

Life Changing, Christ-Centered, Biblical Preaching

Mark A. Finley

Roy Alan Anderson in his book, *The Shepherd Evangelist*, tells the story of a preacher visiting a prison a day or so before he was scheduled to preach to the prisoners. As they toured the prison, the prison warden took the preacher into the chapel. The preacher noticed four chairs draped in black and inquired about them. "Oh! The warden replied they are the chairs the inmates on death row will be seated in. These men will be executed next week." Do you mean that mine will be the last message they ever hear? "That's right preacher! The thought of preaching to dying men sobered this old preacher. He went home and ripped up his sermon and started over again.

The apostle Paul puts it this way, "For since in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." (1 Corinthians 1:21) For the New Testament writers preaching is an event through that God works through to transform lives. There is a divine power that flows through the preached Word of God that is humanly unexplainable. Haddon Robinson, one of the great expository preachers of our day makes this insightful statement, "Preaching in Paul's mind did not consist of a man discussing religion. Instead God Himself spoke through the personality and message of the preacher to confront men and women and bring them to himself." (Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, page 150) He continues, "Yet

when a preacher fails to preach the scriptures, he abandons his authority. He confronts his hearers with a word from God but only with another word from men, therefore most modern preaching evokes little more than a wide yawn. God is not in it."

The apostle Peter declared that we are "born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible through the Word of God which lives and abides forever." (1 Peter 1:23) He continues, "The grass withers, the flower fades but the Word of God abides forever. Now this is the Word by which the gospel was preached to you." (1 Peter 1:24, 25)

John Stott's All Souls Church in Langham Place off Regent Street in London... At a time when British Churches were empty young professionals were flocking to All Souls to hear John Stott preach." As Stott asserts, "**Christianity is, in its very essence, a religion of the Word of God. No attempt to understand Christianity can succeed which overlooks or denies the truth that the living God has taken the initiative to reveal himself savingly to fallen humanity; or that his self-revelation has been given by the most straightforward means of communication known to us, namely by word and words.**" He spoke through the Prophets. He spoke supremely through His Son, the Word made flesh, and He continues to speak through His Spirit. 2. "It is God's speech which makes our speech necessary. We must speak what he has spoken." (Stott, p. 15)

Acts and the Preached Word

The preached Word is mentioned more than twenty times in the book of Acts. Here are just a few examples.

1. **Acts 4:31... “And when they had prayed the place where they were assembled together was shaken and; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness.(Confidence)**
2. **Acts 5:42... “And daily in the temple and every house they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”**
3. **Acts 8:4... “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word.”**
4. **Acts 13:38... “Therefore let it be known to you brethren, that through this Man is preached forgiveness of sins and by Him everyone who believes is justified...”**

In the New Testament the powerful, biblical preaching of the Word changed lives. The Word of God has lost none of its power. When it is proclaimed from Spirit-filled men and women of God it still changes lives. Seeking people still long for a message of certainty from God's Word.

One of the foremost researchers and church growth experts in America today is Thom Rainer. His team as done extensive research on the unchurched. One of the questions they asked in the research questioner to people who had dropped out of the Christian church and returned was, “What led you to come back to the church?” Their

responses were extremely consistent and equally surprising. They are recorded in Rainer's book titled, "**Surprising Insights From The Unchurched**".

What Factors led you to choose this Church?

Pastor/ Preaching 90 %

Doctrines 88%

Friendliness of Members 49%

Worship Style Music 12%

How do these Pastors connect through Preaching?

- Biblical
- Relevant
- Transparent
- Illustrative
- Well-prepared

Jesus and the Preached Word

1. Jesus preaching was the overflow of a life of devotion: Mark 1:35-39.

Haydon Robinson "'Ultimately God is more interested in developing messengers than messages, and since the Holy Spirit confronts men primarily through the Bible, a preacher must learn to listen to God before he speaks for Him." p. 26

- a. The preacher cannot be a disinterested bystander in the process of preaching. In fact, Robinson makes the bold assertion that "God's dealing with the preacher is at the center of the process." p. 24 .
- b. When a preacher prepares a biblical sermon, God prepares the preacher. As he studies the Bible, the Holy Spirit studies him.
- c. Until a preacher has allowed the message of the text to touch his own life, he has no right to preach it to others. He will be exposed as a fraud. He must speak with first-hand language, both verbally and non-verbally.

John Stott's comment is extremely meaningful here.

"I have always found it helpful to do as much of my sermon preparation as possible on my knees, with my Bible open before me, in prayerful study. This is not because I am a bibliolater and worship the Bible; but

because I worship the God of the Bible and desire to humble myself before him and his revelation, and, even while I am giving my mind to the study of the text, to pray earnestly that the eyes of my heart may be enlightened. (Ephesians 1:18)" (p. 222)

2. **Jesus preaching was with authority because at its heart it was solidly biblical...There was a certainty about it... Notice these references in the Sermon on the Mount...**

Matthew 6:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43...Matthew 7:28,29.

3. **Jesus preaching constantly expanded the text of scripture and practically applied it. (See Jesus Bread of life sermon in John 6.)**

“ The Bible has been robbed of its power, and the results are seen in a lowering of the tone of spiritual life. In the sermons from many pulpits of today there is not that divine manifestation which awakens the conscience and brings life to the soul. The hearers cannot say, **“Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?” Luke 24:32.** There are many who are crying out for the living God, longing for the divine presence.

Philosophical theories or literary essays, however brilliant, cannot satisfy the heart. The assertions and inventions of men are of no value. **Let the word of God speak to the people.** Let those who have heard only traditions and human theories and maxims hear the voice of Him whose word can renew the soul unto everlasting life. (COL 40)

Christ's favorite theme was the paternal tenderness and abundant grace of God; He dwelt much upon the holiness of His character and His law; He presented Himself to the people as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Let these be the themes of Christ's ministers. **Present the truth as it is in Jesus. Make plain the requirements of the law and the gospel.** Tell the people of Christ's life of self-denial and sacrifice; of His humiliation and death; of His resurrection and ascension; of His intercession for them in the courts of God; of His promise, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself." John 14:3. (COL 40)

4. Jesus preaching had a sense of prophetic destiny...See Luke 24:44...This is also true of the disciples preaching see Peter's sermon in Acts 2...Stephen's sermon in Acts 7 and Paul's message in Acts 13:27-52

In each of these messages there is a sense of urgency.

5. Jesus preaching was filled with practical illustrations that were understandable to the people. (See Parables of Luke 15... see Matthew 25)

6. Jesus preaching was focused on making an appeal. (See Matthew 4:19, John 6:63)

7. His preaching was filled with hope.

a) Canaanite Women: Great is your faith. (Matthew 15:28)

- b) Roman Soldier: I have not found such faith even in Israel... (Matthew 8:10)
- c) Scribe: "You are not far from the kingdom of God." (Mark 12:24)

Illustration: I was getting up to preach and a man slipped me a note. The note said, "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell my people their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins." (Isaiah 58:1)

I took the piece of paper and scribbled on it, "Comfort, yes comfort ye my people." (Isaiah 40:1)

Certainly there is a place to point out sin but the main function of preaching is to give God's people hope. "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning that we through the patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4)

1. The power of preaching is the power of God's Word. See Hebrews 4:16.

2. God's Word contains creative power. Psalm 33:6,9

“The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is in the word of God. This word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature and re-creates the soul in the image of God. (Ed 126)

3. When we preach the Word of God, creation takes place all over again. 2 Corinthians 5:17

4. “One sentence of Scripture is of more value than ten thousand of man's ideas or arguments.” (7T,pg.71)

SERMON PREPARATION

Types of Sermons

- 1. Biographical....Moses....The Best Is Yet to Come
Daniel... Courage for the Crisis
Joseph.... Triumph in Trials
Esther Seizing the Moment**
- 2. The Teachings of Jesus... Parables...Luke 15
Matthew 25**
- 3. The Miracles of Jesus ... Mark 4:35-39;5:1-43
(Jesus is victorious over Disaster, Demons, Disease and
Death)**
- 4. Topical... Faith, Hope, Love
The Hands of Christ
The Face of Christ
The Feet of Christ**

**Roads in the New Testament
The Jericho Road...The Good Samaritan
The Via Delarosa ... the Way of the Cross
The Emmaus Road... The Resurrection Story
The Gaza Road ... The Ethiopian Eunuch
The Damascus Road... Paul's Conversion**

**Great Mountains in the Bible
Mount Sinai.... A Sermon on the Law**

Mount Carmel... A Sermon on Faithfulness to God
Mount of Beatitudes: A Sermon on Attitudes
Mount Tabor ... A Sermon on the Transfiguration
Mount of Olives....A Sermon on Gethsemane
Mount Calvary...A Sermon on the Cross
Mount of Olives...A Sermon on the Ascension

5. Exegetical.... Letting the Text speak

In expository preaching we ask three questions.

1. What is the cultural, historical background of this passage?
2. What did this passage mean to its original hearers?
3. What is the linguistic meaning of the significant words in the text?
4. What is God saying to us through the text today?

Illustration with the book of Colossians.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Preparing Your Sermon

1. Seek God for a message from God for His people.

2. Select a passage of scripture or a topic to preach on.
3. Read the text in multiple versions of the Bible
4. Read the SDA Commentary, Ellen White Comments and some reliable conservative Bible Commentaries on the text or subject.
5. Take notes while you are studying your passage/topic.
 - a. I tend to have a stack of plain paper on my desk as I am preparing for a sermon. As I read and am impressed with thoughts, I simply write them down.
 - b. After studying the topic or Biblical passage and writing multiple pages of notes a pattern will begin to emerge.
6. Don't worry about organizing your notes at this point. Just write down the meaningful thoughts that the Holy Spirit brings to your mind.
7. If a good illustration comes to mind while you are studying for your message write it down. You may not use it but it is better to have more material for a message than less.

Chinese proverb: He is the eloquent man who turns his hearers' ears into eyes, and makes them see what he speaks of." (Stott, p. 239)

Stott notes that "illustrations transform the abstract into the concrete, the ancient into the modern, the unfamiliar into the familiar, the vague into the precise, the unreal into the real, and the invisible into the visible. p. 239

The best illustrations come from your own life experience.

There are some good illustration books. I like Tan's 7700 Illustrations. I also use web page called "Sermon Illustrations."

- 8.** Now you are ready to write out a single sentence summary of your sermon. What main point do you want to communicate?
- 9.** Write or type your outline from your notes.
- 10.** Once you have an outline then use your outline to write a manuscript.

Now Ask These Questions:

1. **What is the single most important thought that I want my audience to take away from my sermon?**

“ Haydon Robinson quotes from the Yale lectures of J.H. Jowett, which are right on target: **"No sermon is ready for preaching, not ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal. I find that the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labor in my study....I do not think any sermon ought to be preached or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon.** John Stott affirms this assertion in *Between Two Worlds* when he says **"the sermon, as a living word from God to his people, should make its impact on them, then and there. They will not remember the details. We should not expect (them) to do so. But they should remember THE DOMINANT THOUGHT because all the sermon's details have been marshalled to help them grasp its message and feel its power."** p. 225

2. **What difference will this sermon make in the lives of the hearers? This is the So What Question.**
3. **What action do I want my audience to take?**
4. **What decision will I call for?**

SERMONIC WORK SHEETS

1. Read the following passage: Hebrews 2:14-14.

a) Write your one sentence proposition that summarizes the entire passage? What is the dominant theme of the text? What difference does that make? How does it apply to our lives?

b) What central truth do you want to communicate from this passage?

2. What three major points would you like to communicate to your audience from Daniel chapter 1?

3. Answer the following questions from Hebrews 12:1-3

a) What is the sin that does so “easily beset us?”

b) How do we overcome the “sin” that so easily besets us?

c) How did Christ overcome this sin that “easily besets us?”

d) How can I apply these principles to my life and the life of my hearers?

4. Let’s suppose you are preaching on the apostle Paul’s three “not:” statements. Read the passages below and indicate three points and their application from the text.

a) 2 Corinthians 3:4,5

b) 2 Corinthians 4:7-16

c) 2 Corinthians 4:17,18

Making Christ Centered Appeals

1. **Making Appeals is Biblical.** (Genesis 3:9...Revelation 22

a. Expression deepens impression.

Proverbs 16:3..."Commit your works to the Lord and your thoughts will be established."

b. Rehearsing our thoughts strengthens our thoughts.

2. **Making Appeals is Psychologically Sound**

a. Programmed Non Response

b. One Decision Prepares for Others

"It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convince the soul of its need of Christ. Many are convicted of sin, and feel their need of a sin-pardoning Saviour; but they are merely dissatisfied with their pursuits and aims, and if there is not a decided application of the truth to their hearts, if words are not spoken at the right moment, calling for decision from the weight of evidence already presented, the convicted ones pass on without identifying themselves with Christ, the golden opportunity passes, and they have not yielded, and they go farther and farther away from the truth, farther away from Jesus and never take their stand on the Lord's side. (Evangelism, pg 283)

3. **Making Appeals is Effective ...Types of Appeals**

a) Hand Raising

b) Kneeling

c) Standing

d) Card Call

e) Sharing Testimonies

f) Altar Call

g) Combination call

Believe that God is going to use you to touch some life every time you step into the pulpit. Preach with expectation. If you have nothing to say that is life changing do not go into the pulpit. God is raising up a last generation of preachers filled with the Holy Spirit whose messages are life changing.

“The words of Christ were as sharp arrows, which went to the mark and wounded the hearts of His hearers. Every time He addressed the people, whether His audience was large or small, His words took saving effect upon the soul of some one. No message that fell from His lips was lost. Every word He spoke placed a new responsibility upon those who heard. And today the ministers who in sincerity are giving the last message of mercy to the world, relying on God for strength, need not fear that their efforts will be in vain. Although no human eye can see the path of the arrow of truth, who can say that the arrow has not sped to the mark, and pierced the souls of those who listened? Although no human ear has heard the cry of the wounded soul, yet the truth has silently cut its way to the heart. God has spoken to the soul; and in the day of final account, His faithful ministers will stand with the trophies of redeeming grace, to give honor to Christ. (GW 150)

No one can tell what is lost by attempting to preach without the unction of the Holy Spirit. In every congregation there are souls who are hesitating, almost decided to be wholly for God. Decisions are being made; but too often the minister has not the spirit and power of the message, and no direct appeals are made to those who are trembling in the balance. (GW 151)

In this age of moral darkness, it will take something more than dry theory to move souls. Ministers must have a living connection with God. They must preach as if they believe what they say. Living truths, falling from the lips of the man of God, will cause sinners to tremble, and the convicted to cry out, Jehovah is my God; I am resolved to be wholly on the Lord's side. (GW 151)

HOW TO BECOME AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR

There are three major factors in effective communication- logos, pathos and ethos.

1. **Logos:** The content of the message. Logos has to do with substance of what is being said. Enthusiasm and personality will not make up for superficial content that has not cost anything in prayer and study. There is a price for good preaching- that price is time spent in the Word of God. Sermons prepared on Friday night for Sabbath morning will tend to be shallow, superficial and stale. Sermons preached out of the overflow of Biblical study that are carefully thought through and seasoned by the Spirit in the mind will tend to be moving spiritual experiences.
2. **Pathos:** is the passion that the message is preached with. It is the enthusiastic proclamation of a message that means something to you. When the message burns within your heart you cannot wait to tell it tomorrow.

a) Ron Halverson: The Man in the Water... Glacier View

b) Ellen White statement: **On a certain occasion, when Betterton, the celebrated actor, was dining with Dr. Sheldon, archbishop of Canterbury, the archbishop said to him, "Pray, Mr. Betterton, tell me why it is that you actors affect your audiences so powerfully by speaking of things imaginary." "My lord," replied Betterton, "with due submission to Your Grace, permit me to say that the reason is plain: It all lies in the power of enthusiasm. We on the stage speak of**

things imaginary as if they were real, and you in the pulpit speak of things real as if they were imaginary.”
{ CT 255.1}

- c. Ethos:** Is that inner quality of genuineness and sincerity that unites you to the speaker. It is that sense that this person sincerely believes what they are saying. They are genuine, authentic and real. They are not phony and artificial. When Jesus preached even the religious leaders that were in opposition to His teachings declared, “Never a man spoke like this man.” (John 7:46) Commenting on this passage, Ellen White shares this penetrating insight “The witness borne concerning Jesus was, **“The reason that Christ spoke as no other man spoke was that He lived as no other man lived. If He had not lived as He did, He could not have spoken as He did. His words bore with them convincing power, because they came from a heart pure and holy, burdened with love and sympathy, beneficence and truth.... (HP 237)**

William Barclay made this thought provoking statement, “The more a man allows His mind to become to grow slack and lazy and flabby, the less the Holy Spirit can say to him. True preaching comes when the loving heart and the disciplined mind are laid at the disposal of the Holy Spirit.”

As one author said, “God is more interested in developing messengers than messages.” The power of preaching depends on the power of the Holy Spirit moving through the proclaimed Word to change lives. In their epic volume, *The Steps to a Sermon*, the authors rightly state “No

sermon can be delivered in spiritual power apart from the presence of God's Spirit. There is no conflict between preparation and the work of the Spirit. Preachers must prepare as if preaching depended entirely on them but they must go to the pulpit as dependent on God as if preaching had nothing to do with preparation. The most carefully prepared sermon becomes ashes in the mouth of the preacher without God's dynamic presence. But if God is there in the moment of delivery, as in the moment of study, the sermon is reborn. It becomes alive with dynamic power." (Steps to the Sermon, Brown, Clinard, Northcutt, Fasol, pg.223)

W.H. Criswell

When I walked into the pulpit — maybe poor English, maybe faulty construction, maybe homiletically unsound, there I stood — as I was — and what I could do — that I did say and preach in the power of the Spirit for ‘I was in the spirit on the Lord’s Day.’”

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**AS YOU WALK INTO THE PULPIT
MAY YOUR MIND BE SATURATED
WITH THE WORD,**

**MAY YOUR HEART BE FILLED
WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD,**

**MAY YOUR EMOTIONS BE
OVERWHELMED WITH A LOVE
FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

AND

**MAY YOU PASSIONATELY
DELIVER A LIFECHANGING
MESSAGE GIVEN TO YOU BY GOD**

**THAT WILL MAKE AN ETERNAL
DIFFERENCE FOR GOD.**