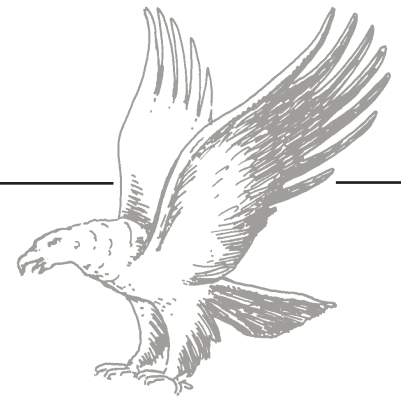


# Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



May 31, 2015

## Extra-Biblical Sources for Preaching

The primary instrument in the preacher’s toolbox is the Bible. But if that’s the *only* tool we’re using, we’re robbing our audience of a lot of valuable information that could be used to advance the truth.

*“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2).*



Earlier in my preaching career I interpreted Paul’s charge to Timothy to mean that preaching should be limited to the text of the scriptures. Thus, every sermon must be loaded with scripture references. Larding a sermon with secular sources was a sure sign of disrespect for the power of the Word.

In recent years I’ve come to moderate that view of preaching—ironically, as a result of studying the Scriptures. Consider the evidence:

First, the Scriptures themselves appeal to external evidences in nature to argue the very existence of God (Psa. 8; Psa. 19; Rom. 1; Isa. 40). Clearly, God views His *works* as just as much a part of His message to us as His *words*.

The Old Testament prophets frequently attacked idolatry, but rarely by appealing to the Ten Commandments. Instead, they exposed the logical fallacy of the practice, as in Isaiah’s brilliant

mockery of the man who builds an idol and a fire *from the same tree* and never notices the inconsistency of what he is doing (Isa. 44:14-20).

Jesus taught timeless truths found in Proverbs and elsewhere, but He rarely quoted from them. Instead He used homespun illustrations drawn from everyday experiences. Audiences got the point from these parables much more readily than by hearing pedantic commentary on Old Testament texts.

No one made more effective use of non-biblical sources in his preaching than Paul. Given his cosmopolitan background, we are not surprised to find him often quoting secular literature. His “sermon” to the Athenians in Acts 17 is more of a lecture on philosophy and cosmology, using citations from two Greek poets (v. 28, Epimenides and Aratus). Paul used absolutely no Scriptures, but his message was dead on—there is a true God, and you haven’t found Him yet. Elsewhere he urged Christians to heed the warning of the Greek playwright Menander: “Evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Cor. 15:33).

We could cite other examples, but the point is made: Truth is wherever we find it, and we do our audience a great disservice—and are, in fact, dishonoring these biblical examples—if we limit our source material to *only* the Bible. The world is full of logical, philosophical, historical, scientific, and even experiential truth that can be used to powerful effect in pointing people to God and Christianity. This is especially useful when trying to reach a deeply skeptical generation such as ours. Our ultimate objective is to bring people to respect for God and His Word, but we have to begin from a common starting point—and more often than not, it ain’t the Bible. Preachers would be well served to expand their reading to non-biblical sources to help bridge that gap.

It goes without saying that in our efforts to make our teaching more relatable to our audience, we must take care never to allow the Bible’s own message to be minimized or watered down. Whatever the starting point, our goal is to bring people to the cross of Christ and the divine love that prompted it.

– David King