

Why I stopped preaching on wearing your “Sunday best”

BY DAVID POSEY

For many years, even extending into my early years here at Folsom, I preached the standard “bring your best” sermon. I appealed to Malachi 1, where the prophet upbraids Judah because they failed to bring their best sacrifices, and were generally bored with the assembly (1:13).

In making application, I spoke about singing our best, about getting enough rest on Saturday night so you were alert in the Sunday classes and assembly and studying your lesson ahead of time; in other words, “*bring your best!*”

But often, another aim of these lessons was to talk about what we *wear* to the assembly. It would go something like this: since we are coming at the appointed time to worship God and since we are offering our “sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13:15) in these assemblies, and since we are presenting our bodies as “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1), then we should wear our best clothing as evidence that we are “bringing our best.”

I don’t preach these lessons anymore. It’s not because I don’t think we should dress appropriately; I certainly do. It’s not because I think there is anything wrong with wearing a nice suit or dress; I certainly don’t.

I stopped preaching the “bring your best” equals “wear nice clothes” sermon for three reasons. First, I decided that using Malachi 1 to teach about what we wear is an inappropriate use of that text and, in fact, minimizes the impact of it. What the Jews were doing in Malachi’s day was so egregious that God tells them to *shut the door to the meeting place* (1:10). The people had become cold and irreverent in their service to God. It wasn’t a clothing problem; that trivializes the real problem that Malachi was seeking to correct. It was a *heart* problem. Using it to make a point about clothing did not meet the I Peter 4:11 test for me.

A second reason I stopped preaching it is because, whether intended or not, the idea of “bringing your best” means “wear nice clothes.” But how do we define “nice” clothes? My definition of “nice” clothing may differ from others. If we equate “nice” with “best” — who are we to judge what is someone else’s best?

A third reason I decided it wasn’t an appropriate use of sermon time is that I wasn’t being consistent — and the few people who were urging me to preach these sermons were not consistent either. We “brought our best” to the Sunday morning assembly (suit & tie; or nice dress) but on Sunday evening it was different — we dressed more casually (presumably, not “our best”). Why was that? If the principle that we should wear our “best” to our assemblies is true, then why not on Sunday night? I began to notice that

other preachers who beat this “wear your best” drum pretty hard also were “dressing down” (i.e., “casually”) at other service times.

I’ve always been a stickler for intellectual consistency and I decided that I couldn’t preach a sermon about “wearing one’s best” and be consistent about it either biblically or personally.

I can preach that we are to come to each assembly with our hearts and minds prepared to worship God and learn more about how to emulate Christ. If we do that, everything else will fall into place. Our clothing will be modest and appropriate, as will our attitude and demeanor.