

Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon, edited by Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Matthews. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010, 304 pp. \$29.99.

"A text-driven sermon is a sermon that develops a text by explaining, illustrating, and applying its meaning. Text-driven preaching stays true to the substance of the text, the structure of the text, and the spirit of the text" (p. 8). By setting out a basic definition of text-driven preaching, David Allen sets the stage for the content of the book to follow. Within this volume authored by Southern Baptist pastors and professors are the principles and procedures for preaching a text-driven sermon. In a book made up of eleven chapters written by twelve authors (ch. 10 is co-authored) there will be a wide diversity in quality of material. In a review of this length, each chapter cannot be analyzed with sufficient depth to get a detailed appreciation for what is written. But, by addressing a few chapters one can get a representative look at the quality of the material.

If as preachers we truly believe that not only the content but even the form, structure, and application of our sermons must come from the text itself, then a volume that is devoted to preaching that is "text-driven" will be a welcome addition to any pastor's library. The book is divided into three main sections. First, "The Preacher and Text-Driven Preaching" addresses issues specifically targeted to the preacher himself. Paige Patterson's "Ancient Rhetoric: A Model for Text-Driven Preachers" is an interesting look at the history and contribution that the study of rhetoric makes to preachers. The basic qualities of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* can be helpful lenses to approach preaching. While most of the chapter is helpful, Patterson's understanding of the preacher's walk with God is somewhat culturally biased and unhelpful. His requirement of formal dress to preach (jacket and tie) except in cross-cultural situations is rather anachronistic and frankly out of place in a section on the preacher's walk with God. Other chapters in this section include Jim Shaddix's "A History of Text-Driven Preaching," Bill Bennett's "The Secret of Preaching with Power," and Ned Matthews "The Disciplines of a Text-Driven Preacher." Each chapter makes a helpful contribution to the topic at hand, yet nothing revolutionary is being said here that has not been said before in other books.

Part two of the book, "Preparation and Text-Driven Preaching," gets to the heart of what many reading this book will be looking for. If one wants to preach a text-driven sermon, this section is where they will want to turn. David Allen writes on "Preparing a Text-Driven Sermon," David Alan Black on "Exegesis for the Text-Driven Sermon," Robert Vogel on "Biblical Genres and the Text-Driven Sermon," and finally Jim Hamilton on "Biblical Theology and Preaching." Hamilton's essay is perhaps one of the most interesting, necessary, and helpful chapters in the entire book. One of the biggest failures of many expository preachers is to constantly get mired down in the details of the text and fail to help people to see the big picture of what God is doing throughout Scripture.

Hamilton helps one see the necessity of putting the text into its canonical context and see how God is using that particular passage to teach about what he is doing in his grand design. How does one preach biblical theology? Hamilton says,

By explaining texts in canonical context. By highlighting the literary structures the authors have built into their texts, through which they make their points. By drawing attention to the reuse of words, phrases, and sequences from earlier biblical texts. By locating particular texts in the context of the Bible's big story. By showing how the biblical authors sought to encourage their audiences and connecting that encouragement to the members of their audience to whom we preach (p. 216).

My struggle, though, with Hamilton is his insistence that one know the original languages to faithfully preach the big picture of God. He writes, "One must be able to read the texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek if one wants to do biblical theology" (p. 213). The reality is, a thorough understanding of the original languages is crucial to exegeting the text of Scripture, but this does not mean that someone who does not read the original languages cannot bring the text into the big picture of what God is doing and do biblical theology. There are faithful pastors all around the world who do not know the original languages who faithfully do biblical theology each Lord's day.

Part three of the book, "Preaching the Text-Driven Sermon" offers some final tips on translating the sermon from the page to the ear. Hershanel York's "Communication Theory and Text-Driven Preaching" helpfully applies the results of research into communication for the sake of preaching. Adam Dooley and Jerry Vines have written a helpful chapter on "Delivering a Text-Driven Sermon." Finally, Danny Akin offers an insightful look at "Applying a Text-Driven Sermon." This overview should be read by every pastor seeking to faithfully apply the Scriptures to the lives of his people. The strongest contribution of this chapter is Akin's discussion about making very pointed, specific application. Such application should start in the head, move to the heart, and then tell the hands what to do. Too many preachers stop in the head or skip the head altogether and just begin in the hand. All three (head, heart, and hand) are necessary and Akin does an excellent job emphasizing this need.

Despite the fact that books authored by many people usually vary in quality, this book is a good look at how to preach the Word of God in a way that truly honors the text. Too many pastors fail to apply the principles explained in this book despite claiming to be expository preachers. We would be well-reminded of the truths outlined here as we work hard at faithfully presenting what God wants people to hear in and from his Word. Therefore, despite the weaknesses mentioned, this book has a number of strengths and should be studied by preachers hoping to be faithful.

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