

Thrift-Store Theology

Sandpaper Sermons

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Sandpaper Sermons

Not enough grit

Can a sermon rub you the right way and never give any results? Sandpaper is an interesting product. A piece of paper, heavier than most grades of paper but none the less paper, with sand glued to one side. Not two sides but one side. The sand is also graded by grit. Small sand means smaller grit. Larger sand granules mean larger grit. Sandpaper is very useful for sanding, sanding meaning taking rough objects and making them smooth. Funny how we have equated a product with a tool. Sand is normally useless, so abundant at the beach we only think of it as something that separates the water from the land.

Sand IS land of course but not much good for anything normally. But sand is also an action. Sanding is rubbing sandpaper on something that is rough to make it smooth; grit on grit. Rough on rough to produce smooth. But sanding will only work IF the object you are sanding is softer than the sandpaper. Now there is metal sandpaper that can make metal smoother or at least shinny. But the sandpaper really isn't made of sand at all; only tiny metal filings. But back to sandpaper. Have you ever thought of using sandpaper to sand rock? And not just any rock but granite? Not likely. Granite is mighty hard and some would say that it is one of the hardest stones there is. Whole buildings are made of granite. Headstones are made of granite because they wear so well. To make them requires special machinery that will cut them and polish them. But I'm sure they don't use garden-variety sandpaper in their processes. So where am I going with this? I'm glad you asked.

At the risk of seeming to meander about looking for a meaning, I have been trying to make you think about Church. Yes Church. Not the building but the action. Going to Church is supposed to make you better. Make you a better Christian

or at least a little bit better human being. Why? Because just like the sandpaper, going to Church is supposed to take something that is gritty, the teachings of Christ, and rub you so it rubs away the roughness of your own sin. Okay? Got the picture?

But sin is not soft. In fact it is so hard that it makes granite look like butter. So what do most of us hear in Church? Sandpaper sermons. Sermons where there may be a bit of grit in them but really only manages to scratch the dust off the granite of our sinful natures. It may make us feel a little bit better like having a nice back rub or even, as my Mother enjoys, a good scratching. But does it really change anything of our granite-like sinful natures? I don't think so. In fact it may only make us a little more comfortable with our granite natures making us think we are a bit cleaned up and more fit to be in public. It may just be fooling us into thinking we are better when all the time our bumpy looking, granite-hard sin is all too prevalent to others to see. Then going to Church is really just a waste of time right? Now I didn't say that did I? I said that we often hear sandpaper sermons.

But there are other sermons that have been preached, now mostly in the past then in the present, that were sticks of dynamite the blew the rough granite to pieces and then took what was left and brought in the Spirit of God to polish it up so God could use it as a foundation to build a beautiful cathedral that glorify God as architect and builder.

Unfortunately we don't hear many "dynamite" sermons anymore. They are just too messy and make us too "uncomfortable". So we enjoy our weekly "sandings" and go our ways having put in our Church time for God. So what's wrong with that? I'm glad you asked.

Think of some of the great preachers of the past. Moody. Tozer. Graham. What do they all have in common with each other? My answer would be that they attacked sin with

dynamite. They blasted it. They didn't pussyfoot around. They called sin Sin. But maybe that was because they preached in a different era. Now people are so "sensitive" that any prick to our consciences sends them whining about being "offended". Well, in the words of the Eagles: get over it! Or better, get rid of it; meaning sin. Instead we are satisfied with being "scratched" and "comforted" on Sunday mornings to the point that there really isn't any difference from the people who go to Church and the ones who don't. If you doubt my assessment, check out George Barna's statistics. His stats are accurate and tell us more than we want to admit about the lack of difference in the everyday living of so-called Christians. Morality is the word we don't say anymore, reflecting the work of God in our lives. A morality that others see and then look to the "author and finisher" and say they want some of that.

Does going to Church make you feel more comfortable with your sin or does it blast it to bits so the Spirit of God can polish what's left into a beautiful foundation on which God can build a beautiful cathedral? Or are satisfied with the granite "out-house" that you have now. You decide. But for me and my house, we want to get "blasted".