning and pray.

I get up every morning and read my Bible. Thank you, Lord. I'm not an adulterer.

Thank you, Lord. I'm not unjust. Thank you, Lord.

I'm not an extortioner. Thank you, Lord, that I've never done these things. Other people do, but I never have.

And, Lord, I thank you that I fast and read my Bible and pray and I give tithes of all that I possess. I've always taken my income and sliced off your tenth and given it to you faithfully, Lord. I sure am glad I've done all these things.

The Pharisee dealt with trivial things. You know what Paul called them? Dunghill garbage. He listed all his religious accomplishments, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee born, circumcised, a tribe of Benjamin, concerning the law blameless, all these things.

I count them but dung that I may win Christ. Isaiah called it filthy rags. Aren't you ashamed to come into the holy presence of a living God and dangle under his nose your filthy rags? The publican had nothing to do with these second-rate religious things.

He prayed about weightier matters. The Pharisee prayed with himself. He didn't do any praying at all.

He just bragged on himself. He listed his characteristics, which he was quite pleased with, and he listed his religious deeds, which are filthy rags. The publican talked about weightier matters.

He talked about sin. He talked about mercy. He talked about substitution.

He talked about sacrifice. He talked about the blood. Where do you get that, preacher? Well, let's look at what he said.

God? God? He went straight to God. He didn't talk to the good Pharisee. He didn't look up the good religious Pharisee to talk to him.

He didn't inquire of his fellow worshipers. He didn't even return the contempt of this Pharisee. The Pharisee was very contemptuous toward him.

I'm not even like that publican. And this blessed man didn't turn to the Pharisee and say, I'm good as you are. I'm just as good as the folks in your church.

I'm no worse off than your church members. I suspect you're right. You're all sons of Adam.

You're all born in sin. You're all under the wrath of God. What difference does it make whether you're in the church under the wrath of God or down at the booze hall under the wrath of God? They're all under the wrath of God.

The Scripture says, Therefore the law concludes all under sin. The law speaks that the whole world might be guilty, that every mouth may be stopped. But this publican, he didn't go to people.

He didn't return their contempt. He didn't argue with the congregation. He went to God.

He said, God. That's where mercy is. That's where salvation is.

That's where grace is. He went to God. And what did he go to God for? He wanted mercy.

Mercy. I don't know what he knew about the atonement. Oh, he had seen the morning sacrifice and the evening sacrifice.

He had seen the priest take the blood of atonement under the veil into the Holy of Holies. But according to every Bible commentator and every Greek lexicon, this man said this. He said, God, be propitiated, accept a sacrifice, and pardon me.

That's what he's saying. God be merciful. The only way God can be merciful is by a sacrifice.

The only way God can show mercy is for sin to be paid for. That's the only way God can be just and justify the ungodly. That's the only way God can be righteous and justify you, is for a suitable sacrifice, for an effectual sacrifice, for a redeeming ransom to be offered.

God must be just. God must be holy when he justifies the ungodly and when he forgives the guilty. And this man comes for mercy.

Lord, be merciful. Let thy blood be propitiation for me. That's the reason Christ died.

He didn't die as an example or as a martyr or as a frustrated reformer. He died as a substitute. Our sins were laid on him.

Our guilt was laid on him. Therefore, because he took our sins and paid our debt and suffered under the justice of God, then God can be just and set me free because my debt's paid, because my sins are put away. And this man acknowledged his sin.

God be merciful to me. And that A there is the. It's a definite article.

It's God be merciful to me, the sinner. Mike was singing about it. Suffer a sinner whose heart overflows, loving his Savior to tell what he knows.

Once more to tell it would I embrace. I'm only a sinner saved by grace. I don't care if you're here this morning for the first time or if you've been here for 25 years.

You're only a sinner. It doesn't matter if you've been a believer for five minutes or you've been a believer for five years. You're still just a sinner saved by grace.

You never graduate beyond God's grace. You never cease to be a sinner. He didn't say I'm a reformed sinner.

I'm a former sinner. I'm a penitent sinner. I'm a praying sinner.

I'm an awakened sinner. I'm tired of people putting those justifying names ahead of the word sinner. You're just and I'm just the sinner.

That's all. Men see sin in proportion as they see God's holiness. Did you know that? That's the reason most people have a sorry conception of sin is because they have a sorry conception of God.

Now you read the Bible and you'll find that out. When Isaiah saw the Lord, how did he see him? He saw him, he said in Isaiah 6, high and lifted up. His train filled the temple.

And the cherubims and seraphims cried, holy, holy, holy. And then Isaiah cried, woe is me. I'm a man of unclean lips.

I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. You're pretty good because you're comparing yourselves with the pretty bad. You'll find out when you compare yourself with the perfect, immaculate, pure, holy God almighty, in whose presence the heavens are not even clean and the stars are not pure, much less man that drinketh iniquity like the water, you'll find out how unholy you are.

And the reason you have such a sorry conception of sin, the reason you've got sin's catalog so that you don't do this and you don't do that and you don't do the other and you're a pretty good fellow is because you've got a pretty little God, a peanut God, mind you, an unholy God, a God likened to yourself who can only do what you let him do, who can only be what you let him be, who can only accomplish what you let him accomplish. God be merciful to me, the sinner. Job.

Job thought he was a pretty good fellow. Job defended his righteousness, defended his morality, bragged about his accomplishments. He said, I'll never let go of my righteousness.

Well, you know what happened in chapters 37, 38, 39, and 40, don't you? God revealed himself to Job in his holiness. And Job said, Lord, I've heard of you by the ear, but now that I see thee, and what was the result? Wherefore, I hate myself, I repent in sackcloth and ashes. The missing note in present-day preaching, the God of the Bible has not been preached.

God in his holiness, God in his sovereignty, God in his immaculate justice, God in his righteousness, God in his love, holy love, pure love, immaculate love, sinless love. In him is no darkness. And men in their sins, and until men see God in his holiness, they'll never be convicted of their guilt and of their sins.

They'll still come with their idle, evil familiarity right into the presence of a holy God and begin to talk about who they are and what they've done. But somewhere, somehow, the Holy Spirit's going to convince some people of sin. When he's come, the preacher can't do it, and your friends can't do it, but the Holy Ghost can.

And he's going to come, and he's going to whittle down some old sinner. Oh, and when he does it, it's tough. But thank God for Holy Spirit conviction.

He's going to come, and he's going to lay bare your heart and how painful it'll be. He'll show you what you are. He'll show you who you are.

He'll show you your hatred and your lust and your malice and your envy and your jealousy and your selfishness and your pride. He'll strip you. He'll knock all your foundations of religious flesh out from under you, all your ceremonialism and custom and tradition and heritage and background.

And he'll leave you empty, dangling over the gaping jaws of a burning, condemning hell. The only thing between you and perishing is God's mercy. Guilty.

And you're going to cry, Lord, save me or I'll perish. And I'll tell you this, if he ever does that for you and saves you, you'll love him, you'll worship him, you'll praise him. You'll be generous.

He'll put peace in your heart. He'll build you. He'll put your feet on the right foundation.

He'll put joy in your heart. He'll give you a purpose for living. He'll give you hope for dying.

He'll give you an advocate at the judgment. T'was for sinners that he suffered, iniquity, ruin, and hell. Can you doubt you're a sinner? If you can, then bid all hope farewell.

But believing what is written, I'm guilty, dead in sin. Look to the crucified Savior and hope shall rise thy soul within. Our Lord was eating in the home of a Pharisee, one of these religious fellows one day.

And there was a woman who came in off the streets. Of course, she wasn't invited. She came in off the streets and she fell at his feet in repentance and godless sorrow and bathed his feet with tears and dried them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet.

And that proud religious Pharisee who had tithed his income that Sabbath day and fasted twice that week and spent his time in the morning and evening prayers and been down to the church and won some souls and given his money and given alms to the poor, he looked down and he thought, if that fellow was a prophet, he'd know that woman's a sinner and he wouldn't let her touch him, let alone kiss his feet. And our Lord looked up. He knew men's thoughts.

And he said, Simon, this was Simon the Pharisee. Simon, I got something to ask you. Simon said, say on, master.

He said, Simon, there was a fellow, that older man, owed him \$500,000. That's an enormous debt. And Simon, that man forgave him, just told him to write it off, write it off, pay him.

Now, Simon, there was another man that owed that same fellow \$10. And that fellow told him, too, to write it off, mark it, pay. He said, Simon, which one of those fellows will love him the most? Simon said, well, Lord, the one to whom he forgave the most will love him most.

Our Lord said, Simon, thou hast well said, thou hast well said. I came to your house, Simon, and you gave me no kiss of greeting at the door. This woman has not ceased to kiss my feet.

You wonder why church members have to be coerced to come to church and beg to give, beg to come to prayer meetings, beg to read their Bible. You have to give them awards and all these things. Same reason Simon didn't meet the Lord and kiss him.

Simon, I came to your door, and you didn't give me any water to wash my feet. They were tired and dirty and weary, and you didn't give me any water. This woman bathed my feet with tears.

Simon, I came to your door, and you gave me no precious ointment to anoint my hot and dry head. This woman has anointed my feet with everything she's got. I say unto thee, Simon, her sins, which are many, are all forgiven.

To whom much is forgiven, he'll love much. You want to know what's wrong? I know what's wrong. These preachers, I don't know whether they know it or not, but the missing note in present-day preaching is the conviction of sin.

Men have never been lost. We've got them to make decisions when they're juniors or sophomores or something else, or primaries, and we run them through the baptismal waters and put their names on the roll. We'll call in a hot-shot singer and a hot-shot preacher, and he'll tell his little jokes and preach his little sermons that he's preached all over the country and give his invitation, and down the aisle they'll run, shake the preacher's hand, run them through the pool, put their name on the roll, kiss them goodbye.

They're all ready to die. They've been dead, and they're still dead, and they've never received life. They've never been lost, never been convicted.

Our Father in Heaven, O God, be merciful to me. Let thy blood be propitiation for me. Forgive my sins through the blood of thy Son.

Be merciful to me, the sinner. Reveal unto us the true condition of our fallen hearts. Reveal unto us the true condition of our minds and our wills.

Shut us up to mercy till we call on the living God, till he speaks to us in pardon and peace. Lord, move in our midst, leave us not to ourselves. Help us that we might be saved from this perverse religious generation.

For we pray it in Christ's name, amen.

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