



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #25

E. Preparing to Preach a Sermon on John 3:14-18

Step 6: Determining the Order of Presentation of John 3:14-18

After determining the main point of the text and the main point of the sermon you are going to preach on this text, it is necessary to determine the order of presentation. In other words, what part of the text should you present first, what part should you present second, etc.? One way to present a text is simply to follow the order of the text: present verse 14 first, and then verse 15, 16, 17, and 18 in that order. In presenting the text in this way, you may not even have one main point in mind. You are simply explaining the text verse by verse. This way of presenting a text is generally called a *homily*, and in many cases, it is a very good way to preach a sermon on a text.

To present John 3:14-18 verse by verse, you would start by explaining the account of Moses and the serpent in the wilderness. Then you would compare the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness with the lifting up of Jesus on the cross. You would show the importance of looking up at Jesus in faith and how that means the difference between eternal life and eternal death, like looking up at the serpent meant the difference between physical life and physical death for the Israelites.

Then you would show how God's lifting up of Jesus on the cross is a demonstration of God's love for all people ("**the world**"), so that anyone who looks up in faith to Jesus on the cross receives eternal life and does not die eternally.

Lastly, you would point out the awfulness of rejecting the remedy that God has provided for sin. Those who refuse to look up in faith to the Savior God has provided for everyone remain under God's condemnation, and such a rejection will result in eternal condemnation – the opposite of the eternal life God wants us to have.

You could then conclude your sermon with an appeal to your audience to accept God's salvation for them in the person of Jesus, God's Son, hanging on the cross. Jesus is the only Savior God has provided for the entire world, and everyone in the world is invited to trust in Him and be saved eternally. The only alternative is eternal condemnation.

In a sermon such as this, your theme would be something like the last theme listed in the previous lessons: "*Condemnation or Salvation, Which Shall It Be?*"

Here is another possible order of presentation: You begin by pointing to the law elements in the text. You could talk about how the Israelites sinned by complaining against their God. You would talk about how God sent the snakes that bit the people as a judgment and so they were dying. Then you would proceed to point out that the whole world is guilty of sin against God and that the whole world is on its way to the condemnation it deserves. You can point out what it means to perish physically and to perish eternally. You would point out that we all deserve to be punished by an eternal death because of our sins, just as the Israelites deserved the punishment of the fiery snakes because of their sin. After showing your audience their sin in this way, and remember, you also are guilty of sin, you would then tell the Good News of God's remedy for sin.

In these verses, the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness as a remedy for the poisonous snakes is used as a picture of God's remedy for the sin of the entire world. This remedy was the lifting up of Jesus on the cross to bear the sin of the world. You would emphasize the words "**world**" and "**whoever**" to make the point that God wants everyone to use the remedy for sin that He has provided.

Next you would impress on your audience the necessity of looking up to Jesus on the cross in faith, because without that faith or trust in Jesus, one rejects, despises, and loses God's remedy for sin. This is not what God wants. God wants everyone in the world to be saved, and He has provided the way to accomplish this. You would want to point out that the remedy has already been provided by God in His love, and you could then describe everlasting life in contrast to perishing.

The main theme in such a sermon could be "*God Sent His Son to Save the World,*" and your outline could make the following points:

1. Why the world needs to be saved (our sin)
2. God's remedy for sin (Jesus bearing the sin of all on the cross)
3. How we can take advantage of God's remedy by trusting in Jesus

You must to determine for yourself the order you want to follow in presenting this text or any text. There is not only one way or one order to follow in preaching on a specific text from God's Word. The main thing is that you preach sin and grace, law and Gospel, and that you always emphasize the Gospel. Our God wants us to preach Christ. Our God wants us to glorify His name. The way to do that is to tell people what He has done for their salvation. Our emphasis is always on what He has done for us, not on what we do for Him. We must avoid giving the impression at any time that our salvation is based, even in part, on what we do.

We must always be careful not to give anyone the impression that our salvation depends on our actions, rather than on what God has done for us. For example, someone preaching on John 3:14-18 might present an outline such as this:

1. God has done His part by sending His Son.
2. Now it is up to you to do your part by believing in Him.

A sermon such as this leads a person to trust in their faith rather than in Christ. God is the one who creates faith in our hearts by a presentation of what He has done for us in Christ. We are saved by grace – God's undeserved love – and never by anything we do.

Questions

1. Why is it important to plan the order in which you preach your sermon?
2. Which order do you prefer for a sermon on John 3:14-18?
3. What impression must you always avoid giving in your sermons?