

TheWordWorks

Expository Preaching Module 1

Giving the Talk - An overview of the sermon preparation process

Aim of this module

To have an overview of a¹ process for preparing an expository sermon from scratch

Recap

See modules “What is expository preaching?”, “The basic shape of an expository sermon” and “The Big Idea of a bible book and why it matters”

The Process (using an example from a sermon on Colossians 2:8-23)

STEP 1

Work out the big idea of the book and the big idea of the passage you’re preaching from.
(Using the skills picked up from the “General Bible Handling Training” modules).

Here are some things you’ll do within Step 1:

- a. Write down questions about anything in the passage you don’t understand. This could be:**
 - An obscure phrase/word (e.g. *elemental forces of the world* in Col 2:8, the *circumcision of the Messiah* in Col 2:11)
 - A place name that the author emphasises but you don’t know the significance of (esp in Old Testament narratives)
 - The logic of the argument the author makes (e.g. Why, in this warning passage (Col 2:8-23) about not being taken captive by false teachers, does Paul emphasise who Christ is and what he’s done for the Christian (2:9-15)?)

- b. The first stop in resolving the questions is always the context.**
 - Is the obscure phrase/word used elsewhere in the book which sheds more light on its meaning?
 - Can I discern the logic of the argument by seeing what linking words are used? (e.g. the “For” in Vs 9, the “Therefore” in Vs 16).

- c. Commentaries can be consulted for unresolved questions.**

Sometimes, the commentator observes something in the context I haven’t. Sometimes, the commentator knows the Old Testament background to a phrase that I don’t. Sometimes, the commentator lays out the logic more clearly than I can discern. The important thing is to consult

¹ The process outline in this module is one process amongst many possible processes. For new preachers however, it is useful to have some starting process to work with and then modify it along the way. It is in this spirit that this module presents its material.

commentaries for specific questions you have after you have worked hard on the text, not before.

At the end of STEP 1, I write down the Big Idea of the passage. It looks something like this:

Main point: You have it all because you've been filled by the all-supreme Christ (Vs 9-10) and you're a new-flesh, forgiven person because of Jesus' death and resurrection (Vs 11-15). The false teachers make empty promises about having it all (see situation).

Purpose: Don't be kidnapped by these false teachers! (Vs 8)

Situation: False teachers were insisting that in order to grow as Christians (i.e. battle successfully against the flesh and get closer to God), the Colossians needed to abide by Old Testament practices (Vs 16-17) and live ascetic lives that promote mystic access to God via angels (Vs 18-23)

STEP 2

Write down the outline of the sermon.

The 5-part outline suggested in the Module "The basic shape of an expository sermon" is reproduced here:

Part 1: Introduction - Describe the current day situation

Part 2: Show how the original situation is similar to the current day situation

Part 3: State the author's purpose

Part 4: How author achieves his purpose (i.e. by teaching the Main point)

Part 5: Drive home purpose into the current day situation as described in the introduction

In this step, I try to do the following 2 things:

- a. Give each part of the outline a rough title which reflects the basic content of that part. The titles don't have to be very polished. It just needs to convey the content of that part for now.
- b. Under each part, write down, in point-form, ideas for developing the points, illustrations, applications

At the end of STEP 2, I have a basic outline with some notes to myself about how to flesh out each point in the outline. It looks something like this:

What we want:

- Talk about every Christian's desire for growth
- We seek growth in different ways (give examples...some wrong ways as well)

The Colossian situation

- 2 ways to grow on offer: Paul and false teachers

Paul's aim (Vs 8)

- Don't be kidnapped by false teachers (purpose)
- Talk in general terms about what is wrong (human wisdom/philosophy) but say will give more details later

[Body of sermon is the main point: the 2 reasons why they are not to be kidnapped]

1. Cos you already have it all in Jesus! (Vs 9-15)

- a. You have Jesus who has the fullness of God's nature (Vs 9-10)
 - Explain the logic here: False teachers saying "You can have more". Paul "If you have Jesus, you already have everything!"
- b. You've a new, forgiven person! (Vs 11-15)
 - Explain circumcision of the Messiah = spiritual circumcision performed on them by the messiah = cutting away of sin-enslaved nature
 - Vs 15 – disarming the rulers/authorities is via forgiveness through the cross
 - Bring in Deut 30:4-6 about circumcised hearts?

2. Cos they're selling empty promises! (Vs 16-23)

- a. Christ-less religious practices (Vs 16-17)
 - Illustration: Wayang Kulit?
 - Modern day examples? Going-through-the-motions Lord's supper?
- b. Useless ascetic-mysticism (Vs 18-23)
 - Explain link between ascetic-mysticism. Worship of angels?
 - Emphasise Vs 23 – useless in battling fleshly indulgence!! Only circumcision of the messiah is useful
 - Modern day examples? Sunday best dress code? Insistence on certain spiritual experiences as a marker of intimacy with God?

Apply

Drive home purpose not to be kidnapped by these empty things because we already have Jesus. With Jesus, we have the resources to grow as Christians (battling flesh) and we're already as intimate with God as we can be.

STEP 3

Listen to 1-2 online expository sermons on the same passage by faithful preachers.

This is an invaluable step in getting trained as an expository preacher. It is to compare the fruit of your work with the fruit of their work. This way, you can see the gaps in your interpretative skill and communication. Sometimes, you'll notice that the preacher you're listening to hasn't picked up something in the text you've picked up. In those situations, have confidence in your reading as long as it can be demonstrated through the text. After all, it is the text that is authoritative, not any human preacher.

As I listen to other preachers, I'm looking out for 3 specific things:

- a. How does their big idea differ from mine?
- b. If there's not much difference in the big idea, how does their outline differ from mine?
- c. What illustrations have they used that I can use in my sermon?

OR

Get your Big idea and outline critiqued by other preachers in your church

As far as is possible, the preachers giving you feedback should have the same understanding of what an expository sermon is. If not, the module "How to give sermon feedback"² can serve as a helpful guide.

STEP 4

Revise the outline (if necessary)

If STEP 3 shows you that you have totally mis-interpreted the passage and gotten the wrong Big idea, then going back to STEP 2 and starting afresh is the way forward.

If STEP 3 confirms your understanding is correct but with minor improvements that will make your sermon even sharper, then revise your outline to reflect the improvements.

It is also at this step that I polish my outline titles.

At the end of STEP 4, I have a more or less final outline with even more notes to myself about how to flesh out each point in the outline. It looks something like this:

² To be published Dec 2019

We want to grow!

Battling the flesh and a deeper experience of God

- Oli (my 5 year old son) always wants to grow
- Talk about every Christian's desire for growth (battle flesh + Intimacy with god)
- We seek growth in different ways (give examples...religious ritual, keeping rules)

The Colossian situation

2 sales pitches

- Paul: Gospel sufficient for growth
- False teachers: More growth if you buy their product. Don't buy → judge you! (Vs 16)

Paul's aim (Vs 8)

Don't be kidnapped!

- State what's wrong (human wisdom/philosophy) but say will give more details later
[Body of sermon is the main point: the 2 reasons why they are not to be kidnapped]

1. Cos you already have it all in Jesus! (Vs 9-15)

a. You've already been filled up Jesus (Vs 9-10)

- Logic: False teachers saying "You can have more". Paul "If you have Jesus, you already have everything!"

b. You've a new, forgiven person! (Vs 11-15)

- Explain circumcision of the Messiah = spiritual circumcision performed on them by the messiah = cutting away of sin-enslaved nature. Christ as spiritual chief surgeon!
- Vs 15 – disarming the rulers is via forgiveness through the cross. Illustration: court of law
- Bring in Deut 30:4-6 about circumcised hearts?

2. Cos they're selling Koyok³! (Vs 16-23)

a. Substances-less religious practices (Vs 16-17)

- Illustration: Wayang Kulit?
- Modern day examples? Going-through-the-motions Lord's Supper? Baptism?

³ A colloquial term referring to a product that promises much but delivers nothing

b. Headless, enslaving and useless ascetic-mysticism (Vs 18-23)

- Explain link between ascetic-mysticism. Worship of angels?
- Paul's verdict: Headless (Vs 19), enslaving (vs 20), useless in battling flesh (vs 23)
 - Modern day examples? Sunday best dress code? Insistence on certain spiritual experiences as a marker of intimacy with God?

Apply

Drive home purpose not to be kidnapped by these empty things because we already have Jesus. With Jesus, we have the resources to grow as Christians (battling flesh) + we're already as intimate with God as we can be.

STEP 5

Write out a quick first draft of the full-text sermon script using the outline from STEP 4

The trick here is to write quickly to get a completed but very rough first full-text script. The reason we do this is that editing a rough draft later is a much easier exercise than to painfully and slowly craft perfect sentences line by line.

During this quick first draft writing, the overall flow and logic of the sermon still follows the outline (which you've spent much time in STEPS 2-4 thinking about). So, don't worry about the overall flow being lost as you write quickly.

As you write the full text, be sure to write the way you speak (short sentences, active voice, sometimes breaking grammatical rules etc). More guidance about writing will be covered under the Module "Writing a sermon script"⁴

At the end of STEP 5, you have the draft full-text sermon script.

⁴ To be published Oct 2019

STEP 6

Edit the first draft full-text script

There are 2 aims in editing.

The first is to eliminate waffle. Waffle is the unintentional repetition of ideas which makes the flow of thought harder to see. Waffle is also using unnecessary words to communicate a point. If you can use 20 words to communicate an idea effectively, using 50 words feels draggy and makes the sermon lose forward momentum.

The second aim is to say the same things better. A better word. A more interesting turn of phrase. An inserted connecting word which makes the relationship between 2 sentences clearer.

At the end of STEP 6, you have the final full-text sermon script

STEP 7

Practice speaking the final script

At this step, you learn the script so that when you deliver the sermon, you will sound as natural as possible while maintaining eye-contact with your hearers.

Learning the script means memorising the critical parts of the sermon (introduction, conclusion are critical). It also means being familiar with the flow of the sermon so that at parts, you can have the freedom to speak the contents of the script without being enslaved to the script word for word.