

Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God's Transformation of the World* (IVP, 2009)

Over the years I have used excerpts of Johnson's course on preaching which he has taught at Regent College (Vancouver). So I was thrilled to see come out with a book on the subject. It did not disappoint for all sorts of reasons:

1. Theology is more important than methodology. That means holding techniques lightly, but being held by convictions tightly. Johnson demonstrates this with four chapters on convictions and then it is five chapters on techniques – before concluding with one chapter on convictions again. So techniques wrapped in convictions – as it should be.

2. There is something captivating in the use of this metaphor of 'participating': "expository preaching is not about getting a message out of the text; it is about inviting people into the text so that the text can do what only the text can do" – 58). Very helpful.

3. I confess that I am somewhat dubious about the North American academic homiletic tradition. With their books they tend to talk among themselves and create this massive industry – and it just feels a bit ivory-tower-ish and club-ish to me. Johnson is so refreshingly different. It drips out of his book. Not a lot of polish. It is almost chatty. His career has bounced between church and academy and between East and West. He has been a pastor and he has been a missionary in the Philippines. It shows.

4. There are specific things which Johnson affirms about which I have thought about and with which I resonate so strongly. He expresses them so well. For example... His definition of preaching emphasizes the need to be "causing a shift in worldview". He makes space for the significance of the parable of the sower/seed/soils. He has such a high view of the Bible – informing, transforming and performing. He includes an entire chapter on "the many-verb-ed wonder (which is) the preaching moment" (98). He lingers with the importance of mere observation of what the text is in saying and with a genre-sensitivity.

5. There are other topics on which Johnson is so fresh and so clear, even prophetic. Stuff I have not heard before. For example... (a) 'truth through personality' becomes "personhood" as he takes us through Temperament, Woundedness, and Gifting ("burnout in ministry does not result from overworking; burnout results from not honouring who we are and instead trying to be who we think we ought to be" – 190); (b) betraying his experience in Asia, he puts postmodernity in its place – pleading with the reader to open their eyes and realise that in the future inter-faith issues are going to be of far more consequence than lack-of-faith issues; (c) keeping the sociologists and the marketers at arm's length a bit, he questions aspects of the pursuit or relevance and the place of seeker-sensitivity. In effect – 'if you are going to let those guys define the problem you may find yourself checking them out for the total solution as well ... and the drift from the gospel has begun'; (d) affirming the need for the Spirit at work at both ends, saved appropriately for his concluding chapter; and (e) having a little word for those who tend

to be intimidated by the visual as preachers – “the power of a film does not lie in its sights alone but also in its sounds” (145).

6. Some things he says make me want to say, “really?! – please explain yourself”. For example ... (a) the case he makes for continuing to hand-write his notes, rather than using a word-processor (135); (b) the case he makes for application *not* being the preacher’s responsibility – rather it is “implication” – “to expect preachers to apply the text for their listeners is to ask them to play God ... the pressure to apply is a modernist pressure, not a biblical pressure” – 159); and (c) the way he plans for the next year’s special service immediately after this year’s version – “why wait for a few weeks or months? Late Christmas Eve is the best time to prepare (for next year) because, one, all the sounds and smells and sights of the celebration are fresh in my senses and, two, I know what I did not preach for lack of time and wished I could have” – 210).

I’ve never ever been fully happy with my choices for a textbook in an introductory course on preaching. Not any more. Without hesitation I would use this book by Darrell Johnson. It is that good.

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