

Austin B. Tucker, *The Preacher as Storyteller: The Power of Narrative in the Pulpit*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008. 232 pages, \$24.99

Storytelling is enjoying a resurgence among preachers and homiletics today. Austin B. Tucker adds his voice to those of many who argue for the high value of storytelling in preaching. For preachers new to the field of storytelling or narrative preaching, his book may be a helpful introduction. Tucker's purpose is to encourage preachers to tell the faith story through the use of story itself in order to better connect with their hearers. In this book he offers several valuable contributions for preachers who are seeking to develop their storytelling abilities for use in preaching.

Part 1: "The Basics of Storytelling," offers a helpful description of the basic elements of story. He offers a good summary of the component elements of story and how they may be used in a variety of ways, depending on the purpose of the storyteller. While there is little in this section that is a new insight, his summary is designed particularly for preachers, and many preachers may find this a helpful review and guide for their use of story in the pulpit.

Part 2: "Getting the Story Straight" is intended as a manual for the use of preachers in the process of developing story within their own sermons. Austin's critique of topical preaching blends with the voices of many expository preachers, but he also encourages the preacher to attend to the "hurts and heart cries," the "hopes and hungers" and "unfelt needs" of the congregation. Austin suggests that attention to the field in which the Word is sown should shape the Word given in the morning sermon. However, his commitment to the text is such that the extent to which the needs of the congregation might shape the sermon will be more limited than might occur with topical preaching.

Part 3 is a brief summary of the use of story in preaching by several pulpit giants in four contexts: in America between the Civil War and World War I under the influence of Henry Ward Beecher and T. De Witt Talmage; in London under Charles Spurgeon's influence both in his lifetime and through that one of his students (roughly 1850-1950); and the methodology of the bible biographical preachers (focusing on Alexander Whyte and Dwight L. Moody, but mentioning several others); and in America between 1900 and 1950, highlighting the skills of Russell H. Conwell, J. Wilbur Chapman, and George W. Truett. This section of the book offers an interesting glimpse into the practice of storytelling in preaching in different contexts.

Included at the end of each chapter are several exercises to improve the writing and storytelling skills of the preacher. These may be helpful to both beginning preachers and those for whom the idea of storytelling is new.

Potential readers should note that Austin's approach to scripture is essentially a non-critical or naive approach. Austin's perspective on the interpretation of biblical stories, while fairly rigid, provides some helpful guidance on *how far* preachers can deviate from the text and remain faithful to it. The intention of the text plays a large part in his evaluation of appropriate adaptation.

As an introduction to the use of story in sermon, this book offers some helpful guidance for preachers in the discipline, as well as some exercises to develop their skills.

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