

2nd Opinion: Roads to Rome, and poor sermons

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Heard about a young preacher who was visited by an elderly gentleman, a former seminary professor of his who came to attend his church one Sunday. The white-haired old fellow had been a preacher himself for decades before taking on the accountabilities of teaching preaching to others. The young man considered the old one his mentor.



Rich Mussler After the service, the two went to dinner together at a fine restaurant. The young preacher was hoping to gain feedback about his sermon, maybe even some praise because he'd worked hard preparing it. But first, the professor spoke of the weather and how pleasant it had been in recent weeks. Then, over dinner, they visited about mutual acquaintances. Finally, as dessert was being served, and now practically bursting with anticipation, the young preacher blurted: "Tell me! What did you think of my sermon today?"

The older gentleman held his tongue until after the waiter left. Then he said, quietly: "It was a poor sermon. Very poor, indeed."

The younger man was stunned. His mouth fell open. "A poor sermon? I worked on it six weeks, researching every word just knowing you'd be here today."

His mentor said, "I've no doubt about that."

The young man searched for understanding. He asked, "Well, didn't you think my explanation of the text was good?"

"Oh, yes," said the aged professor. "Very good."

"Well, then, why do you say it was a poor sermon? Didn't you think my metaphors were appropriate? And the arguments sound?"

"Yes, they were very good as far as that goes," the old man said. "But still, it was a very poor sermon."

The young preacher rested his elbows on the table and scratched his chin, thinking a moment, then gave a little shrug. "Why?" he asked. "What made it a poor sermon?"

"Because," the professor said, "there was no Christ in it."

"Oh," the younger man said, his spine straightening. He was relieved! "Well, that explains it. Christ was not in the text. I preached from an Old Testament passage."

The professor shook his head slowly and sighed deeply. "I'm afraid we failed you in seminary."

Now, the young preacher was truly confused. "I don't understand," he said.

The old gentleman shifted then into teaching mode. "Ever heard the old adage, 'All roads lead to Rome?'"

"Of course," his pupil said. "It's from ancient days when Rome was literally the center of the known world."

"Ah!" said the old professor. "Then you can see. From every text of Scripture, there is a road that leads to Jesus. When you prepare your

sermon, my dear brother, your job is to uncover that road, and map it. And when you preach your sermon, you must become the road signs on the highway that direct those who are lost to the very center of our world, Jesus Christ.

“My friend, I’ve never found a passage of Scripture that did not point to Jesus, and if I ever do, I shall pave the highway myself, plowing through ditches and over hedges as necessary, to get to my Master. For a sermon that has no Christ in it is a very poor one, indeed.”

What makes this story a good one is that you can easily prove its truth to yourself.

Go and see a sick friend in the hospital, one who is dying, and talk to him about politics. Your friend will tell you, “I don’t concern myself with that nonsense anymore.” Or visit with him about the weather, how we haven’t had much rain this year. Your dying friend will say, “Man, I don’t care if it rains or pours.” Introduce the most intriguing bit of gossip you can think of; it won’t hold your dying friend’s interest.

But sit at his bedside, and pull out your Bible. Read a brief passage to him, and then explain how it points to Jesus, and you’ll see something most interesting happen before your very eyes. He may be very near gone, this friend of yours, almost unconscious, but at the mention of Jesus, even just a whisper of his precious soul-reviving, eternal life-assuring name, and you will see a fading eye glisten, and blink, and then focus, and his graying cheeks will flush, and your dying friend will say, though barely audible: “Tell me more.”

Rich Mussler is the author of [Bad Christian: What God Taught Me](#), available on Amazon. He adapted this essay from a [tale told by Charles Spurgeon](#) in 1859.