

No Female Preachers? No Tongues? No Denominational Stereotypes!

✖ Addressing a congregation with long-held beliefs that it's shameful for a woman to speak in church isn't the most comfortable assignment.

That's especially true when it's in a church that's more than 120 years old and where most in the audience are near-Centenarians. But that was my task last Saturday afternoon.

I wouldn't have accepted the invitation to speak in a historic denominational setting that doesn't approve of women with short hair who wear pants to church and pray in tongues—all three of those characteristics describe me well—but it was my grandfather's memorial service.

To be sure, if my mother hadn't asked me to speak after an old gospel hymn and in between two mature male pastors, this big city girl would have never invaded that small country town with the gospel of Christ. I expected weeping, but I hoped against gnashing of teeth as I waited for the hymns to end. In other words, I wasn't expecting the best. (Read: lion's den.) I decided to trust God. And the righteous are as bold as a lion. I stood behind that old pulpit and preached to those old pews. And I am glad I did.

What I learned was that when the Holy Spirit shows up, denominational barriers must fall. When God breathes on a message, stereotypes can't stand up to it. When the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted, all men truly are drawn to Him. And when God opens your mouth, no man can shut it—and those who love God don't want to anyway. But I also learned something about myself and the eternal importance of being a good and faithful servant. Allow me to back up a few steps so you can get the

whole picture.

See, my grandfather died a slow, painful death. I don't understand why believers sometimes have to endure that kind of suffering at the end of their lives—and it's especially hard for the family to watch. Some suggested he might be holding on until he heard from me and that I should call and speak to him. Of course, he couldn't speak, he couldn't eat, he couldn't open his eyes. But he could hear.

Discerning how vital this encounter could be, I asked the Lord to give me the words to say. I could have easily told him how much I loved him and how I looked forward to seeing him again in glory. (And I did.) But I needed a rhema word from God to share. I petitioned God—and He answered me swiftly. He said, "Tell him, well done, good and faithful servant." With that, I called from Miami and my mother put the speakerphone up to my grandfather's ear. I delivered the message and family members told me his eyebrows shot straight up. He heard me. He heard the Lord. He died shortly thereafter. And he undoubtedly got to hear those same words from the King Himself as he entered into the joy of the Lord.

Now jump back with me to the memorial service. The Holy Spirit told me to read the Parable of the Talents. You know the story. The Lord went on a long journey and left His goods with His own servants. To one He gave five talents, to another two and to another one. The first two servants traded with them and reaped 100 percent profits. The other servant dug a hole in the ground because he was too scared to use his talent. We know the end of the story: the two who drove kingdom profits were rewarded as good and faithful servants. The lazy servant had a sorry ending.

I read the parable to this denominational congregation and did my level best to illustrate how my grandfather fulfilled the role of a good and faithful servant. My grandfather wasn't an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher. But he went

about doing good and he was a faithful husband, father, friend, deacon and disciple of Christ. I told my listeners that you don't have to be a Billy Graham or a Joyce Meyer to qualify as a good and faithful servant. You don't have to impact the whole world. You just have to impact your world.

At the end of my message, I challenged these denominational believers, in love, to come up higher, to be an example of Christ to the next generation, to be good and faithful servants so that one day they, too, could hear the same words my grandfather heard when he stood before the Lord: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matt. 25:23).

Honestly, I was shocked by the reaction. When the service was over, almost everyone—men and women alike—came up to me to tell me how the message impacted them. Some of them told me I should go into the ministry (they didn't know I already had). Others asked me if I had my own church (me? a single mother with short hair and long pants who prays in tongues?). It was a gratifying experience on one hand, and an extremely humbling one on the other.

Besides learning that when the Holy Spirit shows up, denominational barriers must fall; that when God breathes on a message, stereotypes can't stand up to it; that when the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted, all men truly are drawn to Him; and that when God opens your mouth, no man can shut it, I learned something about myself—and some of my Spirit-filled contemporaries. I learned that it's time for charismatics like myself to stop buying into those old stereotypes and allowing them to dictate our relationships. In fact, I had to repent because I was the one guilty of stereotyping. These old denominationalists made me feel more welcome in the end than some in my own camp. Imagine that.

And I learned one more thing in watching the life and death of

my grandfather: Being a good and faithful servant is the highest calling of a believer, no matter what denomination or fellowship we align with. We accomplish that high calling by loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

So what about you? Like I told the congregants at my grandfather's memorial: I'm sure you are doing good. Could you do more good as unto the Lord? I am sure you are faithful. Could you be more faithful to the purposes of God? Could you leave some of those old stereotypes behind and build bridges instead of walls in the Body of Christ to advance the Kingdom for the glory of God?

In eternity, earthly denominations, genders and stereotypes aren't going to matter. Your reputation as a good and faithful servant, on the other hand, will be priceless.

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