

Basics of Expository Preaching – MTC April 2014

Shaping the Sermon

Two parts of preaching: (1) Getting it right + (2) Getting it across

Getting it across

Group study – Col. 4:2-4

- What is the content and Paul's chief desire as he preaches?

Our job is not entertainment or interest or working people into a frenzy
And it's not to be popular by saying things that people want to hear

1. A ministry of love

“I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:8)

“we were like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thess. 2:7-9)

Paul is not communicating to make himself look good or clever or to please people – he communicates out of love.

How will love shape the way we communicate? [with more time or a smaller group you can get people to contribute suggestions here]

- We'll not threaten and hit people. We'll not speak to people as 'you' but include ourselves ('I', 'me' 'we', 'us') as fellow sinners.
- We'll not have selfish motives to build our own ego or bank balance but be wanting to have a ministry of giving (Acts 20:32-35).
- We'll be **praying** for people as we prepare and as we come to speak, that the Word would come home to them.
- We'll put good time into **preparation** – wrestling with the text – that is loving – people might not see it or notice it or congratulate us – but that it loving.
- We'll love people enough to say the **hard things**. We're not using them to pump our egos. We are free from needing their approval. We can genuinely love them by bringing them the Word.
- We'll think about how to communicate in a way that they can receive. Not just talk to get things out of our head but to get them into someone else's. **Accommodating** language, style, vocabulary. Communication is like passing a ball in football or rugby – I want to give a sympathetic pass that is easy to receive.
- We'll speak **patiently** and gently (2 Tim. 4:2;).
- We'll really care that the word is understood and work really hard at being **clear**:

2. Struggling to be clear

- a) Style - Be as plain as possible – Use weighty language for weighty things but avoid a long word when a short one will do – It's not about flair or oratory – be happy to be

thought 'simple' or 'unsophisticated' or even rude so long as you are making the Scriptures as plain and clear (and often blunt and gritty) as they are.

b) Vocabulary – get rid of all churchy jargon and cliché

c) Avoiding misunderstanding:

“The gospel heard is different from the Gospel preached”, said Walter Freytag.
How do our listeners understand key terms such as God, Spirit, Sin, Grace, Redemption etc.
E.g. The blood of Jesus Christ (Have you stopped to consider the popular prayer of covering food, persons and property with the blood of Christ?)
As we preach and teach, we must keep asking ourselves how the Christian key words and phrases are understood by our African listeners. We should bring into confrontation the authentic Biblical meaning and the possible local re-interpretation. This will help our listeners filter out pagan and animistic concepts which many Africans sitting in our pews still hold very firmly.
(Steven Musa-Kormayea)

This might mean we have to say what we don't mean.

d) Illustrations

- In a narrative you will hardly need them – just bring out the tension and drama of the story itself. Retelling it in the present tense and with some more updated language can help it to live.
- If you do need to illustrate then save it for the main points and particularly the difficult points to grasp – don't just illustrate because you can
- Do them at end of preparation process
- Clear, short, everyday (e.g. from the market or matatu of family life, not from contexts far away or long ago that will take ages to explain), vivid

e) Visual aids – for children's talks this can be helpful but be very careful:

- There is a danger that the image sticks in people's heads as the only image of this biblical scene or person. Particularly dangerous with images of Jesus – mzungu with long hair.
- We need to fight against our visual age which assumes that the visual is more powerful (and more entertaining) than the spoken/written word.
- Biblical religion has always challenged the prevailing visual culture of idolatry and gives us a God revealed through words (e.g. Deut. 4:15-24; John 1).
- Yes God did use visual things to teach of Christ (e.g. the snake on the pole) but the danger (and often reality) was the worship of those physical signs.
- The real blessedness is for those who have not seen and yet believe on the basis of the written word (John 20:29-31).
- In fact word pictures are more powerful than visual images which fail to deliver the full glory and reality of spiritual things (cf. the attempt to draw pictures of the things in the book of Revelation).

f) Cross-references – use very sparingly indeed it at all – just when really needed to show the background (e.g. Gen. 3:15 as a background to Joshua 10:24) or NT

fulfilment (e.g. Col. 2:15 as the fulfilment of Gen. 3:15 etc.) – be careful as a) very easily we start moving away from our focus on the main passage and introducing other thoughts; b) make us look clever; c) hard to follow; d) listeners are unable to be Bereans and check context. We want to hear the main passage so just use one or two cross-references just to illuminate the main text.

- g) Personal testimony, anecdotes and stories
 - Sparingly – we want to hear the story of the text not our stories
 - Not as distractions that take us away from the text but for illumination
 - We don't preach ourselves but Christ (2 Cor. 4:5)
 - If personal they should show weakness not strength (2 Cor. 11:30)
 - If is not about us (John 3:30)
- h) Quotations from other authors – v. sparingly – may be helpful to capture something very clearly or to show the evil of the world – but our authority is the Word not the commentator or scholar, we mustn't teach like scribes and Pharisees.
- i) Using Greek and Hebrew words – don't do it! Don't want to take Bible out of hands of the believer in the pew.

3. The value of structure

- a) Of the whole talk – we don't want to be prescriptive or restrictive here – it doesn't have to be three points – it doesn't even need to be points but there must be some kind of clear road map, some sort of route through with some kind of signposting for the listener so they know where they are. Without a structure it just becomes a ramble or a rant. (Or as a body without a skeleton it becomes a jellyfish.)
The Bible uses structure (e.g. repeated phrases or groups of three or seven or ten or 'bookends' or mirror/chiasm structures) because it was written in an oral culture and that helps the listeners to follow and remember.

Ways to get a structure:

- Follow the structure of the passage – this is often the best thing to do – with a narrative there'll often be a natural division of the 'scenes' in the text. With Matthew 6 you find a big idea and then three concrete examples.
- Break down the Big Idea or Theme or Aim sentence into its logical steps. E.g. If my big idea for 2 Kings 5 was "The broadness, narrowness and freeness of the grace of God" then it would make sense to look at each of the three elements in turn – they might roughly occur in that order in the text but they would overlap a good deal.
- Do two or three 'runs' through the text. Sometimes with a story (or a Psalm) it might be best to go through the whole thing at different levels. E.g. 1st run through just getting an idea of what happened at the time, feeling the action and the tension. 2nd run through seeing what this would have meant for the people of Judah looking back on it in years to come. 3rd run through seeing how it is fulfilled in Jesus and what it means therefore for us.

The key thing, whatever structure you go for, is that you have one and that you are clear how each point or section within that structure contributes to the whole. You want all your guns pointed at the main target. If a point doesn't really contribute to the big point then either you've got the big idea wrong or it's a side point you can just drop it.



b) Within each part

Sometimes we have an overall structure (4 points or whatever) but we don't think about what we will say within each of those sections – we're just thinking, "I'll say something about the broadness of God's love, then something about the narrowness, then say a bit about the freeness of grace." And the danger is that we ramble within each section and don't make the points clearly.

One way many people have found helpful is something like this:

- STATE – POINT – EXPLAIN – GROUND (SPEG)
- STATE: Say what the point is – a clear, brief, memorable, accurate phrase
- POINT: Show us where exactly in the text you are getting these things from (cf. Acts 17:2: "reasoning from the Scriptures")
- EXPLAIN: Make it clear, using illustrations and cross-references if necessary
- GROUND: Bring, it home, apply the point, show how this aspect of the gospel makes a difference to how we think, feel and live
- And then move on to the next point

4. Preaching One Thing

• Sharpen the stick

To plant a broom handle in the ground is very difficult unless you whittle it to a very sharp point.

It is very powerful to communicate one thing (the big message the passage is giving you) clearly.

Be ruthless with material, get it very clear. Leave most of your preparation and workings on the desk.

But don't lose the details – that's what gives it the cutting edge

• Keep it together

Perhaps have a 'running illustration' through the talk (though be careful that this doesn't control the text)

Keep bringing us back to the main point – keep banging the drum of the Big Idea throughout your talk – at the end of each section you can show how it is bringing out the big thing

• Pushing it home –

Not lecturing (Acts 17) – get us to application and get that application in under the skin.

Plead, urge – not emotionalism or performance but genuine passion for what is being preached and concern for the hearer. Truth through personality – be yourself.

Close off all the options till there's only one place to go.

It is the Word that has the power to cut to the heart (Heb. 4) not our words so make your sermon full of the Word, leaving it ringing in our ears.

5. Beginning and ending well

In the **introduction**:

- Why should we listen? 30 seconds to grab us.
- Start by showing the relevance - it *will* be relevant – if we've spent plenty of time working on the big idea and the primary application we will have started to see how massively relevant this is in our day and place.
- Raise the question/issue which the rest of the sermon will answer.
- Imagine you are a waiter at a restaurant: list the specials or give us a starter to whet our appetite for the main course. (Of course you then have to deliver!)
- Get us quickly into the text.

In the **conclusion**:

- Don't introduce a new thought at the end.
- Tie it all together – what was the one thing I was trying to say
- Answer the question raised at the beginning.
- Imagine you are landing a plane or stopping a car: don't just crash to an instant stop at the end of your talk but don't be slowing down so slowly that it feels like we're going on forever – bring the sermon smoothly to a stop at its destination.
- Don't be predictable. We don't need to always have an 'altar call' (hopefully the whole sermon has been a presenting of Christ for us to receive) or always try to tie up every loose end. Maybe helpful to leave things hanging a bit – What will you do? Eg. end of Jonah or the end of Isaiah or the end to the Sermon on the Mount.

Text to sermon work plan:

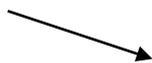
Do the basics well

§ PRAY, PRAY, PRAY (2 Tim. 2:7)

§ Establish the Big Idea

What is the one thing the writer is trying to tell his readers?

Be Christ-centred



§ Establish the aim

What effect does the writer want this to have on his readers?

Think GOSPEL

§ Determine your main teaching points

How does each one flow out of the text?

How does each one support the Big Idea?

Be Christ-centred



§ Clarify your applications

How should this move us?

How will this impact different groups and situations?

Think GOSPEL