

“...The Last Sermon...”—100 Years Later

April 15, 1906, was Easter Sunday for that year. By all accounts, church buildings were full. (It is generally acknowledged that church attendance is at its highest on Easter.) None of the citizens of San Francisco, including the preachers, had any idea that the following Wednesday, April 18, would bring death and destruction to many of them in the form of the “Great Quake.” One of the preachers, Charles Reynolds Brown, looked back at that Sunday and said, “*How differently I would have preached, if I had only known that many of those in my audience were hearing the last sermon that they would ever hear.*” (Quoted in Batsell Barrett Baxter’s book, **If I Be Lifted Up**)

As a preacher, I am moved by his remarks, and I would do well to reflect on them from time to time. It is needful to realize that we (preachers) are speaking, as one man said, “*as dying men to dying men.*” The urgency of the gospel message drives us to proclaim Jesus’ sacrificial death and the need for man’s obedient response to him. Though we cannot always bring the same amount of passion to each sermon, we can structure them so that they call for man’s response.

But the burden is not only on preachers. Each listener must understand that he/she must receive the sermon with the knowledge that God expects their obedience. Surely, “**woe to me if I do not preach the gospel**” (1 Corinthians 9:15)—but woe also unto the listeners who do not receive the faithfully preached message “**as it is really is, the word of God**” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

What about you? What if the sermon you heard Sunday was the last one? Did you take it to heart? Did you reject it—dismissing the preacher for being intrusive and meddlesome? Did you put off making a decision till a more convenient time? Or, were you long past even listening to what he or anyone else had to say about religious matters?

You may have just assumed that you would have at least one more Sunday, and maybe even another year, to take care of spiritual matters—and you may be right. However, you may also be very wrong. Make sure your heart is right—and neither you or the preacher will have regrets.

“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring” (Proverbs 27:1). **“Behold now is the favorable time; behold now is the day of salvation”** (2 Corinthians 6:2). *All Scripture quotations taken from the English Standard Version.*

—Lance Cordle