

Preaching well like doing anything else well takes work. It takes work. There are those who can just get up and talk and everyone thinks it's wonderful. I was talking with a good friend of mine the other day. He told me about a man who he said was the greatest pulpiteer he'd ever known. He said he was at a conference where this man was to preach--he and some other ministers. The man said to them, If your mind goes blank when you're speaking, just go on and don't say anything. Keep preaching and don't say anything at all. They said, How do you do that? He said I'll show you. So in his sermon that day there was a point where he sort of looked at them, and all the sudden it occurred to them, that for the previous 5 minutes he had not said a single thought. But nobody had noticed it.

It is possible to speak effectively without saying anything, but you don't accomplish anything by it. That certainly is not God's purpose. Our purpose is to get a message across, a message from God's Word. But for everyone who can speak well and say nothing, I believe there are six who say a great deal but who don't say it in such a way that it gets across. It is important that the purpose of preaching is to get an idea from your mind into the mind of those who listen. God wants us to think of ways to get ideas across. Of course that which seems rather prosaic to us but which is very important that if you are going to get ideas across you have to think of ways to hold the attention. Ways that will draw people's minds back when they begin to wander. Our minds all wander when we sit and listen to something. Bring them back. Hold their attention. Keep them there.

I heard of a minister who had a little church of about maybe 40 people. He stood and talked and gave some lovely messages. Very fine content. But you couldn't hear him back of the third row! Im not even sure they could hear him in the third row! The purpose of preaching is ~~not~~ fulfilled unless we speak so that people will hear us, but how easy it is for us to forget that.

I did a little bit of teaching public speaking. You might never dream of it to hear me speak, I'm sure, but I did a little of it. I had 8 or 10 fellows. That was when tape recorders were in their bare infancy. I took a speech and had each of them read about two sentences, and so one record was made of about two sentences from each speech. Then we played it over. Some would say, Oh, that's Henry! You'd think he was actually talking. Sounds just like him! They'd say that about every one. But the agreement was not unanimous of a single one, ~~but~~ because in every case the man who was actually speaking said, What's the matter with that machine, it doesn't sound the least bit like me! It was easy to show that what we hear in the inside of our heads is quite different from what people outside hear. We need to speak in such a way as to get the material across and convey the ideas we have in mind. It's an art that is worth a great deal of effort. Some are naturally better at it than most people, but I believe that everybody can tremendously improve in his ability to speak in such a way as to hold attention and keep interest.