



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

### Lesson #20

#### D. Preparing to Preach the Word

- Step 1: Begin with Prayer
- Step 2: Choose a Text
- Step 3: Study the Text and Context
- Step 4: Look for Law and Gospel
- ▶ **Step 5: Find the Main Point**
- Step 6: Determine the Order of Presentation
- Step 7: Apply the Word to Your Audience
- Step 8: Choose the Right Words
- Step 9: Prepare an Introduction and a Conclusion

When we talk about the “main point” of a text, we are referring to most important truth that God wants us to learn from the text. It is not a summary of the text, but the lesson God wants to teach us through the text. For example, “Jesus feeds five thousand” is a *summary* of Mark 6:30-44, but it is not the *main point*, or lesson, of the text.

When we preach the Word of God, it is important that we study our text carefully to determine what is the main point of the text. Otherwise, we may emphasize things that are less important and ignore the things that are the most important. To help you determine the main point of a text, here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Why is this text in the Bible?
- What is God saying to us in this part of Scripture?
- If the text contains the words of Jesus, what is Jesus trying to teach His listeners through what He said?

Consider again the example of Mark 6:30-44 where Jesus feeds the five thousand men. Why is this account in the Bible? What does the fact that Jesus miraculously fed all these people teach us about Jesus? What does God want to teach us through this event?

In general, it is best not focus on the actions of human beings in the text, but rather at the actions of God, the actions and words of Jesus, or why the Holy Spirit moved Jesus’ disciples to speak in a certain way.

The best way to explain how to find the main point is to examine a text and ask ourselves what the main point of that text is. We shall examine Luke 10:38-42:

**Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.” And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”**

This text makes many points. It teaches many true statements. We will list some of these points in the order that they appear in text. Then we will try to determine which are more important than the others, and finally we will try to select the most important point of all.

So here are some statements that can be made about this text:

1. Jesus and His disciples entered a village. If this were the main point of the text, the main point of your sermon could be something like this: *It is important to go from one village to another to preach the Word.*
2. Martha invited Jesus into her home. If this were the main point of the text, the main point of your sermon could be this: *You also should welcome Jesus into your home.*
3. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to His Word. Comparing Martha with Mary, one could preach on the topic: *Sisters are different from each other, and that is true of all of us. We are not all the same.*
4. Jesus took the time at Martha's house to do some teaching. He talked, and Mary listened. We do not know what He said. We only know that He said something and Mary was listening. There is no indication that Martha heard what Jesus said, because she was busy and distracted with her serving. Therefore, you could preach a sermon on the topic: *Jesus talks to us, and we listen.*
5. Mary did not help Martha serve Jesus because she did not like Jesus as much as Martha. This statement goes beyond what the text itself says because we don't know why Mary did not help Martha. We could even get further off track by thinking, as Martha did, that Mary was a bit lazy and uncaring because she didn't help Martha.
6. Martha was busy serving Jesus. If this were the main point of the text, the topic of your sermon could be this: *We should be busy serving Jesus in our homes and in our lives.*
7. Martha was distracted as she was serving Jesus. If this were the main point of the text, the theme of your sermon could be this: *It is dangerous to be distracted in our service of Jesus.* But then we realize that Martha's serving of Jesus was the distraction, so then we might make this the point of our sermon: *We should not serve Jesus, because that is a distraction.*
8. Martha was upset that her sister Mary did not help her serve Jesus. If this were the main point of the text, the topic of your sermon might be this: *It is a sin to not help family members when they need help,* or perhaps this: *It is a sin to get upset when other people do not cooperate with you.*
9. Martha approached Jesus to have Him help her with her problem. If this were the main point of the text, you could preach a sermon with this theme: *Ask to Jesus to help you in your problems, no matter how small those problems may be.*
10. Martha implied that Jesus did not care that Martha was serving Him without Mary's help. You could thus preach a sermon on the question of whether Jesus cares about us or not.
11. Jesus told Martha that she was worrying too much about many things. This could lead to a sermon about the sin of worrying about all kinds of things.
12. Jesus replied when Martha asked Him to do something. If this were the main point, we could use this text to point out that Jesus answers prayer. When we ask Him to do something for us, He gives us an answer. In this case, the answer is not what Martha expected.
13. Jesus refused to do what Martha asked Him to do. If this were the main point, we could preach a sermon on why Jesus refuses to give us help at times when we ask Him to do something.
14. Jesus told Martha that one thing is needed. I suppose someone might therefore preach a sermon with a theme like this: *Just do one thing at a time.*

15. Jesus told Martha that Mary had made a good choice by doing what she did. This would be sermon on the importance of making good choices.
16. Jesus told Martha that He would not do what she asked Him to do. He would not ask Mary to help Martha in her serving. Can we draw the conclusion from this that Jesus refuses to take directions from us in carrying out His work?

The underlined sentences above show us that this text contains many truths and implies other truths. Most of these, however, are not as important as others. In general, we should pay closer attention to the words and actions of Jesus than to the words and actions of Mary or Martha. Mary and Martha are sinners like us. Jesus is the great Teacher of God's Word. Jesus is the Son of God, our Savior. What He says is more important than anything else in this text. The reason this text is in the Bible is to tell us something about Jesus and His teaching, not to tell us a nice little story about two sisters.

So, let us look at Jesus' actions and words. The first thing we notice is that Jesus accepted Martha's invitation to her home and then spent much of His time there talking. We do not know what He said, but, we can be sure it was the Word of God, for Jesus is God. Mary was happy to listen to that Word.

Later, Martha came to Jesus with a request, but Jesus refused to do what she asked. Jesus said that He will not take away from Mary the good thing that she has chosen, namely, listening to His teaching. In fact, Jesus rebukes Martha for being so worried and troubled and distracted. Why was Martha troubled and worried? Because she was serving Jesus and she wanted to do something good for Him. That is why she wanted Mary to help her. She thought that Jesus would immediately agree with her and tell Mary to help her. After all, what could be more important than serving Jesus?

Jesus surprised Martha by not rebuking Mary for letting her sister Martha serve alone. Instead, Jesus rebuked Martha very gently by telling her that Mary had made a good choice by choosing to listen to His teaching rather than serving Him like her sister. In fact, Jesus emphasized this point by saying that one thing is needed. He implied very plainly that the one thing is what Mary had chosen to do: to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His Word.

By examining this text carefully in this way, we can determine the reason this text is in the Scriptures. It was written to point out how important it is to listen to Jesus' teaching. Jesus did not say that what Martha was doing was wrong in itself. After all, He did accept her kind invitation. But she was wrong in thinking that serving Him was more necessary or "**needed**" than what Mary was doing. Sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to His Word was much more important. By saying that only one thing is needed, and that Mary had chosen that one thing, Jesus showed the priority. Which is more important: serving Jesus or being served by Jesus? Martha thought her task of serving Jesus was more important, whereas Mary recognized that what Jesus was doing for her was more important than anything she or her sister could do for Jesus.

It is hard to think of any sermon based on this text that would emphasize anything other than the one thing needed, namely, listening to Jesus' Word. The other suggested sermon themes above would turn minor points into major points. Even though these minor points may be Scriptural in their own way, they are not the main point of this text, but they may be the main point in some other texts.

Another way to find the main point of the text is to look for and underline repeated words and phrases. These repetitions often show the main focus of the passage. For example, in 1 Corinthians 13 we see the word "love" repeated over and over. While there are other topics mentioned in this chapter, this repetition clearly shows the main point of the chapter.

On some rare occasions it may be beneficial to make one of the subordinate ideas in the text the main topic of your sermon. For example, your congregation may need to hear some particular truth that is taught in the text, even though it is not the main point of the text. Be sure, however, that what you are preaching is something that is really taught by the text and that there is a very good reason not to focus

on the main lesson of the text. Most of the time it is best to find the main point of your text, as best you can, and preach a sermon that has that main point as the focus.

### **Write the Theme of Your Sermon Based on the Main Point of the Text**

After you have determined the main point of your text, write a theme for your sermon based on this main point. Your theme should be a short statement that summarizes what you want to say in your sermon. Your theme should not be a question. You might want to ask a question at the start of your sermon to lead your audience to start thinking about the topic of your sermon, but the theme should then answer the question. Your theme should take the main point of the text and apply it to your audience. You can think of your theme as a short statement of what you want your hearers to remember and take home with them from your sermon. It is what they could tell someone if someone asks them what your sermon was about.

Having a theme will guide you as you write your sermon. Everything in your sermon should revolve around and support your theme. Having a theme in mind when you start to write your sermon will help keep you on track so that you do not wander in your sermon or include ideas that may be important but do not relate to the main point of your sermon.

When you write your theme, make sure it focuses on the Gospel. It should remind us of the Good News that we are saved by what God has done for us in Jesus. Your theme should not just be law – focused on what we should or shouldn't do. You are a minister of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6). You want to send people away with the good news that their sins are forgiven ringing in their ears!

Based on our discussion above on Luke 10:38-42, the theme of our sermon could be something like this: *Being Served by Jesus Is More Necessary Than Serving Jesus*. Notice that this theme focuses on the Gospel (being served by Jesus).

### **Questions**

---

1. What do we mean by the "main point" of a text?
2. Why is it important to try to find the main point of your text?
3. On whose actions and words should you focus in order to determine the main point?
4. What is true about all or most of the underlined sentences above?
5. Why would it not be proper to consider these underlined sentences the main point?
6. Which of the underlined sentences comes closest to being the main point?
7. Which of the underlined sentences would make good sermon topics?
8. What did Jesus mean by the one thing needed?
9. Why might you occasionally use a subordinate theme as the main point of your sermon?
10. What is a sermon theme?
11. Why is it important to have a theme for your sermon?
12. What are some characteristics of a good sermon theme?

Look at John 3:14-18 and try to find what you think is the main point of these verses.