

Sidney Greidanus. *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. 376 pages. \$26.

This is a very fine commentary on Ecclesiastes for preachers – for Christian preachers. Thus the title, *Preaching Christ . . .*” But preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes is a challenge. Ecclesiastes contains no promise of a coming Messiah and only an occasional type of Christ. Rejecting the allegorical approach of the early Christian theologians as in appropriate for today, Greidanus broadens the definition of preaching Christ to include Jesus as the Wisdom of God and himself as much a teacher of wisdom as the Teacher of Ecclesiastes.

In the manner customary for commentaries, Greidanus begins with a discussion of introductory matters before he leads us through the Biblical text. He attends to the historical setting and rhetorical forms and structures, essential considerations in any commentary. But his first concerns are matters critical for preachers: the value of preaching Ecclesiastes, and the difficulties involved in interpreting it. The value of preaching from Ecclesiastes is that this work unmask the myth of human autonomy and self-sufficiency, as prevalent in our day as in the time of the ancient author. In its place the Teacher of Ecclesiastes counsels the Creator-creature relationship as the fountain of a meaningful and joyful life. No book in the Bible offers a stronger critique of our secular society and its obsession with acquisitiveness, hedonism, and materialism. The difficulty of interpreting Ecclesiastes for Christians is that it nowhere gives attention to the mighty acts of God culminating in salvation through the atoning work of Christ. Its focus is rather the redeemed life in this world under the rule of God. Clearly the New Testament is concerned with life beyond death, but Jesus as Wisdom and a teacher of wisdom “also teaches us to savor God’s gifts in the here and now.” (68) The remainder of the introduction attends to further issues in preaching: choosing a text, formulating a single, clear theme for the sermon, and ways to move from the Old Testament to the New.

Between this introduction and some very useful appendices and indices at the end, Greidanus leads us through the fifteen rhetorical units that can reasonably be shown to be the organizing structure of the book with a view to helping preachers prepare two series of seven and eight sermons respectively corresponding to the two halves of the book. For each rhetorical unit he begins with an encouragement to resist the temptation to go immediately for the theme by leading us into an intimate savoring the details and artistry of the language. Only then does he struggle to articulate the message the Teacher is trying to communicate by means of the text he constructs. Having formulated a theme and goal for the particular text under consideration, Greidanus then explores the options for understanding it from the perspective of Christ and the New Testament. The results of this exploration then lead to the formulation of a sermon theme and goal that comprehends not only the message of the text but that message in the light of Christ. Next comes a brief consideration of appropriate shapes for the sermon: teaching or narrative, inductive or deductive development, development through contrast, chiasmic structure. The last section is an ordered exposition of the text that unfolds the Teacher’s line of reasoning, the meaning of his language for the literal level of life to which it refers and how the Teacher’s teaching relates to the perspective of Jesus and the New Testament. The table of contents suggests many dimensions of living in this world that Ecclesiastes addresses, as important in our time as in ancient Israel. Three especially relevant themes are “The Love of Money,” “How to Handle Adversity,” and “How to Act in a Paradoxical World.”

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