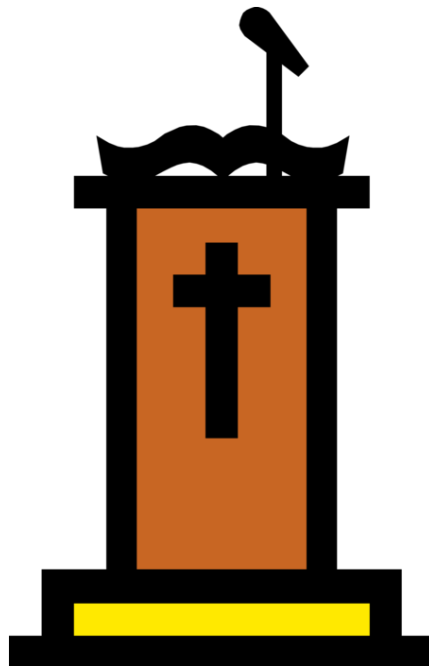




Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)





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Lesson #1

A. Introduction

Every Christian is a priest, an ambassador for Christ, and a missionary. Peter wrote to all the Christians in his care: **“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”** (1 Peter 2:9). Each Christian, in his own station in life, has the privilege of joining his or her voice to the voice of other Christians in proclaiming to others the praises of our gracious God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God has rescued us from our sin through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God has saved us through the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts by means of the powerful Word of God.

In His desire to spread His saving Word throughout the world, our Lord has given to some of His Christians on earth special gifts to take the lead in this work. The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus: **“He Himself** (the risen and ascended Jesus) **gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”** (Ephesians 4:11-12). The apostles and prophets were given to the early Christians before there was a written New Testament. At the present time our Lord supplies evangelists, pastors and teachers, and other special helpers to His Church (His “saints”) to spread His saving Word and to teach Christians how they too can exalt the name of the Lord by their words and works.

This course on “Preaching the Word” is intended especially for those who have been called by God through Christians to preach or teach God's Word in Christ's name. It is also intended for those who hope to be called by God through Christians to preach or teach God's Word. The apostle Paul was called by Jesus Himself to be His special missionary to those who did not know anything about Jesus. Before he died, Paul trained others to carry on his work after he was gone. We have Paul's instructions in the New Testament to two of the men he trained: Timothy and Titus. Shortly before he died, Paul wrote to Timothy: **“The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”** (2 Timothy 2:2). Paul was Timothy's teacher; Timothy taught others, who were in turn to teach others after them, and so the next generation is trained by the previous generation. It is in this spirit that this course on “Preaching the Word” has been written. We want to pass on to you what we have learned from others about preaching God's Word, so that you, in turn, can pass this on to those after you. Of course, all of us have to look to our Master Teacher, Jesus Himself, and the men He chose and trained to be His apostles. It is from them especially that we want to learn how to preach God's Word.

Questions

1. Why can we call every Christian a priest and a missionary?
2. What special gifts has the ascended Jesus given to His Church?
3. For what purpose has Christ supplied evangelists, pastors and teachers?
4. Has Christ, through His Church, called you to be a preacher?
5. If so, how do you know you have such a call?
6. What did the apostle Paul do for future generations?

Read Acts 2:14-41.



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Lesson #2

B. Examples of New Testament Sermons

1. Peter's Sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41)

One of the best ways to learn something is to follow the example of those who know how to do it. A person can learn how to be a carpenter from someone who is a good carpenter. So if we want to know how to preach God's Word, we can learn from someone who is a good preacher. Jesus trained His apostles for a period of over three years. They saw and heard what He did by following Him around, and after a time He sent them out to preach His Word. On his mission journeys the apostle Paul also had partners who worked with him and learned from him. Some were more or less equal partners, like Barnabas and Silas, but there were also younger men like Timothy, Titus, Mark, and Luke, whom Paul trained. The apostle Peter also had Mark as his helper, and there were probably others as well.

Let us take a look at some of the preaching done by Peter and Paul, as recorded in the book of Acts, and let us learn from their sermons how to preach the Word. This is how Timothy and Mark and others learned how to preach the Word in their time.

The first New Testament sermon recorded in the Bible from the apostles is Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. Peter was addressing a large crowd of Jewish people from Jerusalem, from other places in the Roman Empire and even from beyond the Roman Empire. Because it was the feast of Pentecost, there were Jewish people present from many other countries who had traveled to Jerusalem for this important Jewish festival. Among those present were the very men who were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.

As we examine Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-36, we notice that much of what Peter said was a direct quotation of Old Testament passages from the prophets Joel and David. Peter explained how these passages foretold events that had just taken place in the death and resurrection of Jesus and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. From Peter's example we can learn that we also should quote and explain God's Word, because God has given His Word to us in the Holy Scriptures, both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This, of course, assumes that we have read, studied and understood the Bible passages that we are using. There is no better preparation for preaching God's Word than reading and rereading the portion of the Bible on which we are preaching until its meaning is clear to us. If we do not understand something in the Bible, we should not use that Bible passage in our preaching until we do understand it. We should rather quote and explain those passages that we fully understand.

Peter's sermon in Acts 2 was directed at persons who were guilty of crucifying Jesus; therefore, Peter told them that they had sinned grievously against their God. **"Him (Jesus) ... you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death"** (Acts 2:23). Peter repeated this charge in Acts 2:36 when he spoke of **"this Jesus, whom you crucified."** Following Peter's example in our own sermons, we also must inform our listeners of their sins. Of course, we cannot accuse them of sins of which they are not guilty, or of those of which we have no knowledge. Peter knew that many in his audience had called for Jesus' crucifixion, and so he spoke plainly about their sin. There are certain sins of which we are all guilty; we only have to examine ourselves and our own sins to know what these sins are. The better we know the persons whom we are addressing, the better we will be able to call attention to the sins they are guilty of.

But Peter was not interested in calling attention to their sin just for the sake of having them confess their sin. Peter was eager to bring to them the cure for their sins in the person and work of the Man whom they had crucified. For that reason, Peter reminded them of who Jesus was: **“Jesus of Nazareth, attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know”** (Acts 2:22). Peter knew that most of his listeners were well-acquainted with the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus had traveled throughout the land of the Jews for over three years. His miracles were well-known, even though some of their leaders tried to explain them away. They should have known better than to condemn and crucify someone like Jesus, who was obviously doing things that only God can do.

But above all, Peter wanted to impress on them one main fact about Jesus. They had indeed **“put Him to death,”** but Him **“God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it”** (Acts 2:24). The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the main thing that Peter wanted to get across. Indeed, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the main thing every preacher of God's Word wants to get across. This is the Good News; this is the Gospel. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures”** (1 Corinthians 15: 1-4).

Every time we have an opportunity to speak to a group of Christians or non-Christians, we should call attention to the fact that we, as well as our audience, are sinners who have sinned against God and deserve His punishment. But, above all, we should bring them the Good News of Jesus, that is, who He is, what He has done, and the benefit for us: the forgiveness of our sins. This is the center of our message: Jesus died for our sins, He was buried and rose again, and because of what He did, God forgives our sins. The Holy Spirit works through the law and Gospel we speak to bring about repentance for the sin we have committed and to produce faith in Jesus as the Savior from sin.

The last sentence in Peter's address was this: **“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ”** (Acts 2:36). Jesus' death by crucifixion did not mean He was a failure. Not at all! By raising Him from the dead and taking Him up to heaven forty days later, God exalted Him and set Him at His right-hand side, in glory and power.

The result of Peter's preaching was that **“they were cut to the heart”** (Acts 2:37). They realized what they had done and asked the apostles: **“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”** (Acts 2:37). Peter was quick to respond with the words: **“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call”** (Acts 2: 38-39). Repentance is a turn-about, a change in direction. In this case, it was a change from hating Christ and crucifying Him to believing that He rose from the dead and that He is indeed the promised Messiah and Savior, that He is indeed both Lord and Christ. Peter then offered the greatest blessing of all and the very thing Jesus came into the world to accomplish. He presented to them **“the remission of sins.”** He did this by calling on every one of them to be baptized in Jesus' name. For baptism is one of God's ways to deliver the gift Jesus won for all.

What we have in the book of Acts is only a portion of what Peter and the other apostles said that day. We read: **“With many other words he testified and exhorted them”** (Acts 2:40). Notice what the Holy Spirit accomplished through Peter's preaching: **“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them”** (Acts 2:41).

The power of God is in His Word. When we preach His Word, the Holy Spirit is active and brings about a knowledge of sin and then an acceptance of Jesus as Savior and a glad receiving of the Good News of forgiveness. Three thousand were brought to faith in Jesus on that day. No doubt there were also some

in the crowd that rejected Peter's message. This is what happens whenever the Gospel is preached. There are some who are led to accept it by the Holy Spirit, and there are others who reject it.

It is important to remember that we *ourselves* can accomplish nothing by our preaching. It is the Holy Spirit who works through His Word when it is spoken to bring about the conviction of sin and a turning to Christ in faith. When there are persons in our audience who are already believers in Christ, the preaching of God's Word convicts them also of sin and strengthens their faith in Jesus.

On Pentecost the Holy Spirit changed the lives of about three thousand persons through the preaching of God's Word. The Holy Spirit may bring about similar results through our preaching of God's Word today, but this is not what usually happens. Sometimes there are very few visible results of our preaching, and we may become discouraged. But did everyone accept Jesus' preaching? Did not Peter and Paul and all the other apostles face serious opposition to their preaching of the Word? Regardless of the outcome of our preaching, our Lord says to us: **“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine”** (2 Timothy 4: 2-3). God's promise remains in effect: **“As the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it”** (Isaiah 55: 10-11).

Questions

1. How did Jesus' apostles learn how to preach God's Word?
2. Who was the main speaker among the apostles on Pentecost?
3. What kind of audience was present on the day of Pentecost?
4. Which Old Testament Scriptures were quoted in that Pentecost sermon?
5. What confidence should we have when we quote from the Bible?
6. What kind of Bible passages should we use in our preaching?
7. What are the two main teachings of the Bible that were present in Peter's Pentecost sermon?
8. What strong accusation did Peter bring against his listeners?
9. What kind of sins should we bring up in our preaching?
10. What is the purpose of talking about people's sins in a sermon?
11. What should always be the main topic in our preaching?
12. What did Peter want his listeners to believe and receive?
13. How did the Holy Spirit bless Peter's preaching?
14. What two kinds of persons will be present in most audiences?
15. What do all listeners need to hear in every sermon?
16. Why should we not be discouraged when the results of our preaching fall short of our hopes and expectations?

Read Acts 3-4, Acts 10.



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #3

B. Examples of New Testament Sermons

2. Other New Testament Examples of Peter's Preaching (Acts 3-4, Acts 10)

When Jesus sent His apostles out into the world to preach the Gospel, He told them that signs or miracles would accompany their preaching to confirm the Word. Jesus said that one of the signs would be the healing of the sick: **"They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover"** (Mark 16:18). It happened just as Jesus said it would. **"They went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word through the accompanying signs"** (Mark 16:20).

There were three such signs on the day of Pentecost: the sound of the mighty wind, the flames of fire on the believers, and the sudden ability to speak in languages that they had never learned before. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit did not use the signs to bring people to faith in Jesus. He used the preaching of the apostle Peter, through whom three thousand persons believed the Gospel he preached and were baptized.

Very soon after that event, the Lord gave His apostles Peter and John the power to heal a crippled beggar. Peter said to the man: **"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk... and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them – walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God"** (Acts 3:6-9).

This miracle gave Peter the opportunity to address the crowd of Jews who were amazed by what had happened. He said some of the same things he had said on the day of Pentecost, accusing his listeners of having killed the Son of God. **"You delivered (Jesus) up and denied (Him) in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer (Barabbas) to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life"** (Acts 3:13-15). These were strong words of law that were intended to make the people fully aware of their great sin. That is what the law does – it shows us our sin.

But Peter was also quick to bring them the Good News of what God had done. **"God raised (Jesus) from the dead, of which we are witnesses"** (Acts 3:15). Peter said that it was obvious that Jesus is alive, for it was Jesus who has given them the power to heal the man. **"His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know"** (Acts 3:16). Then Peter told them about the forgiveness of sins, as he had done on Pentecost: **"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out"** (Acts 3:19). Peter preached the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. This is the heart of the Gospel that must be present in every sermon that we preach. After we have reminded our audience that they are sinners and need forgiveness, we must preach Jesus Christ crucified and risen, and preach the forgiveness of sins in His name.

Peter also established the truth of what he was saying by referring to the Old Testament prophets. **"Those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled"** (Acts 3:18). Since Peter was speaking to Jews, who treasured their Old Testament Scriptures, he pointed out that what happened to Jesus was part of God's plan from the beginning. It had been announced through the prophets in advance. These are things **"which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began"** (Acts 3:21). Peter then talked about three Old

Testament believers that the Jews held in high regard: Moses, Samuel, and Abraham. Moses had foretold the coming of the great Prophet. Peter told them that Jesus is that Prophet. God promised a Seed to Abraham in whom all families of the earth would be blessed. Jesus is that promised Seed.

God again blessed Peter's testimony. **"Many of those who heard the word believed"** (Acts 4:4). The Jewish leaders, who were chiefly responsible for putting Jesus to death, arrived and put Peter and John into jail until the next day. When the authorities questioned them on the next day, Peter had another opportunity to glorify Jesus, and he did not let this opportunity pass by. He again gave Jesus the credit for the healing of the beggar, saying: **"By Him (Jesus) this man stands here before you whole (healthy)"** (Acts 4:10). He then referred to the same Old Testament passage that Jesus had once used in speaking to these same Jewish leaders: Psalm 118:22. Peter told them that the Man they crucified **"is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone"** (Acts 4:11). Peter concluded with this powerful statement: **"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"** (Acts 4:12).

Notice that Peter did not call Jesus only a Savior. He called Him the *only* Savior for the entire world. That is why our Lord wants His Gospel to go out to all peoples and nations. There is no other Savior from sin and eternal death. Our sermons and talks today must speak with the same urgency. Jesus is not simply one of many good religious leaders who can teach us important things about God. Jesus is the *only* Savior. Jesus is the *only* Son of God, whom God has sent to rescue the human race from the effects of their sin. No Buddha can save us, no Confucius, no Muhammad, and none of the millions of gods or idols that are worshiped everywhere in the world. There is only one Savior for all mankind, and that is Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, who was crucified, died, was buried, who rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, and will return at the end of time to take those who trust in Him to be with Him forever. This is what we must teach and preach at all times and in all places.

After Peter and John were released from prison and threatened with punishment if they continued to speak about Jesus, the believers in Jerusalem gathered together for prayer. Prayer is important in our preaching as well. We need God's help to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ. We can accomplish nothing by our own power or strength. We do not have the courage to stand firm against the many enemies of Christ or the threats leveled against us for preaching Christ or even for just being Christians. We need to pray like the Christians in Jerusalem did. They prayed: **"Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word"** (Acts 4:29). We should never attempt to speak in Jesus' name without praying for our Lord's help and strength and courage. God answered their prayer at once. **"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness... And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus"** (Acts 4:31-33). He will do the same for us.

Peter was God's chosen apostle to the Jewish people. But there was at least one occasion when Peter had an opportunity to speak to non-Jews about Jesus Christ. This was not something that Peter was inclined to do because of his background and training as a law-abiding Jew. Therefore, God had to do something special to encourage Peter to preach the Gospel of Christ in the home of a non-Jew or Gentile. When Peter was staying in Joppa he went up on the housetop to pray at noon. He felt very hungry. God gave him a special vision. He **"saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, 'Rise Peter; kill and eat'"** (Acts 10:11-13).

The Jewish people in the Old Testament were given food laws which strictly forbade the eating of any unclean animals. As a law-abiding Jew, Peter had never eaten any unclean food. But when Peter refused to eat the food lowered from heaven, the Lord repeated the vision two more times. The voice said to him: **"What God has cleansed you must not call common"** (Acts 10:15). Peter did not know what this meant until three men arrived at the door at that very moment, looking for Peter. These men were sent by a Roman centurion named Cornelius, who lived in Caesarea. An angel of God had told Cornelius that

he should summon the apostle Peter in Joppa to his Gentile home in Caesarea to bring him a message from God.

God's vision now became clear. The Old Testament rules about clean and unclean food were no longer valid. Jews could now associate freely with Gentiles without being contaminated with unclean food. To make sure that Peter got the message, the Holy Spirit said to Peter: **"Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them"** (Acts 10:19-20).

Peter therefore accompanied these three men to the home of Cornelius, and six Jewish Christians from Joppa went with him. Although Cornelius was a Gentile, he had already become acquainted with the Jewish Old Testament. He was already a worshiper of the God of the Jews. He prayed to Him regularly and lived the life of a convert to Judaism. The three messengers told Peter that Cornelius, their master, had **"a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews"** (Acts 10:22).

Cornelius was waiting for Peter in Caesarea. He had invited his relatives and friends to come and listen with him to what Peter had to say. Peter began by saying to this Gentile audience: **"You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean"** (Acts 10:28). How important this is for us to remember today also! There is no human being from any culture or language or nation that we should regard as unclean – as someone to whom we should not bring God's Word. In the Old Testament God had His good reasons for keeping the Jewish nation separate from others. But that is no longer valid today. There are many nations and peoples and tribes in the world, but none of them are off limits for the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. Whether they are rich or poor, whether primitive or sophisticated, whether old or young, whether enemies or friends, we are to regard them all as persons for whom Jesus died, and as persons with whom God wants us to share the Gospel of Christ.

What did Peter say to this Gentile audience? He brought the same good news he had brought to the Jews on Pentecost. After a short introduction he talked about Jesus Christ. He called Him **"Lord of all"** (Acts 10:36). Since Cornelius and his friends already knew something about Jesus, he summarized the life of Jesus by saying that He **"went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him"** (Acts 10:38). Then Peter got to the main point, saying: **"We are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead"** (Acts 10:39-41).

Notice that Peter did not accuse Cornelius of killing Jesus. Cornelius had not been present in Jerusalem on that day. But the Gospel facts that Peter preached were the very same: Jesus' death and resurrection, and that Jesus is the Lord of all. Then Peter explained the meaning of all of this: **"He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins"** (Acts 10:42-43).

There was not much law in Peter's message to Cornelius and his friends. But he did speak about the final judgment of the living and dead. That in itself makes a person think about whether he is ready to stand before the Judge and Lord of all. But Peter's main point was that forgiveness of sins was available to anyone and everyone who puts their trust in Jesus. In fact, this was the message of all the Old Testament prophets: the forgiveness of sins for all nations through the coming Messiah. And now this promised Messiah has come and carried out His mission. Tell all the world now that in Jesus we have peace with God! Our sins are forgiven through His death and resurrection! Trust in Him.

Questions

1. What did Jesus promise His disciples that would confirm their word?
2. List some of the miracles done among the early Christians, as recorded in the book of Acts.
3. What incident occurred that gave Peter the opportunity to address a Jewish crowd at the gate of the temple?
4. Why did Peter accuse his listeners of killing the Son of God?
5. Why should we call attention to people's sins in our sermons today?
6. What was the main point of Peter's sermon that day?
7. Why must this continue to be the main point of our sermons today?
8. Why did Peter refer to the Old Testament prophets in his sermon?
9. Why were Peter and John put in jail?
10. What bold statement about Jesus did Peter make on the next day?
11. Why is it so important that we say that Jesus is the only Savior of all?
12. What is the importance of prayer in our preaching of God's Word?
13. How did God answer the prayer of the Christians in Jerusalem?
14. Why did God give Peter the vision of the unclean animals?
15. Why would Peter have refused to go to Caesarea without this vision?
16. What kind of man was Cornelius?
17. Which nations or peoples are off limits for our preaching today?
18. In which ways were Peter's two sermons different from each other?
19. In which ways were Peter's two sermons similar?
20. What was the main point in Peter's sermon in Caesarea?

Read Acts 7-8.



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Lesson #4

B. Examples of New Testament Sermons

3. The Preaching of Two Deacons: Stephen and Philip (Acts 7-8)

In the days after Pentecost the teachers and preachers of the Christian congregation in Jerusalem were the twelve apostles. They also took care of the care of the poor and the sick. But when the number of Christians increased, they were not able to handle all of their duties. Therefore, the congregation chose seven helpers to assist them so that the apostles could concentrate on the ministry of the Word and prayer. Among these seven helpers or deacons, as they are usually called, were two men, Stephen and Philip, who had the gifts of teaching and explaining the Word of God.

In the book of Acts we have the sermon that Stephen preached when he was on trial before the Jewish council for allegedly speaking against Moses and the Temple. In this sermon Stephen recounted the history of the Jewish people from the time of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. He then discussed the days of Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon. He pointed out in particular what the Bible had to say about Moses and the temple.

After presenting this history and quoting pertinent passages from the Old Testament, Stephen addressed sharp words to those who accused him of blasphemy. **“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it”** (Acts 7: 51-53).

Since Stephen was addressing ungodly persons who had the blood of Jesus on their hands, he preached the law of God and His judgment. He used the history of the Jews and their past rejection of God’s prophets as the basis for his present accusations against them. Their fathers had received the law of God but had not kept it. They did not keep it even when Moses was still with them. When God sent His prophets, they had rejected them. And now the present generation was doing the same thing; they were rejecting the Messiah Himself whom the prophets had foretold.

There was no repentance on their part. In fact, they became so angry that they **“cast him out of the city and stoned him”** (Acts 7:58). Stephen was put to death for his preaching. He was the first of many martyrs who have died because they preached Jesus and His Word.

There are times today also when Christian preachers have to testify truthfully and bluntly against the enemies of Jesus Christ. They also may be beaten, fined, imprisoned, and even put to death for their testimony. At such times we need to be brave and steadfast like Stephen. We need to be willing to give our lives into death for Jesus’ sake. Stephen asked Jesus to take him home to heaven and he prayed that the Lord would forgive his attackers.

In Stephen’s sermon we have a good example of how to use Bible history in our sermons. The apostle Paul wrote, **“all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition”** (1 Corinthians 10:11). **“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).

Philip was given a more pleasant task. When many Christians fled from Jerusalem because of severe persecution, some of them went to Samaria. **“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them”** (Acts 8:5). Notice the subject matter of Philip’s preaching: He preached Christ. He no doubt centered his message on who Jesus was and what He had done for everyone by His life, death, and resurrection. The Samaritans did not reject Philip as the Jews in Jerusalem had rejected Stephen. **“The multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip”** (Acts 8:6). **“And there was great joy in that city”** (Acts 8:8). **“When they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized** (Acts 8:12).

The message of Stephen was rejected, but the message of Philip was accepted, and yet both of their messages exalted Christ. For this reason, Article V of the *Augsburg Confession* says: *“To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, He gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when He wills, in those who hear the gospel”* (Book of Concord, p. 40). The Holy Spirit produces faith where and when He wills. Both Stephen and Philip were faithful servants of Christ, but their outward success was different. The same things happens today when two preachers, faithfully preaching the same message of Christ, experience different results. The one who sees favorable results should not become proud, and the one with unfavorable results should not become discouraged. We are only witnesses; the Holy Spirit is the One who produces faith and the fruits of faith.

Philip was also given the pleasant task of explaining Scripture to a man from Ethiopia who was returning home after worshipping the God of the Jews in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit directed Philip to join this man as he was riding in his chariot. The man was reading a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He was reading about the lamb led to slaughter in chapter 53 of Isaiah’s prophecy and he could not understand who this lamb was. He invited Philip to sit with him and help him understand what he was reading. **“Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him”** (Acts 8:35). Jesus is the Lamb of God that Isaiah was writing about in advance. Jesus was the Lamb of God on whom God laid the sin of the world, so that sinners like us could be forgiven. As Philip had preached Jesus Christ to the multitudes in Samaria, so he preached Jesus Christ to the solitary man riding in his chariot. The Holy Spirit can do His work in crowds and one-on-one. The important thing is that we open our mouths and proclaim Jesus.

Questions

1. Why were seven men chosen to help the apostles in Jerusalem?
2. Which two of these seven became preachers of the Word?
3. Why did Stephen’s listeners become so angry with him?
4. How did Stephen make use of the Old Testament in his preaching?
5. What is Christian martyrdom?
6. What was the subject matter of Philip’s preaching in Samaria?
7. Why did Philip’s preaching have a different result from Stephen’s?
8. How was Philip able to help the man traveling to Ethiopia?
9. What was the central point in Philip’s preaching in Samaria and on the road to Ethiopia?

Read Acts 13:14-52



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #5

B. Examples of New Testament Sermons

4. The Apostle Paul's Sermon in a Jewish Synagogue (Acts 13:14-52)

Jesus chose the apostle Paul to be His special missionary to the non-Jews or Gentiles. The book of Acts gives us several examples of the apostle Paul's preaching. Paul was brought up as a strict Pharisee. He thought that following God's law and the traditions of his people was the way to salvation. When the apostles of Jesus started teaching that the crucified Jesus was the promised Jewish Messiah, Paul (or Saul, as he was known as at first) did whatever he could to silence this talk about Jesus as the Messiah and as One who had risen from the dead. But the risen Jesus appeared personally to Paul on the road to Damascus. Jesus convinced him that He had indeed risen from the dead and was, in fact, the very Son of God and the Savior of the world. Immediately after his conversion, Paul **"preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God"** (Acts 9:20).

It was only after several years that the Christians in Antioch of Syria called Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to bring the Gospel of Christ to other towns and cities of the Roman Empire. Since Jesus was in fact the Messiah promised to the Jewish people, Paul and Barnabas usually began their work by going to the Jewish synagogues in the various cities. They informed the Jewish people that God's promises to His people had been fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus was the One Moses and the prophets had written about. At the time of Paul, the Jewish people had been scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Most synagogue services were attended not only by the Jews but also by Gentiles who had become converts to Judaism, or at least they had become interested in the God of the Jews. These Gentiles were known as God-fearers.

Paul and Barnabas came to another city named Antioch. This was Antioch in Pisidia (now modern-day Turkey). They **"went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day"** (Acts 13:14). As fellow-Jews, Paul and Barnabas were permitted to address the worshipers. The book of Acts (Acts 13:16-41) gives us a summary of what the missionary Paul said on that historic day. No doubt it was the kind of sermon Paul preached in all of the Jewish synagogues in which he was permitted to speak.

He began by saying: **"Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen"** (Acts 13:16). He realized that his audience was made up of Jews (**"men of Israel"**) and Gentile God-fearers. In the first part of his address Paul retraced the history of the Jews from the days of Moses to King David. He recalled in particular the promise God gave to King David concerning the promised Son of David, a King who would save His people.

After reviewing Old Testament history, Paul said: **"Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent"** (Acts 13:26). Then Paul preached the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus, concerning His death by crucifixion and His resurrection from the dead. **"We declare to you glad tidings – that promise which was made to the fathers, God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus"** (Acts 13:33). After referring to several Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus, Paul arrived at the main point of his message: the meaning of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus: **"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses"** (Acts

13: 38-39). Paul concluded by warning his audience against rejecting his message, as many of the Jews in the past had rejected their prophets.

Paul's message was appreciated more by the God-fearers than by the Jews. We read: **"The Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath"** (Acts 13:42). But many Jews also paid close attention. **"Many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas"** (Acts 13:43). **"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God"** (Acts 13:44). What a tremendous opportunity that was!

Instead of rejoicing that so many Gentiles were interested in learning more about the Jewish Messiah, the Jews **"were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul"** (Acts 13:45). This was a very typical reaction of the majority of the Jews to Paul's preaching of the Gospel of Christ. Just as many of the Jews in Palestine turned against Jesus and His message, so many of the scattered Jews in other areas turned against Paul's preaching concerning Jesus. **"Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles'"** (Acts 13:46). It was not long before the Jews stirred up some of the chief men and women of Antioch against the two missionaries and they were driven out of the city. But a Christian congregation had been formed. It was made up of some Jews and even more Gentiles. They rejoiced in the forgiveness of sins won for them by Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Yes, **"the disciples (in Antioch of Pisidia) were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit"** (Acts 13:52). Glory be to God!

What can we learn about preaching the Word of God from Paul's example? First of all, we recognize that the core of the Gospel is Jesus' death for the sin of the world, His resurrection from the dead, and the forgiveness of sins. This message can be resisted, and then the forgiveness is forfeited. The Gospel will benefit only those who accept the message. Paul said: **"By Him everyone who believes is justified"** (Acts 13:39) or forgiven. Our Lord wants everyone to receive the message and be saved, but there are those who do not receive it and, therefore, lose it for themselves. In the words of Paul and Barnabas, those who rejected their message judge themselves **"unworthy of everlasting life"** (Acts 13:46). In other words, the Gospel we preach separates its listeners into two groups: those headed for eternal life by faith in Jesus, and those who reject eternal life by their rejection of the Gospel. But remember, many who reject the Gospel at first are later brought to the truth, as was the case with Paul himself.

Another thing that we can learn from Paul's sermon is that he recognized his audience and directed his words specifically towards them. Since he was addressing Jews and persons interested in Judaism, he began by talking about Jewish history. It is generally a good idea to go from the known to the unknown, to begin with something the audience is familiar with, and proceed from there to the main point. Since he was speaking to people who were acquainted with the Old Testament, he quoted the Old Testament to confirm the points he was making.

No doubt Paul was disappointed that so many of his fellow Jews refused to listen to him and even tried to prevent others from hearing him. But he was happy that so many Gentiles received the Gospel with joy. It often happens that the people that we think will listen to the Gospel reject it, while others unexpectedly become strong believers and supporters of the Gospel. We have to follow where God leads; we cannot predict in advance where He will take us.

Questions

1. What was Paul's special assignment from the risen Lord?
2. In what place did Paul usually preach when he came to a town or city?
3. Who were Paul's listeners in Antioch of Pisidia?
4. What was the subject matter of the first part of Paul's sermon?
5. Why was this especially fitting for his audience?
6. What is meant by a God-fearer?
7. What did Paul tell his audience about Jesus?
8. What is the great gift Paul offered to his listeners?
9. What happened as a result of Paul's first sermon?
10. What happened on the following Saturday?
11. What is the only way listeners can receive the benefit of the Gospel?
12. Why were Paul and his message rejected by many of his listeners?

Read Acts 17:16-34



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #6

B. Examples of New Testament Sermons

5. The Apostle Paul's Sermon to Pagan Gentiles (Acts 17:16-34)

On his second mission journey the apostle Paul found himself alone for a short time in the famous city of Athens. As usual, he **“reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshippers”** (Acts 17:17), but he also had opportunity to spend some time in the marketplace to talk to the people there about **“Jesus and the resurrection”** (Acts 17:18). Many different religious ideas were current in Athens at that time, but Paul was bringing some new and strange ideas. The philosophers were curious. Luke tells us: **“All the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing”** (Acts 17:21).

Because of their interest, Paul had an opportunity to address a crowd of pagan Gentiles at a place called the Areopagus. Because this time his listeners knew nothing about the Old Testament or God's promises of the Messiah, Paul did not refer to Jewish history, and he did not quote the Old Testament. He started out by referring to one of the religious altars he had seen in the city. This altar had the inscription: **“TO THE UNKNOWN GOD”** (Acts 17:23). Paul told them he wanted to tell them about this God that they knew very little about: the true God.

Yet they did know something about this God, for they had seen the things He created. He **“made the world and everything in it”** (Acts 17:24). They were also recipients of His blessings, **“since He gives to all life, breath, and all things”** (Acts 17:25). Instead of quoting the Old Testament prophets, Paul referred to what some Greek authors had written. One had said: **“For we are also His offspring”** (Acts 17:28). This Greek author acknowledged that there was some kind of Deity who had made human beings in the beginning. The city of Athens was filled with idols. Paul pointed out that **“we ought not to think that the Divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising”** (Acts 17:29). Just by observing the world and the things in it, they should have realized that a God who had made them could not be contained in a temple or be put into some kind of animal or human shape.

Notice how Paul proceeded from something they knew (or should have known) to the main point of his message. He wanted to introduce them to Jesus. He did so by telling them that the true God, the Creator and Preserver of all things, would one day **“judge the world in righteousness”** (Acts 17:31). Who would be the Judge? It is **“The Man whom He has ordained”** or appointed for this task. And who is that Man? It would be the Man whom He raised from the dead. It seems they listened with great interest up to this point. **“When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter’”** (Acts 17:32). The Athenians were so wise in the ways of the world that they could not possibly swallow such an outlandish tale of a man who had been raised from the dead.

Nevertheless, even in Athens there were some who were brought to faith in Christ through Paul's sermon. **“Some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them”** (Acts 17:34). No doubt these few listened to Paul after the crowd dispersed, and Paul was able to finish his sermon and explain that Jesus was this Man who would be the Judge, and that Jesus had died for the sins of all and won forgiveness for all, and that there was salvation and eternal life in Jesus.

Notice that in this address at Athens Paul introduced his message about Jesus Christ differently from the

way he did when he spoke to a Jewish audience. In the same way preachers today need to know who their listeners are, and how they can adapt their sermons to their audience. Old Testament quotations would have meant little or nothing to these pagans. Paul wanted to lead them to the truth about Jesus, so he used a different way. He used the so-called natural knowledge of God that God has given to everyone on earth. Paul wrote about this natural knowledge of God in his letter to the Romans: **“What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead”** (Romans 1:19-20).

This natural knowledge of God is not enough to save anyone, but it is a point of reference that preachers can use to talk about God and lead them to a better understanding of who God really is and what He has done for the world in Jesus Christ. Again, it is a matter of proceeding from the known to the unknown. It is a matter of beginning with what is familiar to the listener and moving from there to that which is unfamiliar, namely Jesus Christ and what He has done. This is especially important when we speak to persons who know little or nothing about Jesus.

Questions

1. What special opportunity did Paul have in Athens to preach God’s Word?
2. In what way was his audience different from his usual listeners?
3. Why did Paul not quote from the Old Testament in his sermon?
4. What did Paul say about the unknown God?
5. What is meant by the natural knowledge of God?
6. What did Paul say about Jesus to this crowd?
7. What brought a sudden end to his preaching?
8. What difference was there between Paul’s preaching in Antioch of Pisidia and his preaching in Athens?
9. Why is it important that we follow Paul’s example?
10. What does it mean to go from the known to the unknown in our preaching and why is that a good thing to do?

Read Acts 28:16-31

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #7

B. Examples of New Testament Sermons

6. Paul's Message to the Jews in Rome (Acts 28:16-31)

For a long time, Paul had wanted to visit Rome, the chief city of the Roman Empire, and share the Gospel with the Christians, the Jews, and the Gentiles there. When he finally did reach Rome, he went there as a prisoner awaiting a hearing before Caesar. **“But Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him”** (Acts 28:16).

Paul invited the Jews in Rome to visit him at his lodging so that he could explain to them that he had been imprisoned because of his testimony concerning Jesus. He wanted these Jews to know the full story of how Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah and their Savior. So **“many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening”** (Acts 28:23). This was more like an extended Bible class rather than a sermon, for no doubt they asked him many questions as he referred to Old Testament promises concerning the Messiah and showed how Jesus was the fulfillment of these prophecies. We can be sure that his message centered on Jesus' birth, life, teaching, suffering and death, and His glorious resurrection.

Paul's teaching divided the Jews into two groups. **“And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved...They did not agree among themselves”** (Acts 28: 24-25). Before they left, Paul warned them by quoting a passage from the prophet Isaiah about the danger of hardening their hearts against the Gospel. They should not think that the Good News of Jesus would disappear if they did not accept it. Paul said: **“Let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it”** (Acts 28:28). The Gospel of Christ will continue its march through the world. When some turn away from it, it goes out to others who will listen. This continues on and on until Jesus returns as Judge of living and dead. **“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation”** (Isaiah 52:7).

Questions

1. Whom did Paul invite to his lodging in Rome?
2. What was the subject matter of his discussions with them?
3. In what way did his audience divide into two groups?
4. Whose fault was it that some did not believe what he said?
5. Why were others brought to faith?
6. What makes the feet of missionaries so beautiful?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #8

B. Examples of New Testament Sermons

7. What We Learn from These Examples

The goal of all these sermons was to proclaim Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah and as the only Savior of the world. The desired effect was that all listeners would recognize:

1. that they were sinners deserving punishment
2. that in love God had sent Jesus to save them from their sin and its punishment through His life, His death, and His resurrection
3. that they should put their complete trust for salvation in Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins He won for all and therefore for them also.

On Pentecost, Peter was mainly addressing Jews who had rejected Jesus and had called for His crucifixion, so he accused them of the murder of the Son of God. This was a strong and severe preaching of the law of God that condemns sinners. But after the Holy Spirit had used this preaching of the law to convict his hearers of their sin, Peter was quick to proclaim forgiveness of sins and offer baptism as a means by which they would receive the forgiveness of sins.

There was no need emphasize God's condemning law in Peter's message in the home of the Gentile Cornelius. God had already prepared Cornelius for Peter's preaching and Cornelius was already a believer in the true God of Israel. But Cornelius and his family did not yet know that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. Nor did he know that the God of the Jews was actually the God of the Gentiles also. Peter's sermon in this Gentile home concluded with the Good News of the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit used this message to convince these Gentiles that Jesus was their Savior. The fact that the signs of Pentecost were repeated in this Gentile home served to show that the old division between Jews and Gentiles had disappeared and now both Jews and Gentiles could be united in worship through trust in the same Savior and the same forgiveness of sins.

Paul had the privilege of bringing the Gospel to audiences made up of both Jews and Gentile God-fearers. To these audiences Paul used what they already knew and believed from the Old Testament to show that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of the Old Testament types and prophecies, and to show that in Jesus there is forgiveness of sins.

When Paul addressed pagans in Athens, he did not refer to the Old Testament at all, but used their natural knowledge of God to lead them to the true God, the Creator and Preserver of the universe. He then tried to introduce them to Jesus of Nazareth as God's appointed Judge. He was laying the groundwork for His presentation of Jesus' death and its meaning by speaking of Jesus' resurrection. But at this point Paul was interrupted by their objections. But even in Athens he must have been able to get to the good news of Jesus and His forgiveness in some way, for several persons became believers in Christ through Paul's preaching and teaching.

It is very clear that all of the sermons recorded in the Book of Acts were centered on Christ. The type of audience these preachers faced determined their method of approach, but their aim was always the same. They wanted to preach the Good News of Jesus, centering on His life, death, and resurrection, and the results of His work: the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. In his sermon at

Antioch of Pisidia, Paul used the term justification together with the term forgiveness. He pointed out that his listeners could not be justified by obeying God's law.

God wants His believers today to preach the same Gospel that Peter, Stephen, Philip, and Paul preached. Paul once wrote: **“We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake”** (2 Corinthians 4:5). Peter, Stephen, Philip, and Paul all preached Christ and they were intent on telling their listeners about the forgiveness of sins that Christ won. **“Our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant”** (2 Corinthians 3: 5-6). The new covenant is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus said: **“Preach the gospel”** (Mark 16:15), and that is what we must do. Paul wrote to Timothy: **“Preach the word!”** (2 Timothy 4:2). What is that Word? Paul tells us the answer to that question in the previous chapter: **“You have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”** (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Therefore: **“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching”** (2 Timothy 4:2).

Questions

1. In what way were all the sermons from the book of Acts similar?
2. What differences do we see in them?
3. Why did the preachers change their approach at different times?
4. What must be present in every Christian sermon?
5. Why is the preaching of the law necessary?
6. Why is the preaching of the law more necessary sometimes and not others?
7. What role does the Holy Spirit play in the preaching of the Gospel?
8. How can we know that we are preaching God's Word rather than our own ideas?
9. Who makes us sufficient for the preaching of the Gospel?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #9

C. The Power of God's Word

1. The Power Is in the Word, Not in the Preacher

There is a certain amount of power in every word that a person speaks. We can use words to hurt others, and we can use words to help, encourage, comfort, and persuade others. Sometimes a person can accomplish more with words than with force. That is why someone has coined the proverb: "The pen is mightier than the sword."

The world still admires orators of the past like Demosthenes of Athens and Cicero of Rome. Audiences can be swayed into different ways of thinking and acting by the words that they read or hear. A preacher, therefore, may begin to think that he can accomplish great things for the kingdom of God because of the words he chooses to and because of his speaking ability. But we should not think that the power to create and sustain faith in Christ and thus to save men's souls lies in our words and in our speaking. Listen to what the apostle Paul said about his preaching in Corinth. **"I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God...I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"** (1 Corinthians 2: 1-4).

The power to create, sustain and strengthen faith in Christ is not in the preacher, but in the Word of God that he preaches. As far as the world is concerned, the good news about Jesus is nothing but foolishness. Paul said: **"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness"** (1 Corinthians 1:18,23). How can the story of a man who lived a long time ago in another land and who was put to death on a cross help or save anyone? It seems like foolishness. But Paul said: **"It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe"** (1 Corinthians 1:21).

No merely human word can convert anyone to true faith in Jesus. No merely human word, no matter how powerfully it is presented, can change anyone from being an enemy of Christ to being a believer in Jesus. The Holy Spirit has chosen to do His work in men's hearts through a particular message of divine power: the law of God to knock down man's pride and the Gospel of Christ to create new life and hope. **"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter (the law) but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"** (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). **"For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us"** (2 Corinthians 4:5-7).

This treasure is the Gospel of Christ, **"for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes"** (Romans 1:16). The Holy Spirit creates and sustains spiritual life through the Gospel, even when it is spoken by us whom Paul calls earthen vessels, pieces of pottery that are easily broken. The power is in the Word of God, whether it is written or spoken. Paul wrote to Timothy: **"From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"** (2 Timothy 3:15). It is power sufficient to give us wisdom that will save us, because it gives us Jesus Christ, our Savior. The Gospel produces trust in Christ in our hearts and it maintains that trust through repeated hearing of that same Gospel! **"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"** (Romans 10:17).

Questions

1. Why do some people think that the pen is mightier than the sword?
2. Why is God's Word called foolishness by unbelievers?
3. What power does God's Word have that no human word has?
4. What power did God's Word have on the first day of the world?
5. What is the new covenant, and how it different from the old covenant?
6. What must the preacher recognize about his own abilities?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #10

C. The Power of God's Word

2. The Holy Spirit at Work through the Word

The Bible contains many examples of how God does amazing things through His powerful Word. Think of creation. **"Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light"** (Genesis 1:3). **"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth...For He spoke, and it was done"** (Psalm 33:6, 9).

Think of God's control of the world He created. **"He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes; He casts out hail like morsels; who can stand before His cold? He sends out His word and melts them. He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow"** (Psalm 147:15-18).

The false teachers in Jeremiah's time spoke lying words to deceive the people. Jeremiah responds: **"He who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully... 'Is not My word like a fire?' says the LORD, 'and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?'"** (Jeremiah 23:28-29). God's Word is not only powerful, but it is also effective. It accomplishes God's purposes: **"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word that goes forth from My mouth: it shall not return to Me void (empty, without result), but it shall accomplish what I place, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it"** (Isaiah 55: 10-11).

Preachers of God's Word need to have confidence – not in themselves and in their oratory skill, but in the power of God's Word to accomplish what He wants. What does God want? He wants to create faith in Christ. He wants to produce the fruits of faith. He wants people to be saved. And He accomplishes this through the preaching of His Word. James writes: **"Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth"** (James 1:18). Peter says that Christians are **"born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever"** (1 Peter 1:23). **"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword"** (Hebrews 4:12). It is the Holy Spirit that makes God's Word into such a powerful force. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: **"Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance"** (1 Thessalonians 1:5). To the Ephesians he wrote: **"In Him (Christ) you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation"** (Ephesians 1:13).

In fact, the Word has this power even when it is proclaimed by unworthy servants, yes, even when it is proclaimed by persons who do not themselves believe what they are saying. When the apostle Paul was in prison in Rome, he proclaimed God's Word to those who were guarding him, and he wrote to his fellow-Christians in Philippi: **"Most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear"** (Philippians 1:14). If Paul could preach the Word while in chains, they certainly should be able to preach the Word also. But Paul was even happy that some were preaching Christ **"from envy and strife," "supposing to add affliction to my chains"** (Philippians 1: 15-16). For he writes: **"What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice"** (Philippians 1:18). The Word has the power of God in it, even when Christ is preached from impure motives.

The Holy Spirit continues to work through the Word in the hearts of those who have come to faith in Christ through the Word. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: **“We also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe”** (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The Spirit keeps on working through the Word, as it is written: **“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”** (Galatians 5: 22-23). As preachers of God's Word, we have a mighty weapon for our use: **“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”** (Ephesians 6:17).

The devil uses human ideas, human opinions, lies and deceptions. He even twists God's Word for his own ends. We do not want to be instruments of the devil by using such things in our preaching. We want to be instruments of the Holy Spirit by using God's pure Word. We want everything we say as preachers to agree with God's Word, for it is only through God's Word that the Holy Spirit will do His work. We may not be the best speakers in the world. We certainly are not perfect Christians. But the Word that we speak has power if it is only God's Word that we speak. As one teacher has said: “Good preaching involves getting out of the way so that the Word can do its work” (Chapell: *Christ-Centered Preaching*, p. 25).

Questions

1. What are some of the things God has accomplished through His Word?
2. Why is God's Word compared with a hammer, and with rain and snow?
3. What tool does the Holy Spirit use to bring people to faith in Christ?
4. Why was Paul happy about what some of his enemies were preaching?
5. How does the Holy Spirit work effectively in believers?
6. What makes the word that preachers preach powerful and effective?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #11

C. The Power of God's Word

3. Living in Harmony with Our Preaching

There is an old saying that goes like this: “Your actions speak so loudly I can’t hear what you say.” If our lives and conduct do not match what we say, our listeners may not pay much attention to what we say. In other words, we can hurt the preaching of God’s Word by conducting ourselves in ungodly or even unfriendly ways. We cannot add to the power of God’s Word by the way we speak or by the way we act, but we can hinder the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word by the way we act and speak.

When the missionary Paul came to Thessalonica with the Gospel, he was careful not to get in the way of the Holy Spirit’s work. This is his report (the underlined words bring out the main points):

- **We were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness – God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. (1 Thessalonians 2:2-8)**
- **You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12).**

To the Corinthians Paul wrote: “**We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God**” (2 Corinthians 6:3-4). We need to remember at all times that we are representing God as preachers of His Word. Giving offense means that we do or say something that does not fit with the glorious Gospel of Christ that we are preaching.

Paul carefully instructed his helpers Timothy and Titus to live lives in keeping with the Gospel they preached:

- **Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. (2 Timothy 2:15-16)**
- **Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition. (2 Timothy 2:22-25)**
- **In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of us. (Titus 2:7-8)**

If we remember what our Lord Jesus did for us and how the Holy Spirit brought us to faith in Christ through the Word, we will want to share this good news with others; therefore, we will not want to do anything that will work against the Gospel that we preach. To use an American expression, we not only want to talk the talk, but we want to walk the walk. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to lead us in this direction. Humility is extremely important. We who preach the Word are sinners, just like those to whom we preach, and we need of the same Gospel we proclaim to others.

Let us listen to some more of the instruction Paul gave to his young assistant:

- **Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity...Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. (1 Timothy 4:12, 15-16)**

Questions

1. Why is the conduct of the preacher so important?
2. What can happen to the Word we preach if our conduct is bad?
3. What are some of the things Paul avoided in Thessalonica for the sake of the Gospel?
4. What kind of advice about their conduct did Paul give to Titus and Timothy?
5. What kind of Christian life is worthy of God?
6. Why is humility so important in the preaching of God's Word?
7. What is a character flaw you need God's help with?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #12

D. Preparing to Preach the Word

Here are nine steps you should follow to prepare a good sermon that contains both the Law and the Gospel:

- 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

We will study each step in detail in the following lessons. As you grow in your experience as a preacher, you may be able to group steps 3-7 together in your study of the text, but as you begin to learn how to prepare a sermon, it is important to take the time to focus on each step individually to learn how to do each step properly. Therefore, you should follow each step carefully and complete each step before moving on to the next one until you are comfortable in doing each step.

Step 1. Begin with Prayer

Let us assume that you have been asked by a group of Christians to preach the Word of God at a Christian service of worship. This is really a call from God Himself, who calls preachers through His Christians. This is a serious responsibility, and you want to accept this call in order to glorify God and help your fellow-Christians. You want to carry out this task to the best of your ability. What is one of the first things you should do? Remember the words of the apostle Paul: **“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God”** (2 Corinthians 3:5). Since God is the One who makes us sufficient to preach the Word of God, you should pray to God to give you the sufficiency to do what you have been asked to do.

Of course, we should pray to God to be with us and help us in every task that we do, but we should pray when we get ready to stand before our fellow-human beings to bring them a word from God. Psalm 119, in particular, can provide words for our prayers as we prepare to preach the Word of God. It is the longest of all the psalms, and every one of its verses refers to the Word of God. Here are a few examples that should help us find the right words and thoughts as we talk to God and ask Him for His help:

- **With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Blessed are You, O LORD! Teach me Your statutes.** (Psalm 119:10-12)
- **Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.** (Psalm 119:18)
- **Teach me Your statutes. Make me understand the way of Your precepts...Strengthen me according to Your word. Remove from me the way of lying...I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame!** (Psalm 119:26-31)
- **Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments.** (Psalm 119:66)

- **Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.** (Psalm 119:73)
- **Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven...I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life.** (Psalm 119:89, 93)
- **How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.** (Psalm 119:103-105)
- **Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy, and teach me Your statutes. I am Your servant; give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies.** (Psalm 119:124-125)
- **Let my cry come before You, O LORD; give me understanding according to Your word. Let my supplication come before You; deliver me according to Your word. My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes. My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness.** (Psalm 119:169-172)

Above all, we want to pray the petition that our Lord taught us: **“Hallowed be Your name”** (Matthew 6:9). This is the way Martin Luther explained how this petition is answered in our preaching: *“Whenever the Word of God is taught clearly and purely and we, as God’s children, also live holy lives according to it. To this end help us, dear Father in heaven! However, whoever teaches and lives otherwise than the Word of God teaches profanes the name of God among us. Preserve us from this, heavenly Father!”* (*Book of Concord*, p. 356).

Questions

1. How does God call us to preach His Word?
2. Why is it important to pray to the Lord as we prepare to preach?
3. What are the thoughts that are repeated in these words from Ps. 119?
4. How is God’s name hallowed in our preaching?
5. How might God’s name be profaned in our preaching?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #13

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

The Bible is a big book. All of it is the Word of God, but we cannot possibly preach all of it at one time. Therefore, it is necessary that we limit ourselves to one small section of the Bible at a time.

We do not absolutely have to have a Bible text in order to preach the Word of God. There may be times in our lives when we do not have a Bible in our hands but it is necessary for us to speak. In such cases we may have to summarize Bible truths in our own words, but we will always want to mention Jesus Christ, our Lord, and what He has done for us in what we say.

But even Jesus' apostles generally based much of what they said on a text or texts from the Old Testament Scriptures, as we saw in their sermons recorded in the book of Acts. This was true of Peter's sermons and Paul's sermons when they spoke to Jews and God-fearers. When Paul spoke to heathens in Athens, he did not quote any particular Scripture, but he summarized some of God's teaching in his own words, but what Paul said was in full agreement with what the Scriptures say.

Nevertheless, when we are asked to speak God's Word to a group people, it is best if we choose a Bible text from the Old Testament or the New Testament as the main basis or source of what we are going to say.

What kind of text should we choose? When you beginning to preach of God's Word, it is important that you choose texts from Scripture that you, yourself, understand. Perhaps texts that helped you come to faith in Jesus or strengthened your faith in Him. Our choice of texts will depend, in part, on what kind of persons will be in our audience. Are they rich or poor? Are they educated or uneducated? Are they strangers to us, or are we well-acquainted with them? Do we know what kind of message they need to hear? Is there a certain kind of ignorance or problem that they are dealing with? How far have they come in their understanding of the Gospel of Christ? Generally, it is best to speak in such a way that those who understand the least are able to understand what we are saying.

In the beginning, it will probably be best if you pick texts from the New Testament, especially from the four Gospels and the book of Acts. The letters of Paul and Peter are generally harder to understand. They may become easier for you to explain later on after you have had more experience in preaching the Word of God. The letters of John are very deep and profound, but the words he uses are simple for the most part.

When you start to preach, try to choose texts that clearly present the Gospel (the Good News) of Christ.

If you wanted to speak about Jesus' birth and why He came to our world, you could choose as your text Matthew 1:20-25 or selected verses from Luke 2. Matthew 9:1-8 and John 1:25-29 are texts that talk about the forgiveness of sins. You could preach on having faith in Jesus from John 3:14-18. Jesus told many parables to the people of His time to explain a spiritual truth by using examples from daily life. If your audience is made up of persons who grow plants from the ground, you may tell the story of the sower and his seed in Luke 8: 4-15. Texts from the Gospels that give the account of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection are always appropriate. The apostle Paul said he preached Christ crucified, and we ought to follow his example.

In addition to the four Gospels, another good source of texts for the beginning preacher is the book of Acts. You could choose the account of Philip and the man from Ethiopia in Acts 8 or the story of the jailer in Philippi in Acts 16. There are three accounts of Paul's conversion in the book of Acts: Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26.

Sometimes a single from the Scriptures may serve as the basis for your sermon, especially single verses from the letters of Paul or Peter. Some verses that would make good sermons are: 1 Timothy 1:15, Ephesians 4:32, and Ephesians 5:2.

A good text on sin and forgiveness is 1 John 1:6-10. If your audience is a bit more advanced in their understanding, you may want to explain a wonderful law and Gospel passage like Romans 3:23-24 or Galatians 2:16 or 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.

Questions

1. Why might it be necessary at times to preach the Word without a text?
2. Why is it best always to have a specific Bible text to explain?
3. What can help us find the right text for a certain situation?
4. Why is it usually best to preach on New Testament texts at first?
5. Why is it important to know something about your audience?
6. What should be included in every sermon we preach?
7. Which texts from the ones listed above appeal to you as texts that you would like to use as the basis for sermons you preach.
8. Why is it important to preach the law as well as the Gospel?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #14

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

2.1 The Church Year

Starting in the early days of the church, the Christians gradually developed the so-called church year. The purpose of the church year is to remember certain events in the life of Christ at specific times of the year. The first festival started by the early Christians was probably the celebration of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Since the resurrection took place in the spring of the year during the Jewish Passover season, the Christians celebrated the resurrection of Christ at that time. Actually, there were serious arguments among the Christians as to when the resurrection took place. The Christians in Europe and the West agreed that Easter should be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. For this reason, Easter may be celebrated as early as March 22 and as late as April 25. On Easter, most Christian preachers probably will choose texts that speak of Jesus' resurrection, such as texts from Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20-21, other New Testament texts that refer to Jesus' resurrection, or even Old Testament texts that foretell His resurrection.

The early church then began to think of the weeks before Easter as days of penitence and preparation. Based on Jesus' forty-day temptation in the wilderness, they decided this period would last for forty days and would all the days before Easter, excluding the Sundays. This period became known as the season of Lent or the Passion season. It begins on Ash Wednesday and includes Holy Week – the week before Easter. Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and includes Maundy Thursday, the day of the Lord's Supper, and Good Friday, the day of our Lord's crucifixion. Sermons during Lent center on Jesus' suffering and death for our sins and what this means for us today. In addition to texts from the four Gospels, there are many New Testament passages that explain the significance of Jesus' suffering and the many Old Testament passages that foretell Jesus' suffering, such as Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

Forty days after Easter, the early Christians celebrated the day that Jesus ascended to heaven on a Thursday called Ascension Day. Ten days later, on the fiftieth day after Easter, the early Christians remembered the day of Pentecost, the day on which the risen Savior sent the Holy Spirit to His disciples in a miraculous way to initiate the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the world, beginning at Jerusalem and going out to all nations. Sermons during the season of Pentecost usually emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit and His use of the means of grace to bring people to faith in Christ. The book of Acts contains many texts that are suitable for sermons during the Pentecost season.

Another festival that gradually developed in the early years of the church was the Epiphany festival. This festival took place on January 6 and celebrated the baptism of Jesus and the beginning of His public ministry among the Jews. Epiphany means manifestation or appearing; it refers to Jesus' showing of Himself as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Today Epiphany is celebrated by remembering the visit of the Gentile Wise Men from the East to worship the young Christ child. The Epiphany season is a good time to celebrate the spread of Jesus' Gospel to all the various nations of the world. The book of Acts is a good source of texts for this season, as well as other texts that emphasize Jesus' great commission to preach the Gospel in all nations of the world.

For over a hundred years the early Christians did not have a particular day for remembering the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. But eventually they chose such a day, the day we call Christmas, which we celebrate on December 25. This day is celebrated throughout the world even more than Easter, with many celebrations that really have little to do with Jesus or His birth. In many countries Christmas has become a time of the year when merchants do whatever they can to induce customers to buy gifts for their family and friends. The four weeks before Christmas comprise the Advent season. During Advent it is good for Christian preachers to prepare Christians for a spiritual celebration of Jesus' birth as the day on which God became man in order to save humankind.

From these major festivals the entire church year has developed, with each Sunday being given a name. The church year begins with the four Sundays in Advent (which means "coming") before December 25. In most years there is a Sunday after Christmas. New Year's Day is one week after Christmas. On New Year's Day, the Christians celebrate the circumcision of Christ, as well as Him being given the name Jesus.

Epiphany follows on January 6, although this festival is not often celebrated in our time with a special service if it does not fall on a Sunday. The following Sundays are known as the Sundays after Epiphany. The number of these Sundays varies, depending on whether Easter is early or late. The last Sunday in the Epiphany season is sometimes celebrated as Transfiguration Sunday to remember when Jesus appeared in His glorious form in the presence of Peter, James, and John. Some congregations have three special Sundays after the Epiphany season before the Lenten season begins. Other congregations extend the Epiphany season right up to Ash Wednesday. There are six Sundays in Lent, and the last Sunday in Lent is Palm Sunday. Holy Week follows, with special celebrations on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday, or both days, leading up to Easter Sunday, the great day of Jesus' resurrection.

There are five Sundays after Easter before Ascension Day. Then one Sunday after Ascension before the festival of Pentecost. So the three major festivals of the church year are Christmas, when we celebrate the love of God the Father in sending His Son as our Savior, Easter, when we remember the work of God the Son on our behalf, particularly His death for our sins and His resurrection, and Pentecost, when we celebrate the coming of God the Holy Spirit. It is fitting, then, that the Sunday after Pentecost is Trinity Sunday, when we summarize the work of all three Persons of God in our salvation.

The Sundays that follow Trinity Sunday are called the Sundays after Trinity. There may be as many as 27 Sundays after Trinity, depending on the date of Easter Sunday. During this season of the year you have the opportunity to speak on many topics in Christian doctrine and on living the Christian life. In the United States, Lutherans generally celebrate several special days during the Trinity season, for example, Mission Festival, the Reformation Festival, and Thanksgiving. No doubt other countries have their own special days that people celebrate with special church services and celebrations.

Using the church year helps you cover the main teachings of God's Word over the course of a year. This follows Paul's desire to "**declare...the whole counsel of God**" (Acts 20:27). Otherwise you may be tempted to preach only on your favorite topics or on your favorite Bible verses. This can lead you to neglect some of God's word. Following the pattern of the church year is a good way to ensure that your sermons have variety and cover many different topics.

We need to understand that God has not commanded that we use of the church year. In the Old Testament God Himself established a church year that the Israelites had to follow. They were not permitted to choose alternate festivals or follow a different pattern. But now in the New Testament we dare not establish laws that God has not established. For it is written: **“Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ”** (Colossians 2: 16-17). Paul wrote to the Galatians: **“You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain”** (Galatians 4: 10-11). We are free to use the whole church year or part of the church year or none of the church year. But most Lutheran preachers of the Word use the basic pattern of the church year, and most Lutheran congregations approve of its use.

Questions

1. What are the main festivals of the church year?
2. How did the church year come about?
3. What are the three main festivals of the church year?
4. What is the preparation period for Christmas, and how long does it last?
5. What is the preparation period for Easter, and how long does it last?
6. What is meant by Holy Week?
7. Why are there more Sundays after Epiphany in some years than in other years?
8. What are the benefits of using the church year?
9. What are the disadvantages of using the church year?
10. What is the difference between Old Testament festivals and New Testament festivals?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #15

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

2.2 Pericope Systems (Lectionaries)

In an effort to provide Christian congregations with a well-balanced diet of spiritual food from the Scriptures, various individuals and committees have devised lists of texts from the Scriptures for every Sunday of the church year and also for special church festivals. Each text is called a pericope – pronounced parickapee – which is a text suitable for a sermon. Such lists help the pastors locate suitable texts for the various Sundays and festivals of the year.

Two pericope systems, or lectionaries, can be traced back to the early Christians. Pastors from various denominations, including Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, and Lutheran, have followed these lists. Martin Luther and many Lutherans of the past preached regularly on these old pericopes. One of these old lists is made up of selections from the four Gospels for every Sunday of the year. The other old list contains selections from the epistles of the New Testament.

The first four Sundays of the church year are the four Sundays in Advent. These are the texts in the two old pericope systems:

First Sunday in Advent	Gospel text: Matthew 21:1-9;	Epistle text: Romans 13:11-14
Second Sunday in Advent	Gospel text: Luke 21:25-36;	Epistle text: Romans 15:4-13
Third Sunday in Advent	Gospel text: Matthew 11:2-10;	Epistle text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Fourth Sunday in Advent	Gospel text: John 1:19-28;	Epistle text: Philippians 4:4-7

No doubt these texts were chosen with the idea of Advent in mind. They focus on Jesus' coming – His coming as a fulfillment of prophecy, His coming as Savior of the world, His coming to us today through His Word, His coming on the last day. These same general ideas occur also in many other lectionaries that have been developed over the years.

Another system is named for the city of Eisenach in Germany. This system has three lists of texts: a Gospel text, an Epistle text, and an Old Testament text. These are the texts for the first four Sundays in Advent:

Advent 1 – Luke 1:68-79;	Hebrews 10:19-25;	Jeremiah 31: 31-34
Advent 2 – Luke 17:20-30;	2 Peter 1:3-11;	Malachi 4
Advent 3 – Matthew 3:1-11;	2 Timothy 4:5-8;	Isaiah 40: 1-8
Advent 4 – John 1:15-18;	1 John 1:1-4;	Deuteronomy 18: 15-19

By using these lists, you would have texts for five years of sermons without repeating a single text.

The Lutheran Synodical Conference, which made up of several American synods from 1872 to 1963, asked one of its pastors to devise other pericope systems (lectionaries) for the member churches to use. These are the choices for the four Sundays in Advent:

Advent 1 – Matt. 11:25-30; Luke 17:20-25;	Romans 1:16-20;	Psalm 24
Advent 2 – Luke 17:26-37; Luke 1:67-80;	2 Timothy 3:10-17;	Deuteronomy 18:15-22
Advent 3 – Matt. 3:1-12; Luke 3:3-14;	1 Corinthians 9:16-23;	Isaiah 61
Advent 4 – Mark 6:17-29; John 1:29-34;	1 Timothy 2:1-6;	Haggai 2:6-9

In more recent times, a committee made up of persons from various backgrounds has devised a three-year series of texts for the church year. Each series has four texts: Old Testament lesson, Epistle lesson, Gospel lesson, and a Psalm for the day. These are the selections for Advent in Year A:

Advent 1 – Isaiah 2:1-5;	Romans 13: 11-14;	Matthew 24: 37-44;	Psalm 18
Advent 2 – Isaiah 11:1-10;	Romans 15: 4-13;	Matthew 3: 1-12;	Psalm 130
Advent 3 – Isaiah 35:1-10;	James 5: 7-11;	Matthew 11: 2-11;	Psalm 146
Advent 4 – Isaiah 7:10-14;	Romans 1: 1-7;	Matthew 1: 18-25;	Psalm 24

These are the Advent texts for Year B:

Advent 1 – Is. 63:16b-17, 64:1-8;	1 Corinthians 1:3-9;	Mark 13:32-37;	Psalm 24
Advent 2 – Isaiah 40:1-11;	2 Peter 3: 8-14;	Mark 1: 1-8;	Psalm 85
Advent 3 – Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11;	1 Thess. 5:16-24;	John 1:6-8, 19-28;	Psalm 71
Advent 4 – 2 Samuel 7:8-16;	Romans 16: 25-27;	Luke 1:26-38;	Psalm 89

These are the Advent texts for Year C:

Advent 1 – Jeremiah 33:14-16;	1 Thess. 3:9-13;	Luke 21:25-36;	Psalm 25
Advent 2 – Malachi 3:1-4;	Philippians 1:3-11;	Luke 3:1-6;	Psalm 24
Advent 3 – Zephaniah 3:14-17;	Philippians 4:4-7;	Luke 3:7-18;	Psalm 130
Advent 4 – Micah 5:2-5a;	Hebrews 10:5-10;	Luke 1:39-55;	Psalm 85

This same committee also devised four texts for each Sunday in what is called a one-year series:

Advent 1 – Jeremiah 33: 14-18;	Romans 13:11-14;	Matthew 21:1-9;	Psalm 24
Advent 2 – Malachi 4:1-6;	Romans 15:4-13;	Luke 21:25-36;	Psalm 85
Advent 3 – Isaiah 35:1-6;	1 Corinthians 1:26-31;	Matthew 11: 2-10;	Psalm 111
Advent 4 – Isaiah 12:1-6;	Philippians 4:4-7;	Luke 1: 46-55;	Psalm 92

God, of course, has not commanded that we use of any of these pericope systems, nor has He taught us to follow any pericope system at all. But many preachers find that the use of such a system saves them the time of searching for a text from Sunday to Sunday. These systems also ensure that you will present many of the themes of the Bible over the course of the year. Remember that Paul's aim in his three years in Ephesus was to preach **“repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Acts 20:21), **“to testify to the gospel of the grace of God”** (Acts 20:24), and **“to declare to (them) the whole counsel of God”** (Acts 20:27). Using a pericope system of texts will help you today to accomplish the same goal.

Some hymn books print some or all of the above pericope systems in their entirety. After many years of experience in preaching God's Word, you may want to devise your own pericope system.

Another way to preach God's Word is to choose one Bible book, or a section of a Bible book, and to preach a series of sermons on that Bible section. This is something you may wish to do especially during the many Sundays of the Trinity season. For example, you could choose to take your texts from the first chapter of the Gospel of John. You could divide the chapter into seven or eight sections, and preach on the first section on the first Sunday, the second section on the second Sunday, etc., until you have

presented the entire chapter.

Many Lutherans have chosen to preach God's Word following the order of Luther's *Small Catechism*. On the first Sunday one would preach a sermon on the First Commandment, the next Sunday on the second commandment, etc., until one has taught the whole catechism. There are many other possibilities for a series of sermons on a particular topic or section of Scripture. Of course, a preacher of God's Word may choose freely which Scripture text he wants to use as the basis for his preaching. In making his choices, however, the preacher will keep in mind his own abilities and the condition and needs of his listeners.

Questions

1. What is a pericope?
2. What is a pericope system or lectionary?
3. What is the advantage of using a pericope system for finding texts?
4. What is the general theme of all the texts chosen for Advent?
5. What disadvantages may there be in using a pericope system?
6. Where could you find a complete pericope system?
7. What other ways could you use to choose sermon texts?



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #16

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

After you have chosen a Bible text, you must then work, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to fully understand the text you have chosen. There are several steps you can follow to help you study and understand the text you have chosen so that you can correctly preach on it:

1. Read and re-read the text aloud and silently in the language in which you will be preaching

If there are several translations of the text available in your language, choose the translation in which you have most confidence, that is, the one that is the most faithful translation of the Hebrew or Greek.

Read and re-read the text in your chosen translation. This will give you a general understanding of the text. It is important read the text not only silently, but out loud as well. You will be reading the text before or as part of your sermon. Reading the text out loud as a part of your study will you the practice so that you can read the text correctly and clearly when you read it for your audience.

2. Study the context of your passage.

To understand a text in Scripture, it is almost always very helpful to study the *context* of the passage. The context refers to the verses or chapters that come before and after your text. Reading the context will give you a better understand of the general flow of thought in that section of the Bible. You should try to get a good idea of the general thought of the book and section of the book from which your text is taken.

If you have the time, you should read the whole book from which your text is taken. This will give you a general idea of the book as a whole and the best understand of the context of your verses. While this may seem like a lot of work, if you will be preaching a serious of sermons from the same book, this extra work at the beginning will help you as you continue to prepare sermons from the book. If you do not have time to read the whole book, read at least the whole chapter containing your text, and also the chapter before and after the chapter containing the text you are studying.

Studying the context will help you correctly understand your text. For example, if your text is a parable that Jesus told, reading the parables that come before it and after it can help you see the main point of the parable you are studying, as these other parables often talk about the same subject and give a similar lesson. And if your text begins with "And he..." or "And they...", you have to look at the context to figure out who "he" refers to and who "they" are.

3. Study your text verse by verse.

After you understand the context of your passage, study each verse in the passage one by one. Take notes as you study each verse. If you have questions on what a verse says, write down the question.

If you have access to other translations in your language, read the verses in those translations as well. If you know other languages in addition to the language in which you will preach, it will be helpful to study the text in these other languages as well. For example, if you are planning to preach in your local language, you should read and study your text first in that language. If you are able to read and study in another language, such as English or French, also study the text in this second language.

Studying different translations in your native language, along with translations in other languages you may know, will help you properly understand the Bible text. If we read only one translation, we might misunderstand what the translators meant by the words and phrases they used to translate the Greek or Hebrew. Looking at multiple translations and languages can help you avoid any misunderstanding and give you a more complete understanding of what God is saying. Reading the verse in different translations can also help you if you find some words that you do not understand. Different translations may use different words that explain the concept better.

If you have learned some Greek or Hebrew and you have access to the Greek New Testament or the Hebrew Old Testament, study the text, as far as possible, in the original Greek or Hebrew. Studying the original language can give you additional insight into the meaning of the text.

As you study each verse, it is usually helpful to examine the grammar of the sentences in your text. What is the subject of the sentence? What is the verb (the action word)? What words give us the object of the action? What are the connections between the various parts of the text? What are the tenses that are used? Are they past, present, future, or perfect? These are some questions that you can ask yourself to help you study and understand the passage in detail. Another way to think about this is to consider the five main questions:

- who?** Determine who is doing or saying something in the verse(s) and to whom they are doing or saying it. What do you know about the people mentioned? For example, if the passage talks about the pharisees, answer questions such as: Who were the pharisees? What were they like? What do we know about them?
- what?** Determine what is being said or done by each person.
- where?** Determine where the events took place. What do we know about this place? Is the place important?
- when?** Determine when the events described took place or will take place. Is what has happened before this important?
- why?** Look for reasons why the people mentioned in the text do or say what they do. You must be careful, however, to not invent a reason if the Bible does not clearly give a reason.

Find other verses in the Bible that talk about the same things. Many Bibles list verses that are related to the verses you are studying. Look for little letters or numbers attached to words or phrases in the verses and then find the cross-references in the center column or at the bottom of the page. Because the Bible interprets itself, something that may not be clear to you in your text may be more fully explained in another part of the Bible. These other passages can help you understand what your text is saying.

The Gospels often contain parallel passages. If you are studying a text from one of the Gospels, read the parallel accounts in the other Gospels (these are often given in the cross-references in your Bible). These parallel accounts often give additional information that can help you understand your text more fully.

All of this may seem like a lot of work, but it is important to thoroughly study the text on which you are preaching so that you understand it correctly and can preach on it properly. If you do not understand the text, how can you preach on it? And by studying your text thoroughly, you, yourself will grow in your understanding of God's word (see 2 Peter 3:17-18). As you practice all these steps, they will become second nature and you will become more adept in your study of the Bible.

Some texts are much more difficult to understand than others. It may even happen at times that you realize that you do not understand a text well enough to teach it to others. In this case, look for another text that you do understand and pray that the Holy Spirit will give you a better understanding of God's Word so that you can understand and preach the difficult text at a later date.

While it is important to take the time and effort to carefully study the text on which you will be preaching, remember that our understanding of God's Word ultimately comes from the Holy Spirit. May He bless all your efforts and give you understanding of the text you have chosen.

Resources for your study

As general rule, at least for beginning preachers, it takes about 20 hours each week to properly study a text and prepare a sermon on that text. When it comes to studying, preaching, and teaching God's word, we do not want to take shortcuts. Because of work and family, however, you may have limited time, so you will have to make the very best use of the time that you have available to study and prepare your sermons. There are resources that can help you make efficient use of your time to study the Bible.

If you have a friend or a mentor who can help you study your text, use him. If you can get together with other like-minded preachers in your area to study of that text, this can be very helpful in your preparation. This is another reason to use the same lectionary. If you are all preaching on the same text each week, you can discuss the text together, share insights, and help one another to prepare your sermons.

You can save a lot of time if you have an edition of the Bible that provides study helps. For example, you may have a Bible that has notes that explain certain difficult words or expressions. As mentioned above, your Bible may list passages from other parts of the Bible that deal with the same subject or provide an explanation of your text. Your Bible may contain maps, charts, and timelines that help explain the setting of your text.

Some Bibles contain *concordances* in the back that give a list of the various passages in the Bible that contain a particular word. This list can help you find other passages that talk about the same subject or use the same word. Looking at other passages that use a certain word can help you better understand what that word means. There are also Bible apps that you can download onto your phone or tablet that let you search for words.

Another resource that may be helpful is a Bible commentary written by someone who has spent much more time trying to understand what your text means. Such a commentary may provide helpful comments on the meaning of the original words or the grammar of the sentences. It may include parallel passages or information that help explain your text. But you must be very careful when you use commentaries, whether they are in books or on the Internet. Every commentator has his own point of view and follows a certain confession or creed that will color his understanding of the text. It is best to read only those commentaries written by Lutheran men who share the same confession that you have. You should be able to have confidence in a commentary written by someone who also believes that the *Book of Concord* agrees with Scripture. In general, it is best to consult a commentary only after you have studied the text yourself. It is important that you try to understand the text yourself first. Remember that the Holy Spirit works through the Word itself to enlighten those who study that Word.

You can find a lot of information to help you study your text on the Internet. There are websites, such as www.BibleGateway.com, www.biblia.com, and www.bible.is, that have Bibles in many languages.

These websites and various Bible apps allow you to search for words and phrases and find other passages that speak to the same topic as your text to help you better understand your text. As noted above, however, you must be careful when reading commentaries on the internet. It is easy to find comments on the internet from those that do not share our understanding of the Bible.

Questions

1. List the steps you will take in studying your text with the time and the materials you have available to you.
2. Which Bible translations are available for you to use?
3. Which languages can you use to study the Bible?
4. Why is it helpful to consult with others in studying a text?
5. What do we mean when we say that the Bible interprets itself?
6. How can a map or chart or timeline help you understand your text?
7. What is a concordance and how may it be helpful?
8. What is a parallel passage?
9. What can a person learn from the Internet about a specific Bible text?
10. Why do we need to be careful in our use of commentaries?



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #17

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

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

In the previous lessons, we have studied the first three steps to take in the preparation of a sermon. The first step is beginning with prayer, but remember that you should continue to pray throughout your preparation. We need always to remember that we are only instruments of the Holy Spirit in preaching God's Word.

The second step is to select your text. We will choose John 3:14-18. Now we will apply the next step, step 3: Studying the Text and Context.

Step 3: Study the Text and Context of John 3:14-18

Since we are studying the text in English, we will begin our study of John 3:14-18 by the reading of the text in a translation that is both accurate and adequate, the New King James Version. We will also compare this text to other English translations that are readily available: the King James Version, the New American Standard Version, the English Standard Version, the New International Version, and the Evangelical Heritage Version.¹ You may have access to other English translations. If you speak another language, you will want to read and compare your text in that language. It is generally helpful to read your text in as many languages as you are familiar with. If you will be preaching in a language other than English, you will want to especially study your text in the language you in which you will be preaching.

This is the text of John 3:14-18 in the New King James Version:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Many Bibles print the text in red, because it is understood that the entire text is something that Jesus

¹ These translations are all available online at www.BibleGateway.com and www.Bible.com (there is also an application for Bible.com, so you can download these translations on to your phone or tablet).

Himself said in a conversation with Nicodemus. Looking at the context we see that Nicodemus is called **“a man of the Pharisees”** (John 3:1) and **“the teacher of Israel”** (John 3:10).

As we read through this text, there are certain things that we need to study further. For example, what is meant by Moses lifting up the serpent, who is the Son of Man, and how was He lifted up? What does it mean to believe in Him? What is the difference between perishing and having eternal life? What is meant by the world that God loves? What is an only-begotten Son? What does it mean to condemn the world and to save the world? What does it mean to be condemned already? Is there any difference between the Son of Man and the Son of God? We need to have a good understanding of all these things, so that we can teach them accurately to our listeners.

Comparing Other English Translations

Keep these questions in mind as you read the text in other translations. We start with the King James Version. Except for using antiquated words, like **“whosoever believeth”**, and a slight difference in word order, the King James Version and the New King James Version are the same.

The Evangelical Heritage Version substitutes the word **“snake”** for **“serpent.”** It also uses the word **“eternal”** rather than the word **“everlasting”**, and so uses the word **“eternal”** twice. We also read: **“Whoever believes in him shall not perish.”**

The New American Standard Version does not use the words **“condemn”** or **“condemned.”** Rather, it says: **“God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world,”** and **“He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already.”**

In New International Version we notice that the first sentence ends like this: **“that everyone who believes may have eternal life.”** It omits any reference to perishing. And instead of using the term **“only-begotten”**, it uses the term **“one and only.”** The NIV also ends Jesus’ words at verse 15, so that verses 16-18 are something that the Apostle John wrote, rather than something Jesus said to Nicodemus. In its desire to avoid using male pronouns, the NIV translates the last verse as follows: **“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”**

The English Standard Version uses a different expression in verse 17: **“God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”**

A comparison of these translations does not show that there is anything substantially wrong with the New King James Version translation of these verses. Some words that we might need study more in-depth include “serpent” and “only begotten.” One translation uses **“judge”** rather than **“condemn,”** but all of the others use **“condemn.”**

If you have had the opportunity to study some Greek and are able to read the Greek to some extent, you will, of course, want to look at your text in its original form.

Studying the Context and Background of the Text

After studying the words of the text and how they are connected to each other, it is important to read the entire context of the selected passage. This means reading all of chapter three of the Gospel of John, and perhaps also the first two chapters as well. It is clear, first of all, that the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus took place very early in Jesus’ ministry. He has just gathered His first disciples; He has just performed His first sign (miracle), and He is in Jerusalem and on the temple grounds for the first time since His baptism and temptation. Jesus has had His first clash with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem because He drove the money changers and the buyers and sellers out of the temple court. When they ask for a sign of His authority, Jesus gave them the sign of His own future resurrection: **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”** (John 2:19). By **“this temple”**, Jesus was referring to His own body.

Jesus did many signs in Jerusalem during this time, for we read that **“many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did”** (John 2:23). We are not given the details of any of these signs. This leads to chapter three, where we are introduced to a Pharisee in Jerusalem named Nicodemus. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. He was aware of the miracles that Jesus had done in Jerusalem, for he says to Jesus: **“No one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him”** (John 3:2). Nicodemus shows great respect for Jesus by calling Him Rabbi and he implies that Jesus must be a Teacher who has come from God.

At the end of Chapter 2 of John’s Gospel we read that Jesus **“knew what was in man.”** This is demonstrated by Jesus’ response to Nicodemus’ polite and kind opening remark. Jesus knew that Nicodemus was not a true believer in God’s promises to Israel, even though he was a Pharisee and a teacher of Israel. He needed spiritual regeneration; he needed a new birth in order to enter into the kingdom of God. After Jesus pointed out the absolute necessity of a spiritual rebirth, that is, a birth from the Spirit, Jesus went on to speak of what He called heavenly things. He said: **“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven”** (John 3:13). It is hard to know how much of this Nicodemus understood. Jesus spoke of the Son of Man in heaven who has come down from heaven, and He is the only One who can ascend to heaven.

Studying Important Concepts

The better you know the Bible from daily reading and meditation, the easier it will be for you to find connections between your text and other texts and parallel passages in the Bible. For example, when the text speaks of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness, you might already know what Jesus is referring to, because you have read the account in the book of Numbers. Your Bible may give you a cross-reference the story in Numbers 21, so you can read the account for yourself. In fact, even if you remember the account, you should reread it to make sure you understand the details correctly. The strange cure for those bitten by poisonous snakes was to look up at a bronze serpent that Moses had put up on a pole. Of course, the bronze serpent in itself could not cure anyone. It was God’s Word of promise that attached the cure to the serpent. God said to Moses: **“Everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live...And so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived”** (Numbers 21:8-9).

It is worthwhile to study the man Nicodemus and learn where he is mentioned in the Bible. You will learn that later on he spoke up in defense of Jesus. In fact, he and Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus down from the cross to bury Jesus. With this act, Nicodemus finally openly demonstrated his love for Jesus. Because Nicodemus was a Pharisee, whatever you can learn about Pharisees might also be helpful in understanding what he says and does.

Since our text speaks about God and His Son, and it refers to both the Son of Man and the Son of God, it would be helpful to further study the relationship between God and His Son, as well as to study the two names used for Jesus in this text: Son of Man and Son of God. It is certainly important to have a good understanding of these concepts and these terms, so that we can be sure that what we say is in full agreement with Holy Scripture.

For help in this study we can turn to the lessons dealing with the doctrine of Christ, or Christology in the Online Theological Studies course. In Dogmatics Lesson 6.3 – [Incarnation](#) we find the following, which should help prevent us from going beyond Scripture in what we say:

Since Jesus is God, He is eternal, just as His Father is eternal. Therefore, we must say that Jesus as God was begotten of the Father from eternity. There was no time when there was no Jesus as Son of God. But there was a definite beginning to Jesus as human – as a man. There was no human Jesus until He was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. About nine months later the Son of God was born of the virgin Mary. Thus, He who has always been God became man at a definite point of time in history and is now the God-man, Jesus, the Christ.

He was always God, but He became human. His becoming human is called the incarnation.

All of the facts of the above paragraph are spelled out clearly in Scripture. The incarnation is most clearly taught in the first chapter of John's Gospel. We are introduced to the eternal Son of God in the first verses: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God"** (John 1: 1-2). Then later in the chapter John tells us: **"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"** (John 1:14). The Word's becoming flesh is the incarnation.

The details of Jesus' incarnation are presented in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The first chapter of Luke tells us that God sent His angel Gabriel to tell the virgin girl Mary of Nazareth that she was God's choice to be the mother of the Son of God: **"You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest"** (Luke 1:31-32). Moreover, Gabriel told her that this boy would not have a human father. Instead He would have a unique conception: **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God... For with God nothing will be impossible"** (Luke 1:35,37).

Even though Jesus had no human father, God provided a husband for Mary in the person of Joseph, a carpenter to whom Mary had been promised through a betrothal. But the marriage was not consummated by a sexual union until after Jesus was born. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that when Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant even though he had not been with her, he **"was minded to put her away secretly"** (Matthew 1:19). He felt he could not take her as his wife since this child to be born of her was obviously not his. But God revealed to him the truth about this baby's conception and instructed him in a dream: **"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins"** (Matthew 1:20-21).

Thus, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary were both present. The actual birth of Jesus is described in very few words: **"So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn"** (Luke 2:6-7). He who had always been God was now also fully human – true God and true man in one person. The birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies, such as Genesis 3:15, Genesis 22:18, Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9: 6-7, Micah 5:2, and Jeremiah 23:5.

In Dogmatics Lesson 6.4 – The Union of Jesus' Two Natures in One Person we read:

Jesus has a human nature and a divine nature. He is both God and man. But He is not two persons; He does not have two personalities. The person of the Son of God, who is eternal, has now taken on human nature, but He is the same person as before. **"The Word became flesh"** (John 1:14). For this reason, the angel Gabriel told Mary: **"That Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God"** (Luke 1:35). And Mary's cousin Elizabeth called Mary **"the mother of my Lord"** (Luke 1:43). So, it is correct to give Mary the title "mother of God", for He who was in her womb from conception was true God. The angel announced to the Bethlehem shepherds at the birth of Jesus: **"There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord"** (Luke 2:11). We do not know how soon Jesus realized that He was the Son of God, but we do know that by the age of twelve Jesus was fully aware of the fact that God was His Father in a very special sense (Luke 2:49).

The apostle John fought against false teachers who denied that the Son of God had assumed

human flesh and blood. That is why he established this truth as a way to separate true teachers from false teachers: **“By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God”** (1 John 4:2-3). The apostle Paul’s words concerning Jesus have been true from the moment of His conception: **“In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”** (Colossians 2:9).

The incarnation of the Son of God brought about a union of Jesus’ divine nature and Jesus’ human nature in one Person. The human nature retains all the characteristics of humanity, and the divine nature retains all the characteristics of deity. Yet there is only one Person, one personality, the God-man Jesus, the Christ. From the moment of His conception in Mary’s womb, the human and divine natures are united in such a way that they cannot ever be divided. When Jesus died, the Son of God died. The divine nature shared in the death of Jesus, even though God as God cannot die. This is all-important to us, because **“We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son”** (Romans 5:10), that is, the death of the Son of God. Many who knew Jesus on earth did not recognize Him as the Son of God, but His disciples knew who He was. Peter confessed for them all: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”** (Matthew 16:16).

The beginning of the personal union between human and divine natures can be described in different ways. We can say that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb. We can say the eternal Son of God became flesh. The deity assumed humanity. Before this union the Son of God was the eternal Word *without flesh*. After the incarnation the Son of God was and is the eternal Word *in flesh*, permanently. **“The Word became flesh”** (John 1:14). In the Old Testament, the Son of God sometimes appeared in human form, for example, when He visited Abraham. This was not incarnation, however. It was not the beginning of a permanent union between divine and human natures. The Angel (or Messenger) of God in Old Testament was still “the Word without Flesh”; His taking on of an earthly body was only temporary.

Man did not become God, but God became man. This is one of the greatest miracles of all. It is far beyond our understanding or ability to explain. **“Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh”** (1 Timothy 3:16). In an attempt to explain this mystery, some of the early church fathers said it was like iron glowing with fire, or like the union of body and soul in a human being.

Another concept in John 3:16-18 that needs special study is what is meant by God’s love for the world. This passage seems to teach that God loves everyone, and yet we know from this same passage that some are saved, but others perish. How does God speak of these things in the Bible? In order to make sure that what we say agrees with God’s Word, it is important to review what the Bible says about God’s love for the world.

To help us in this study, we look at Dogmatics Lesson 6.7.2.6, which talks about universal atonement and universal justification. Here is an excerpt:

Christ and His apostles do not want anyone to feel left out of the salvation Christ won for them by His work as our High Priest, so the fact that everyone is included is stressed in many places in the Bible. Jesus said: **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16). And Jesus said: **“The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”** (Luke 19:10). Surely all of us are lost sinners. Paul tells us: **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 3:23-24). **“As through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life”** (Romans 5:18). **“If One died for all, then all died”** (2 Corinthians 5:14). **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”** (1 Timothy 1:15). **“The Man Christ**

Jesus ... gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2: 5-6).

When the word "many" is used instead of "all," it does not mean "many, but not all," rather it is a contrast between "many" and "few." Jesus said, for example: **"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many"** (Matthew 20:28). In instituting the Lord's Supper, Jesus said: **"This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"** (Matthew 26:28). **"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous"** (Romans 5:19). It is especially clear in this last passage that "many" means "all", because *all* were made sinners by Adam's disobedience and *all* were justified, as previous verse clearly states.

What about those who lived and died before Christ died and rose again? Did Christ's work apply also to them? Yes! Jesus' work certainly included Abraham, for He said to the Jews: **"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad"** (John 8:56). The apostle Peter testified at the Jerusalem convention: **"Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they"** (Acts 15:10-11). The apostle Paul pointed out that God had forgiven the Old Testament sinners because of Jesus' sacrifice: **"God set forth [Christ Jesus] as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed"** (Romans 3:24-25). The letter to the Hebrews makes it clear that Old Testament sinners are included in Jesus' work: **"He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance"** (Hebrews 9:15). The transgressions under the first covenant were redeemed by Jesus' death and resurrection, and so the Old Testament believers received the promise of the eternal inheritance because of Jesus sacrifice.

When God's Word tells us that Christ died for all, it means every individual sinner: **"Jesus ... was made a little lower than the angels ... that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone"** (Hebrews 2:9). This even includes the many who, because of their unbelief, will not benefit from what Christ has done for them. Peter writes: **"There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring destructive heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them"** (2 Peter 2:1). Even though these false teachers denied Jesus, they were still bought by Jesus' blood.

Christ and His apostles also make it clear that since Jesus, as our High Priest, has atoned for all sinners in the world, there is no need to add to His priestly work. Jesus said: **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"** (John 14:6). Peter testified: **"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"** (Acts 4:12). The letter to the Hebrews repeats over and over again that Jesus had to bring His sacrifice only once, and that His one single sacrifice gained remission of sins for all. **"Where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin"** (Hebrews 10:18). No other sacrifice is needed. We need no other Savior. Christ's work of atoning for the sin of the world as our High Priest is complete and needs no supplement.

On the basis of the Bible passages we have quoted above, it is certainly proper for us to speak of universal atonement and universal justification. Many passages say that Jesus has atoned for the sins of the world and that He has justified all. But there are many false teachers in Christendom who deny that Jesus atoned for all sinners. The followers of John Calvin, Calvinists, for example, believe in and teach what they call a *limited atonement*. They claim that Jesus did not atone for all sinners, but only for those who were chosen by God from eternity to come to saving faith in Christ. In other words, they claim that Jesus sacrificed Himself only for those who remain believers in Christ to their dying day. Calvinists cannot believe that Jesus died for sinners

who reject Him in unbelief. But the Bible is clear that Jesus died for all persons, including even those who reject Him. The message these false teachers proclaim is no longer the Good News of the Gospel. Instead of proclaiming forgiveness of sins to all because of Christ's work of atoning for all, they have to wrongly say: "Jesus died for you if you believe in Him. Jesus died for some of you, but not for all of you. There are some of you whom God did not want to save; Jesus did not die for you." This kind of message is not the true Gospel of Jesus Christ! God's word is clear: Jesus took away the sins of the whole world and, by His obedience, justified all.

There are also many false teachers, even among Lutherans, who accept universal atonement but do not accept universal justification. But the Bible clearly teaches universal justification in such passages as Romans 3:23-24, Romans 5:18-19, and 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. In all of these passages the Bible clearly says that all are justified, or declared righteous, on the basis of Christ's redemption of the world. It is true, however, that many reject the forgiveness and justification they have from Jesus, and thus lose these gifts. Justification and forgiveness can be received only by faith.

It is important that we do not preach God's message of forgiveness as though there were conditions that we have to fulfill before it becomes true. For example, we should not say to someone: "If you do this or that good thing, then you will be forgiven." We should not even say to someone: "If you believe, you will be forgiven." Rather our message is this: "Because Jesus has died for all, He has died for you, and therefore there is forgiveness for you. You have been declared righteous and forgiven before God, because Christ's sacrifice has paid for all your sins." One of our Lutheran teachers has said it this way: "Sinners are not justified now *if* they believe, but if they have true faith, they believe that they *have been justified* in Christ (objective justification). There is no gospel (good news!) for the sinner but this" (John Schaller: *Biblical Christology*, p. 181). So, the Gospel needs to be proclaimed as a true blessing, without *any* conditions – without any ifs, ands, or buts, as we say. It is *unconditioned* good news. Not even faith is a condition or term we need to meet; faith is only the receiving organ, that is, the way by which we receive the benefit. In Christ we all have universal atonement and universal justification!

You may not always have the time to study all the topics that are related to your text. But whenever you study a doctrine that is found in your text, you will remember something of what you have learned before. The next time you have a text that refers to the same topic, you will have a more complete understanding of the topic. This is one of the ways we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Your continuing study of God's Word will make you better prepared to preach this Word to others.

Questions

1. Which versions or translations of the Bible will you read in preparation to preach a sermon on John 3:14-18?
2. Which version or translation will you use in preaching your sermon?
3. Which words or expressions did you not understand when you first read John 3:14-18?
4. What is meant by the context of John 3:14-18?
5. What have you been able to learn about Nicodemus?
6. Why is it important to study the various doctrines that are referred to in your text?
7. Why is it important to be clear on what the Bible teaches us about the relationship between God the Father and God the Son?
8. What dangers must we avoid in speaking about God's love for the world?



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #18

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: Select 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

The Bible contains two main teachings: the law and the Gospel. It is important for you to study your text carefully to determine what part of your text is law, and what part is Gospel. The Holy Spirit uses both the law and the Gospel to do His work. It is written: **“The letter (law) kills, but the Spirit (Gospel) gives life”** (2 Corinthians 3:6).

The law tells us what we should or shouldn't do. The law shows us our sin and condemns our sinful thoughts and actions. When the Bible tells us to do something or not do something, that is the law. The Holy Spirit uses the preaching of law to convict sinners of their sin and condemn their thoughts, words, and deeds.

The Gospel tells us what God has done to save us by sending His Son Jesus Christ. The Gospel shows us that we our sins are freely forgiven by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospel shows us our Savior and the salvation we have through Him. The Holy Spirit then uses the preaching of the Gospel to give forgiveness of sins and new spiritual life. He also uses the Gospel to create in believers a love for the Lord so that they delight in doing those things that please Him.

You must preach the law and the Gospel

Jesus explained the work of the Holy Spirit to His apostles: **“If I depart, I will send Him (the Holy Spirit) to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged”** (John 16: 7-11). **“He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you”** (John 16:14). Jesus also told them **“that repentance and remission of sins (law and Gospel) should be preached in His name to all nations”** (Luke 24:47).

It is important that we use the law and the Gospel as the Lord intends us to use them. Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus help us to preach the law and Gospel correctly. Paul warns that some are **“desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm”** (1 Timothy 1:7). These people were trying to use the law as a way to save sinners or to help in their salvation. But Paul says: **“We know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murders of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,**

for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers” (1 Timothy 1: 8-10).

The Gospel of Christ assures us that our sins are forgiven. Through faith in Christ we are already perfectly righteous. The law cannot make us more righteous. We do not need the law for that purpose. The law condemns sinners for their sin; it does not to make them righteous. We do not preach the law so that people will live in a more godly manner, but so that they will seek forgiveness in their Savior Jesus Christ.

The law made Paul aware of his sin, but the Gospel showed him Christ as his salvation from sin. Paul summarizes the Gospel in these words: **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief”** (1 Timothy 1:15). **“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all”** (1 Timothy 2: 5-6). This is Gospel.

We preach the law to make people aware of their sin and their need for their Savior. We preach the Gospel to assure them that their sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ. In your sermons you will want to kill the sinful nature of your hearers by preaching the law and then give them new life by preaching the Gospel.

There are times when we must preach the law and nothing but the law. Paul instructed Timothy: **“Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear”** (1 Timothy 5:20). Unrepentant sinners need to hear the law so that the Holy Spirit will lead them to repentance. But if someone is repentant, we must preach the Gospel to assure them their sins are forgiven because of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

When we preach to a group of people, however, we will generally preach both the law and the Gospel, because we do not want to withhold the Gospel – the forgiveness of sins – from all those who are repentant, even if there may one or two who are unrepentant.

Paul told Timothy how to use the Bible: **“From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”** (2 Timothy 3:15-17). The Gospel provides the wisdom for salvation; the Gospel is the doctrine that preaches Christ and forgiveness of sins. Reproof and correction, however, come from the law. The law reproves and corrects, but always with the final goal of imparting forgiveness and eternal life through the Gospel.

Looking for the law

To find the law in a passage, look for words that tell us what we should or shouldn’t do (commands). This can also involve attitudes or thoughts we should or shouldn’t have.

Sometimes a text may not contain a clear word of law telling us what we should or shouldn’t do. It is still important to preach the law by talking about sins that are common to all of us. If your text is an account from the Gospels, you can look at the actions and word of the people around Jesus. Often their words or actions demonstrate a sin, like unbelief or self-righteousness. You can point out their sinful actions or attitudes as a way to preach the law to condemn the same sin in your hearers.

Looking for the Gospel

To find the Gospel in a passage, look for words that tell us what Jesus has done to save us. Look for words that tell us our sins are forgiven. Do not confuse earthly blessings or earthly help with the Gospel (the Good News). The fact that Jesus is always with us and helps us in this life is certainly good news, but it is not the Good News that our sins are forgiven, and we have a home in heaven.

Sometimes your text may not contain a clear presentation of the Gospel. For example, the second half of most of the letters of Paul contain simply exhortations where Paul encourages us to live in a way that

pleases God. It can be tempted to preach a whole sermon from these passages on what we should or shouldn't do and how we should live. But that is only preaching the law. Such a sermon leads either to the sin of pride and self-righteousness: "I am doing these things; I am good!" Or such a sermon leads to despair: "I am not doing all these things; I am a lost!"

But we must always do as Jesus commanded: **"Preach the Gospel"** (Mark 16:15). The law prepares us for hearing of the Gospel. The Gospel must be the focus of our sermons, for we are **"ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit"** (2 Corinthians 3:6). The Gospel of Christ is God's final word to sinful mankind. We must *always* preach the Gospel in *every* sermon. We must always talk about the forgiveness of sins that we have through Jesus.

The motivation and ability to live as God wants us to live comes from the Gospel: **"We love Him because He first loved us"** (1 John 4:19). Before we tell Christians what God wants them to do, we must first remind them what God has done for them in Jesus. And we will want to preach the Gospel to assure them that they are forgiven for all the times they have failed to do all that God wants them to do.

It is important that we remember Paul's words to Titus. They guide us in the right way to use the law and the Gospel: **"The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority"** (Titus 2: 11-15).

Questions

1. What is the main difference between the law and the Gospel?
2. How do we know that the Holy Spirit wants us to preach the law?
3. Why can no one be saved if we only preach the law?
4. For what purpose does the believer in Christ no longer need the law?
5. What are some of the passages of Scripture that show that we must use the law?
6. List the statements in the passages above that refer to the law.
7. List the statements in the passages above that present the Gospel.
8. Why do believers in Christ still need to hear the law?
9. Why must the Gospel of Christ predominate in our preaching?
10. What must we always talk about in every sermon?

Study Jean 3:14-18 and try to find the law and the gospel in this passage.



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #19

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

- 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

In preparing to preach a sermon on a specific text you should look for the law and Gospel elements in the text. John 3:14-18 is primarily a Gospel text, since it talks mainly about God's love for the world and the sending of His Son into the world as a Savior. But there are law elements in the text as well. Always remember that the Gospel is intended for troubled sinners. Since only the sick need a physician, it is part of your task to convince your audience that they are sick and need a physician. The Holy Spirit uses the law for that purpose.

There is one part of John 3:14-18 that is definitely law: the last part of verse 18: **"He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."** Any verse that speaks of condemnation is certainly law.

But the text refers to law elements in other places as well. The historical background of verse 14 refers to an Old Testament incident that involves human sin and God's judgment. We read in Numbers 21:4-7: **"Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.' So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people."**

What does God's law have to say about such behavior? The First Commandment directs us to put our trust in the Lord and to thank Him for all His blessings. But the children of Israel were discouraged because of their lack of food and water. Moreover, the people of Israel called the good food – the manna that God was giving them regularly – **"worthless"** and they **"loathed"** this bread. They were despising the blessings that God was providing for them. God had been faithful in the past to provide for all their needs for food and drink. They received water from rock more than once. They had eaten quail. Their supply of manna from the Lord was constant, and the manna was good food, not worthless. They should not have loathed it or been unhappy with what God provided them.

Moreover, the text says specifically that **"the people spoke against God and against Moses."** Their complaining was not only in their thoughts but in their words as well. The first four commandments condemn both their thoughts and words. No one should ever complain against God's way of handling

our human situation. We should not talk back to God, or reject those whom He has placed over us, unless they bring us that which is false or ungodly.

Another element of law is suggested by the word “**perish**” in John 3:15-16. The word “**perish**” is used in contrast to “**eternal life**” and being “**saved**.” Thus, the kind of perishing these verses are talking about is the kind of perishing that is eternal, without any future possibility of life or salvation. Why did the Israelites die in the wilderness? They died because of their complaining and disobedience. Because of these sins, God sent them the judgment of the poisonous snakes.

In a similar way, all of us are infected with the poison of sin, which leads to God’s judgment and eternal perishing. Without God’s intervention through the bronze serpent in the wilderness, all the Israelites would have died. Without God’s intervention through the lifting up of God’s Son on the cross, we would all perish eternally. Temporal death is unnatural; it is not something that God created us for. The same thing is even more true of eternal death. The Bible tells us that all human beings “**through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage**” (Hebrews 2:15). The mere mention of death is enough to make us all anxious to a degree, until we learn of the remedy that God has provided through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The law element in this text is obvious in John 3:18, where Jesus condemns unbelief in simple words. He is not talking about unbelief in general, but unbelief with respect to the Son God sent to save the world. “**He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**” Unbelief in Jesus is a sin against the very First Commandment, which requires that we fear, and love, and trust in God above all things. We are not trusting in God when we reject the very One God sent into the world to be our Savior. We can think of the whole world as being under the wrath of God because of its sin. But God has provided an umbrella large enough and strong enough to protect all persons from this wrath of God. Very many, however, prefer to face God’s wrath on their own without finding refuge under Christ’s umbrella. John 3:36 teaches the same thing, where we read: “**He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.**”

But in spite of these law elements in John 3:14-18, the Gospel – the Good News – of Jesus clearly predominates in this text, and therefore the Gospel should also predominate in our preaching of this text. Consider first the good news that God gave to the sinning Israelites through Moses when He ordered Moses to make the bronze serpent and put it on a pole. This remedy for the poison of the snakes was very easy to take. All they had to do was to look up at the serpent on a pole, and their sickness would be healed. That was certainly good news for the penitent Israelites.

But the good news of John 3:15-18 was not intended only for a small nation like the Israelites. This is good news for the “**world**.” The way God loved the world was to give the world His Son, who is “**the Son of Man**” (John 3:13-14) and also “**Son of God**” (John 3:18). As Moses lifted up the bronze serpent at God’s command, so God Himself lifted up the Son of Man on the cross. As the bronze serpent reminded the people of the cause of their problem, the fiery serpents, so the Son of God hanging on the cross would be a picture of sin. As it is written, God made Jesus “**to be sin for us**” (2 Corinthians 5:21) on the cross.

God’s remedy for human sin extends to all mankind. “**The world**” was the object of God’s love, so that “**whoever believes in Him should not perish**.” God sent His Son into the world “**that the world through Him might be saved**.” As we learn from other passages in Scripture, God poured out on His Son the full punishment for all human sin; that is what was in the cup that Jesus drank on that day. Jesus drank the cup of God’s wrath and drained it dry, so that no more punishment remains. Therefore, Jesus is rightly called “**the Savior of the world**” (John 4:42), and John the Baptist correctly testified of Him: “**Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**” (John 1:29).

In this way, and in this way only, salvation and everlasting life have been won by Jesus for every individual sinner. **“Whoever believes in Him”** shall not perish, but have everlasting life. But the sinner needs to have a connection with Jesus in order to have the benefit of what Jesus accomplished for all sinners. The connection is called believing in Him, or having faith in Him, or trusting in Him. Notice it is not just belief or trust or faith in general, but believing **“in Him,”** trusting **“in Him,”** having faith **“in Him.”**

Not believing in Jesus is a rejection of God’s love and God’s loving plan of salvation. There is no alternate plan. Either Jesus is our Savior from sin, or we have no savior from sin. Without faith in Jesus, we will perish. Without faith in Jesus, the only thing we have is condemnation. Unbelievers have condemnation already now because they are separated from the blessings of Jesus, and hereafter they will have eternal condemnation, if they do not believe in Jesus now or ever in the future.

John 3:16 has rightly been called the Gospel in a nutshell, because in simple words it presents Jesus as the only Savior for the whole world.

Questions

1. Why do Christian preachers need to include elements of law in their preaching?
2. Which elements of law can be found in John 3:14-18?
3. Why will preaching only the law not produce good results?
4. Why must we call John 3:14-18 a text that stresses the Gospel?
5. Why should the Gospel predominate every Christian sermon?
6. What is the Gospel? (Give a summary of the message of the Gospel.)
7. What do you consider the main point in John 3:14-14?

Study Luke 10:38-42 and try to pick out what you think is the main point of this passage.



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 sermon, 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 sermon, 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.

After we have determined the main point of the text, our sermon will also emphasize this main point. The theme of our sermon will be something like this: *Being Served by Jesus Is More Necessary Than Serving 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.

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?

Find what you think is the main point in John 3:14-18.



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #21

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

- 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

As we study our text in preparation for preaching a sermon, it is important to decide what is the main point of the text. Ordinarily, the main point of the text will also be the main point of your sermon. In general, it is preferable to look for what God is doing or saying in the text, rather than what human beings are doing or saying. In John 3:14-18, Jesus Himself talking to the Pharisee Nicodemus. At this point Nicodemus is not a believer in Jesus, because Jesus tells him he needs to be born again. Jesus also tells him that he does not believe the **“earthly things”** (John 3:12) that Jesus has been telling him regarding regeneration and spiritual rebirth. Now Jesus is going to tell him **“heavenly things”** as the One who Himself has come down from heaven and will ascend to heaven again. Even while He is on earth, He is the Son of Man in heaven. So, our text is most definitely the Word of God. It is the teaching of the Son of Man Himself, who is also the Son of God.

So, as we look at this text, we want to learn what these heavenly things are that Jesus wants to tell to Nicodemus. What is the main point? This text begins with a comparison between the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness with the lifting up of the Son of Man. The lifting up of the serpent is not the main point of the text. But Jesus referred to that Old Testament incident to introduce another lifting up, namely, the lifting up of the Son of Man.

In the next verses Jesus emphasizes the importance of believing in the Son of Man who has been lifted up, even as it was important for the Israelites bitten by snakes to look up in faith to the bronze serpent on the pole. Jesus is clearly emphasizing the important of believing **“in Him,”** for this idea is repeated in verses 15, 16, and 18. In verse 18 it is spoken of as believing **“in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”**

Surely then, one of the main things that Jesus wanted to get across to Nicodemus was the importance of believing in the one and only Son of God. He did not plainly tell Nicodemus that He Himself was this Son of Man or the Son of God. But since He is speaking of heavenly things, and knows what He is talking about, it is clear that He must be from heaven. In fact, Nicodemus had earlier admitted that Jesus must be a **“teacher come from God”** because of the miracles that He did.

Jesus makes the point that believing in the Son of Man makes the difference between perishing and having eternal life. What could possibly be more important than that? In verse 16 Jesus traces this possibility of eternal life back to God’s love for the world. God’s love for the world is demonstrated by the giving or sending of His Son (the Son of Man and the Son of God) into the world.

Why did God send His Son into the world? God did not send His Son into the world to judge or condemn the world. God sent His Son into the world to save the world. How did Jesus save the world? By being lifted up, just like the bronze serpent in the wilderness.

The difference between condemnation and non-condemnation is belief in Jesus: **“He who believes in Him is not condemned: but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God”** (v. 18).

It is also important that Jesus twice uses the word **“world”** in connection with God’s love. The sending of His Son into the world was God’s way of demonstrating His love for the world. God’s motive in sending His Son into the world was **“that the world through Him might be saved.”** We notice also that twice Jesus uses the word **“whoever”** to bring out the point that God’s love extends out to each person in the world. This invitation is extended to every sinner, because of God’s love for the world and for every person in the world. God’s desire is to save the whole world.

So, we have many important and even vital concepts in these few verses. Which one is the main point Jesus is making? Is it God’s love for the world that led Him to send His Son? Is it the importance of believing in Jesus in order to have eternal life? Or is it the lifting up of the Son of Man like the serpent in the wilderness? These are all very important ideas, and each one is worthy of being preached. One way of preaching a sermon on this text is simply to explain it verse by verse and emphasize all these important points, without choosing a main point and stressing that one main point.

But it is usually best to find one main point and make sure that you present that one main point in such a way that everyone in your audience will understand that main point. In this case your choice may depend on your expected audience. What is the concept that your audience really needs to understand? Excellent sermons on this text could be preached from various points of view, and with different emphases. Here are some possible suggestions, and it is up to you to choose one of them or to present still another statement that focuses on the main point of the text and the main point of your sermon:

Look Up to Jesus on the Cross and Believe in Him

You Have Eternal Life Rather Than Eternal Death through Jesus

Jesus is God’s Way of Loving the World

God Sent His Son to Save the World

Believing or Not Believing, What Difference Does It Make?

The Words “World” and “Whoever” Give Hope to Troubled Sinners

Condemnation or Salvation, Which Shall It Be?

Questions

1. What did you choose as the main point in John 3:14-18?
2. In your opinion, which one of the above statements comes the closest to presenting the main point?
3. If none of the above is a satisfactory presentation of the main point of this text, present what you think the main point is
4. Why should the main point of the text ordinarily be the main point of your sermon?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #22

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

Once you have determined the main point of your text, in most cases, you have also determined the main point of your sermon. There may be times when a subordinate thought of the text becomes the main point of your sermon because of some special needs of your audience, but usually you will want to make the main point of the text also the main point of your sermon.

The next thing you need to determine is the order in which you are going to explain your text and present the main point or theme of your sermon. Order is important in any oral address. We have all probably heard addresses or sermons that lacked order. The speaker would make random remarks about one subject, then another, and then another, without any logical sequence. Such sermons and addresses are difficult to follow. The listener easily gets lost and cannot always understand what the speaker is talking about. The speaker may have some very good thoughts and he may speak very important truths, but because there is no order in what he says, these good thoughts and important truths do not reach their audience. It's like a gun that sprays bullets in many different directions but does not hit the target.

Because order is so important, it is important that you, either in your mind or on paper, make an outline of the order in which you are going to explain your text and communicate the main point of the text. There are two main ways you can do this. The most natural way of presenting the truth of a text is to follow the order of the text.

Natural Order

In the last lesson, we looked at Luke 10:38-42. We determined that the theme of our sermon would be the idea that being served by Jesus is more important than serving Jesus. In preaching a sermon on this text, you would first of all explain that Jesus traveled to various villages in His ministry, and in this one village there were two sisters, Martha and Mary. Martha invited Jesus into her home, and when He accepted the invitation, He spent His time talking. Mary sat near Jesus and listened to what He had to say. In other words, you would explain the first two verses in the text, Luke 10:38-39. The first point in the outline would be something like this: Jesus opened His mouth, and Mary listened to what he had to say. You would explain that Jesus was doing something for Mary that she considered more important than anything else.

After discussing the actions of Jesus in His teaching and Mary's response, you would go on to discuss verse 40 where we have a description of what Mary's sister Martha considered important. Martha was busy with trying to serve Jesus. She was no doubt preparing a meal for Jesus, her honored guest. The

text says that Martha was distracted. Jesus later told her that she was worried and troubled. In other words, she was hurrying and scurrying around to do the best she could for Jesus.

But as she was busy in trying to serve Jesus, she became upset that her sister Mary was not helping her. Instead of helping, Mary was just sitting there listening to Jesus. Did her sister not think that serving Jesus was important? What could be more important than serving such a special guest as Jesus? But Mary was just sitting there and not helping her sister at all.

Finally, Martha became so upset with Mary's lack of cooperation that she asked for Jesus' help. In fact, she even implied that Jesus should have noticed that Martha was doing all the work and that Mary was just sitting there, listening to Jesus. Martha wanted Jesus to direct Mary to get up and help her prepare the meal. No doubt Martha fully expected Jesus to comply with her wishes. She may have expected Jesus to apologize for keeping Mary with Him and not noticing that Martha needed help. Mary would then quickly get up and help her, and the meal would be served.

You have the two different reactions of the two sisters to Jesus' presence in their home. Mary used this special opportunity to listen to Jesus' teaching. This is what was most important to her. Martha, on the other hand, thought that what Mary was doing was not as important as what she was doing. That is why she asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her. So first we have said that Mary's priority was listening to Jesus' Word. Then we stated Martha's viewpoint that serving Jesus must be the most important thing to do at this time.

Finally, we come to verses 41-42. Here Jesus expresses His opinion about the choices of the two sisters. Will He agree with Martha and ask Mary go help her sister in serving? Will He gently rebuke Mary for not helping her sister Martha? This is certainly what Martha expected Jesus to do. But Jesus surprised Martha and probably also Mary. He gently rebuked Martha for being so worried and troubled about her need to serve Jesus. Instead of rebuking Mary, Jesus rebuked Martha. Instead of siding with Martha and approving of her priority, Jesus specifically said that Mary had made an excellent choice. Mary had in fact chosen the one thing that is needed, that is, the most important thing of all. She chose to take the time to listen to Jesus and His teaching. Jesus said He would not tell Mary to quit listening to His teaching in order to serve Him together with Martha.

So, we have this order of presentation:

1. Jesus came to the home of two sisters. Mary sat down and listened to Jesus' teaching.
2. Martha considered it more important to serve Jesus and expected Jesus and Mary to agree with her.
3. Jesus stated that Mary had made the better choice, because listening to His teaching was the one thing that is needed. Listening to Jesus more important than anything else.

This kind of order simply follows the order of the text. It discusses the first two verses first, then the middle verse, and finally, the last two verses. This order leads up to the main point, namely, it is more important to listen to Jesus' teaching than to serve Jesus by what we do for Him. In other words, it is more important to have Jesus serve us than to have us serve Him.

This order works out so well in this text that it is hard to imagine any other order than the natural order of the text. But let us present another order of presentation that could possibly be followed.

Logical Order

In this order, we begin with Jesus' statement that one thing is needed, and then we determine what He means by this statement. To do this, we follow this order:

1. We talk about Martha. We show that what Martha thinks is the one thing needed. It seems that Martha thinks it is serving Jesus. What could be more important?

2. We talk about Mary's choice. She was not serving Jesus, but she was being served by Jesus. She chose to sit at Jesus' feet and listening to His Word.
3. We talk about Jesus' explanation that Mary has made the better choice. The one thing that is needed is listening to Jesus' teaching. This is more important than serving Him.

This order of presentation does not follow the order of the text, but it does have the advantage of presenting Martha's choice before Mary's choice. It talks about the negative before the positive. This is a very logical way to proceed.

Conclusion

In the examples above we divided the text into three parts. It is generally helpful to divide a text into two or three parts, sometimes even four or more parts, and present one point after another in a logical way. In your presentation, you should always keep the aim in mind.

The above is an attempt to put explain the process you would go through as you prepare to preach a sermon on a certain text. Often this process only takes a few minutes after you have studied your text and you have determined the main point. Sometimes it is more difficult to determine the best order to say what you want to say to your audience.

The important thing is that you have some kind of an order. You do not want to mix everything up so that your audience cannot follow your line of thought. You do not want them to miss out on what you are trying to say. An orderly sermon is not only easier to listen to and understand, it is also easier for you to preach. An orderly sermon is easier for you to keep in your own mind as you are talking, because one thing leads to another in a logical sequence.

Questions

1. Why is the order of presentation important?
2. What makes a sermon difficult to follow and understand?
3. What is the natural order of presentation?
4. What are three points of the sermon above that follows the order of the text
5. Which verses of Luke 10:38-42 pertain to each of the three parts?
6. How is the second example different from the first example?
7. In the second example, which verses of Luke 10:38-42 pertain each of the three parts?
8. Which of the two examples above do you prefer, and why?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #23

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

- 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

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 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?



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #24

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 you prepare to preach God's Word, it is important to think about what kind of people you will be speaking to. Do most claim to be Christians, or are they unacquainted with Christ? Are they members of a Christian congregation who have been Christians for a long time, or are they newcomers to the Christian faith? Are they literate or illiterate? Are they highly educated, or are they without much education? What language do they speak? Do they read the Bible, or do they who know very little about Bible teaching? The more you know about your hearers, the better you will be able to apply the Word of God to their situation. As we have seen, Paul presented God's Word in one way to an audience in a Jewish synagogue that was well-acquainted with the Bible. He presented God's Word in a different way to an audience in Athens who knew nothing about God's Word or His promises.

Once you have a general idea of the order in which you want to present your text and who your audience is, it is good to consider how you want to apply this word to your audience. In other words, how do you make your audience understand your text? To answer this, think about what this text should mean to your audience. What difference should your text make to them?

Let us continue to use as an example Luke 10:38-42. As we determined in lesson 20, the main point of the text is that it is more important to be served by Jesus than to serve Jesus. While it is good to serve Jesus, it is more important to listen to His teaching.

Finding the Law in Your Text

At this point it is helpful to consider the law elements in the text and the Gospel elements in the text. To find the law elements in the text, consider which of the Ten Commandments is being broken. Let us look for the law in our text:

1. Was Martha doing anything wrong in welcoming Jesus into her home? Not at all. Martha was doing a good thing. So, the wrong thing would be to do the opposite of what Martha is doing: not welcome Jesus into your home. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 25: what we do to the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters in His name we do to Him. If we help a brother or sister of Jesus, we are serving Jesus. If we fail to serve a brother or sister of Jesus, we are failing to serve Jesus. A possible application of the law to your audience might be: *Be careful of how you treat your fellow-Christian, for as you treat that person, you are treating Jesus Himself.* But this is not the main point of the text, so you may not want to make a big point of being a good neighbor in this sermon.
2. In verse 39 we read about Mary who was sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to His teaching. Was there something wrong in what Mary was doing? Not at all. Mary was doing a good thing. In fact, Jesus said that what Mary was doing was the one thing needed; it was something good that would not be taken away from her. So, the wrong thing would be failing to sit at Jesus' feet and listening to His Word. Since this really is the main point of the text, you will certainly want to apply this word to your audience. Make your audience realize that it is indeed a sin to ignore or neglect the hearing of God's Word. As Martin Luther wrote in explanation of the Third Commandment: *"We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching or God's Word, but instead keep that Word holy and gladly hear and learn it"* (*Book of Concord*, p. 352).
3. In verse 40, we see that Martha **"was distracted with much serving,"** and that Jesus scolded her for this, saying: **"Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things."** It was good that Martha was serving Jesus, but she was making the serving of Jesus more important than what Mary was doing. She expected Jesus to agree with her because she didn't realize that Mary had made the better choice. Martha's "sin", therefore, was that her priorities were wrong. She thought that what she was doing for Jesus was more important than what Jesus was doing for Mary. Thus, the application of this text to any audience would include a warning not to make major things minor and minor things major. Serving Jesus or anyone else can never be as important as sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to His Word, because that is **"the one thing"** needed.

When you apply the law found in this text to your audience, you make them aware of their sins of neglecting the Word of God, or of considering serving Jesus to be more important than hearing His Word. But this can be only a part of the application of your text to the audience. Preaching the law alone cannot do anything except make the person aware of his or her sin. It is important that everyone recognizes that they are a sinner, but we dare not stop there. There can be only two results if we only preach the law:

1. The members of your audience compare themselves with others and become proud of the fact that they are listening to God's Word. They consider themselves better than others for making a good choice.
2. The members of your audience realize that they have not made listening to God's Word a high priority in their lives and therefore there is no hope for them. They have not lived up to God's demands. It is good to reach this conclusion, but we cannot stop at this point and be satisfied that our listeners are aware of how sinful they are for not listening to Jesus' teaching. That is only the first step.

Finding the Gospel in Your Text

We are not ministers of the old covenant of law, but we are ministers of the new covenant, so we must look for Gospel elements in our text. We are preachers of Good News. The law that we must preach is only preparation for the gospel; it is not the last word. Are there any Gospel elements in Luke 10:38-42, or must we bring the Gospel in from other texts? Since Jesus has told us to preach the Gospel, we must preach the Gospel even if our text doesn't directly contain the Gospel. We cannot leave our audience

without the good news of Jesus.

In Luke 10:38-42 the Gospel is *implied* rather than presented in full detail. The Gospel is present in this text because Jesus is present. The fact that He is on earth talking to persons like Mary and Martha is good news in itself, because of who Jesus is. Jesus's name means Savior, and that is what He is. Jesus is the Savior sent from heaven above to save us from our sins.

Because of who Jesus is, we can be sure that when He was talking to Mary, He was bringing her the Gospel. He was telling her the good news of who He was and what He had come to do. That is why Jesus could say to Mary that what she had chosen was the one thing needed. We do not know what Jesus said to her specifically, but we can be sure that Jesus did more than teach God's law. If Jesus only made Mary aware of the fact that she was a lost sinner who had broken all of God's commandments, it would not be **"that good part"** which would not be taken from her.

We get some idea of what Jesus must have said to Mary from what happened a few weeks later. Jesus was again at the home of Martha and Mary. We read about this in John 12:1-3: **"Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil."**

Judas Iscariot and the other disciples complained that this was a waste, but Jesus defended Mary and said: **"Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial."** Mary showed her appreciation and understanding of Jesus' mission by anointing Jesus with this precious oil. She anointed Him in advance for His burial. No doubt it was through her careful listening to Jesus' teaching that she knew about Jesus' coming death. She probably had a better understanding of what was about to happen than Jesus' twelve apostles!

This same incident is described in the Gospel of Matthew in these words: **"A woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table"** (Matthew 26:7). When His disciples complained about the waste, Jesus replied: **"Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her"** (Matthew 26:10-13).

Because of the way Jesus defended Mary's action on that day, we can be sure that Mary anointed Jesus out of love for Him. This love can only be generated by the hearing of the Gospel. John wrote: **"We love Him because He first loved us"** (1 John 4:19). Mary loved Jesus because Jesus first loved her. She knew that love because she sat at Jesus' feet and listened to His Word. His Word certainly was predominantly Gospel, the good news of Jesus' love that He was about to demonstrate by His sacrifice on the cross.

Of course, we ought to listen to everything Jesus says to us, whether it is law or whether it is Gospel. But we know from Jesus' words throughout the four Gospels that His words to penitent sinners were Gospel words of love and forgiveness. He spoke to them of caring and blessing, and even gave them the assurance of eternal life. You could include a few examples of these sayings from Jesus' lips in your sermon as you apply your text to your audience so that they can begin to understand the blessings that come to us through listening to Jesus' teaching.

Here are a few examples from the Gospel of Luke, the same Gospel from which our text is taken. In His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus told the audience in the synagogue that He was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: **"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted"** (Luke 4:18). Jesus said to a crippled man who was brought to Jesus by his four friends: **"Man, your sins are forgiven you"** (Luke 5:20). To the messengers sent to Him by John the Baptist Jesus said: **"Go and tell John the things you have seen and**

heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Luke 7:22).

Notice that Jesus emphasized the hearing of the Good News (the Gospel) that He taught. He did not only point to His miracles of healing. Today Jesus' blessings come to us only through His Word. It is only by listening to His Word that we begin to believe in Him and His work in our behalf. It is only through His word that we begin to respond to His Good News by our love and service to Him. The hearing of His Word is the one thing needed, for, as the apostle Paul wrote, **“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17).

Summary

The application of your text to your audience will include some law elements, so that your listeners are aware of their sin. In this example, you would talk about specifically their sin of failing to listen to Jesus' teaching at times. But what you want to emphasize above all is the Good News that God sent His Son, Jesus, to sinners like us to be our Savior from sin. The message of what Jesus has done for us comes to us through His words, and that is why it is so important to listen to His teaching. It is through His words in the Gospels and in the entire Bible that we come to know Him, to believe in Him, to love Him, and to serve Him. Listening to His teaching is the thing that Jesus Himself says is the one thing needed, for it is through His Word that we receive His blessings.

There are different ways in which you can apply the text to your audience. One way is to apply the teaching as you discuss of each part of the text. Another way is to save the application to the very end, after you have explained the whole text. If your sermon has two or three divisions, another way would be to apply the text after each division. You will learn how to do this in your speaking in a way that is most natural for you.

As a preacher, you will want to answer two questions in his sermon: What does this text of Scripture mean? What does this text of Scripture mean to you and your audience at this time and at this place?

Questions

1. Why is it important to know something about the persons you are addressing?
2. How would you address a congregation of Christians differently from an audience of mostly non-Christians?
3. How would you speak differently to a congregation made up of new believers as opposed to long-time believers?
4. In what way are all audiences the same?
5. What does it mean to apply the text to the audience?
6. Why is application important in preaching the Word of God?
7. What law elements can be found in Luke 10:38-42?
8. What is the purpose of calling attention to people's sins?
9. What happens when your sermon contains only law preaching?
10. What Gospel elements can be found in Luke 10:38-42?
11. Why should the preaching of the Gospel predominate in a Christian sermon?
12. What are some different places in the sermon you can apply the text to your audience?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #25

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

- 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

John 3:14-18 very clearly applies to every individual in any kind of audience because Jesus uses the words **“world”** and **“whoever.”** Every individual in every audience is a member of the world that God loved in such a way that He gave His only Son to the world and lifted Him up on the cross as a Savior for the world, that is, for every individual in the world. That is why Jesus can say: **“Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

A person who trusts in their own goodness is not afraid of perishing because of their sin. For this reason, it is necessary for you to make everyone in your audience aware of the fact that he or she is by nature on the path that leads to perishing. This was true even of Nicodemus, the Pharisee, who needed to be born a second time in order to enter the kingdom of God. Mankind in general needs to be released from the power of death and the devil, because they **“through fear of death”** are **“all their lifetime subject to bondage”** (Hebrews 2:15).

Every person has a conscience given them by God that makes them conscious of the fact that there is a supreme being who is watching human behavior and will some day require them to give an account. Every person has a voice within them approves when they do something that is considered good and that produces fear, disgust, dismay, and even despair when they do something that is considered wrong or that does not measure up to their own standards.

This knowledge of right and wrong, which is found in every human being to some extent, makes a person agree with a preaching of law, whether human law or God’s law. Because of our sinful nature, however, it easier to accuse others of wrongs than it is to admit our wrongs. We try to justify our own behavior, so that we do not seem to be as bad as we actually are.

John 3:14-18 contains statements that can strike fear in the hearts of the people in your audience who are well aware of their own faults. But there may be others in your audience who need you to point these words out to them to make them more aware of who they are and what they are like. They are perishing, they are dying, they are mortal, subject to death – physical death, but also eternal death. In other words, they are subject to condemnation; in fact, they are under condemnation already in the sight of the supreme Creator and Controller of the universe.

In order to underscore these points, you should emphasize the account of the Israelites under Moses in the wilderness. The Israelites were supposed to be God’s chosen people, and yet they did not honor

God as their God, nor did they love and trust in Him as they should have. Instead, they complained about how He was treating them. They expressed their anger with Him because they were hungry and thirsty. Instead of appreciating the manna that God was providing for their daily sustenance, they **“spoke against God and against Moses: ‘Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread’”** (Numbers 21:5).

Every time we are unhappy with our circumstances in life and begin to blame God for our problems, we are sinning against God. In the case of the complaining Israelites, God sent swift judgment to make them aware of their sin. **“The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died”** (Numbers 21:6). This swift judgment had an immediate effect on the people. **“Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people”** (Numbers 21:7).

Everyone to whom you will speak has also sinned against the Lord God in one way or another. Everyone deserves judgment from God. It is not just physical death that threatens us because of our sin, but we face eternal death. That is why we say we are on the way to condemnation and perishing eternally because of our sin. This is true of all of us without exception, as it is written: **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23).

When you apply these words of law to your audiences, you need to have a feeling for how long and how much you need to dwell on the fact of human sin, the judgment and condemnation of God, and the prospect of eternal punishment. If it is clear to you that your audience is well aware of its sin and the punishment of sin, a short reminder of sin and its punishment may be all that is necessary. But if you are addressing a group that seems to be proud of its own virtue and goodness, a group that is hardly aware of sin at all, then you need to emphasize the law and the punishment for sin, even though this text is basically a Gospel text. As Jesus said, one does not need of a physician if one is not sick. Jesus is our Physician, and in order to appreciate His healing, we must be aware and conscious of our fatal disease of sin that leads to eternal death.

Every preacher of the New Testament is eager to be a minister of the new covenant. We delight in presenting God’s solution to the human predicament of sin and its consequences. John 3: 14-18 presents God’s remedy in a particularly graphic way: by comparing God’s solution in Christ to God’s remedy for the Israelites in the wilderness. God told Moses to make and then lift up a bronze serpent on a pole. God then promised that anyone who was bitten by a poisonous snake could simply look up at the bronze serpent and be healed.

What happened in the wilderness was a preview of God’s much greater remedy that He would provide for the entire human race. Our problem is not poisonous snakes. Our problem is the judgment of eternal death – the just punishment for our many sins against God and our neighbor. God’s remedy for mankind’s universal problem was to give His Son to the world and to lift Him up on a cross to bear the ugliness of sin in Himself. Jesus on the cross is not a pretty picture, even as the picture of the serpent in the wilderness was not a pretty picture. But when we look up at Jesus on the cross and trust in what God did for us there, we are instantly cured of our disease, and we are on the road to eternal life rather than the eternal death that we deserve.

We cannot look up to Jesus on the cross with physical eyes as the Israelites looked with their eyes to the bronze serpent. Our look is a look of faith. Believing in Jesus is the equivalent of looking up at the bronze serpent. The Bible explains in detail why it is that Jesus’ suffering and dying on the cross is our salvation. God gave all human sin to Jesus, so that He became responsible and guilty for all human sin. He was then punished by God as though He had committed all of human sin Himself. In other words, the punishment for human sin was eternal damnation, and Jesus endured eternal damnation in our place on the cross.

The particular point that Jesus stresses in John 3:14-18 is that God's love extends to the **"world,"** and that anyone (**"whoever"**) who believes in Him has everlasting life. The word **"world"** occurs four times, so that we cannot miss the emphasis that Jesus puts on this word. Every individual in the world can insert his or her name in place of the word **"world"** and it would be a true statement. Let me insert my own name: "God so loved David Lau that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever (namely, David Lau) believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. God did not send His Son to David Lau to condemn David Lau, but that David Lau through Him might be saved." Put your own name into this sentence. Put the name of every single hearer of your sermon into this sentence, and the sentence will still be true.

Because of what Jesus says in these verses, it is correct to call Jesus **"the Savior of the world"** as the Samaritans did (John 4:42). But this text also makes it clear that this does not mean that everyone in the world will be saved. Everyone has been saved in the sense that Jesus paid for the sins of all, and God declares everyone forgiven because of what Jesus did. But it is possible to reject and disregard God's gift to the world in the person of Jesus Christ. Eternal damnation is still possible for those in the world whom God has saved. That is what Jesus says in John 3:18: **"He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."** Individuals are condemned, not because Jesus did not save them (He did), but because they rejected the salvation He won for them. This also has to be a part of a sermon on this text, so that no one gets the idea that everyone will go to heaven. Those who reject Jesus are under condemnation already. Unless they are brought out of darkness into God's light during their lifetime, their destiny is eternal damnation. Christ is the only Savior of the world. Without a connection to Christ by faith in him, there is no salvation for anyone. This faith is worked by God Himself through the means of grace.

Here is the great mission of the Christian preacher: to tell everyone that there is good news for sinners, to tell them about the promise of forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life through Christ, the Savior, the only Savior, that God has provided for the entire human race.

You need to present the law and the Gospel in every sermon you preach, based on the way your text talks about the law and Gospel. Everyone present should be brought face-to-face with the fact that he or she is a sinner deserving punishment, and that God has provided salvation for each one of us in Jesus Christ. This is what the love of God has done, and God wants each one of us to receive the benefit of His love and live with Him forever.

Questions

1. Why can we say that John 3:14-18 applies to every person who hears your sermon?
2. How is the listener's conscience an aid to the preacher?
3. Why do people, by nature, resist the Gospel of Christ?
4. What does the Holy Spirit use to overcome this resistance?
5. For this reason, what can actually happen during a sermon on John 3:14-18?



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #26

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

You have been called to preach God's Word. You began your preparation by asking God the Holy Spirit to teach you His Word. You have chosen a text. You have studied this text. You have determined the main point of the text and have made that point the main point of your sermon. You have determined the order in which you want to present your text. And you have considered what specific points of law and Gospel you will apply to your audience based on your text. All of this preparation requires serious concentration. Now you are in the final stages of preparing your sermon: you need to think of the actual words you will use in your sermon.

Not all preachers do this in the same way. One way to choose the words you will use is to write out your entire sermon in advance. Writing out your entire sermon, word for word, will help you carefully consider what you will say and how you will say it. It is important to remember, however, that what you are writing down is not something that people will read; it is something that people will hear. A person will not be able to go back and reread something again if they did not understand the first time. You will need to make things very clear in the words that you will speak, so that your audience will be able to understand what you are saying as you are saying it. As you write down and review the words you plan to use, it is helpful say them out loud to make sure they are easily understood when you speak them.

If what you are going to say is something that may be difficult to understand at first, you may need to repeat it several times, or you may need to explain it in more than one way. It is easy for our minds to wander as we listen to someone speaking, so it is good to repeat important points. You will probably want repeat these points in more than one way, so that you are not just using the same words over and over. Using different words to repeat important points in your sermon will help your listeners to hear and understand what you say.

The words you choose for your sermon will depend on what kind of people you are talking to. Your audience must be able to understand the words you use. When you have finished writing your entire sermon, read through your sermon again and make sure that your words are words your listeners will understand. You will also want to make sure that everything you say agrees with the Word of God.

Preachers with little or no experience should write out their entire sermons and have an experienced preacher read it and make suggestions for possible improvement. Do not expect your first sermon to be excellent in every way and to not need any improvement. Like almost everything else in life, preaching improves with experience.

Some preachers continue to write out their sermons in full throughout their lives. Others do this for a while and then realize that it is not necessary for them to do so. They can come up with the right words to use as they are speaking without writing out everything out in detail in advance. It is still helpful to write out at least an outline of what you want to say. That is, you list the main points you want to make and the order in which you want to present them. If you want to use quotations from other parts of the Bible, or from other books, you may want to write these down so that you quote these passages or statements accurately.

Some preachers are very good at memorizing what they have written. Others can keep everything straight without writing down anything. Each preacher develops his own way of preparing the words he wants to use. What works best for most is to write down the words of the sermon in full or in outline, and then to memorize the order of your presentation thought by thought, rather than memorizing the exact words of your sermon. You should not sound as though you are reciting something you have memorized. You should sound natural, as though you are thinking the thoughts as you are presenting them, just like you do in ordinary conversation. You also should not simply read your sermon. Nevertheless, if there is a very important point that you want to make, and your choice of words is important to make that point, write this point down word for word in advance and try to use the wording you have chosen.

The Old Testament book of Proverbs points out that our choice of words in speaking is very important: **“The tongue of the righteous is choice silver”** (Proverbs 10:20). **“The lips of the righteous feed many”** (Proverbs 10:21). **“The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom”** (Proverbs 10:31). **“The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable”** (Proverbs 10:32). **“Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad”** (Proverbs 12:25). **“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness”** (Proverbs 15:1-2). **“A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!”** (Proverbs 15:23). **“Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones”** (Proverbs 16:24). **“Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles”** (Proverbs 21:23). **“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear”** (Proverbs 25:11-12).

A respected Lutheran teacher in America once said to a group of pastors: “The first requirement of a sermon is that it contains nothing but God's Word – and that pure and unadulterated” (C. F. W. Walther: *Pastoral Theology*, p. 97). This agrees completely with what Paul wrote to Timothy: **“If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing”** (1 Timothy 6:3-4). Paul also told him: **“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus”** (2 Timothy 1:13). Paul said to Titus: **“Speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine”** (Titus 2:1).

Questions

1. List the steps that you should take to prepare to preach the Word.
2. How can a beginning preacher of God's word improve his sermons?
3. When you are writing a sermon, why is it important to realize that what you are writing is meant to be heard, not read?
4. What are some things to keep in mind in choosing the right words?
5. Why is it not necessary for everyone to write out his sermon?
6. What is wrong with reciting a sermon you have memorized?
7. Why is it better to memorize your sermon thought for thought, rather than word for word?
8. What parts of your sermon might you want to write down word for word?
9. Which one of the proverbs above is the most meaningful for you in your sermon preparation?
10. What is true of the person whose does not preach God's Word?



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #27

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

- 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

As a beginning preacher, when you sit down to write the words of your first sermon, you may find it to be a difficult task and you might wonder whether you will ever be able to succeed and finish the sermon. Usually your first effort will need some improvement. It is good to have an experienced preacher as a mentor who is willing to look over your first effort and make suggestions for how it can be improved.

One mistake you may make at first is to include too much in your sermon. In your study of your text, you have learned many things. You may want to include everything you have learned in your sermon. But you cannot do this in one sermon. A preacher generally has to know considerably more than what he teaches. You will select from the material that you have available to you in order to accomplish the goal of your sermon, that is, to communicate the main point of your text and sermon to your listeners so that they understand it.

It is important to focus on one main point. Everything you say in your sermon should be connected in one way or another to your main point. It is so easy to get carried away on some subordinate or minor point that takes you away from your main point. You will have to ask yourself: "Does this paragraph help to bring out my main point, or does it lead away from my main point?" In order to stick to the main point of your sermon, you may even have to omit or barely mention certain points that are found in your text but do not pertain to what you have determined is your main point. In other words, the best sermon is the sermon that sticks to the main point and does not wander into many other areas of thought.

Another way to say this is: your sermon should not be a little about a lot of different things, but it should be a lot about one main thing. You may include anything that explains, illustrates, supports, or applies your main point, but you should leave out of your sermon anything that strays from the main point, even if it is important, true and interesting. You can save such important, true and interesting material for another sermon, when it helps to explain the main point of that other sermon. You will probably also have the opportunity to preach on a text again, so you may choose a different main point that these other things would then support.

As you follow the order you have arranged for your sermon, you need to include words and ideas that present the point that you are making. Naturally, much of your material will come from the text itself. In other words, you will use what your text says about the point you are making. If what you say comes from your text, and you have understood it correctly, what you are proclaiming is God's Word and is

absolutely true, so you can present what you are saying with authority; you have God's Word to back you up. You are simply making plain what is in the text itself and applying it to your hearers.

One helpful way to prepare a sermon is to look at how your text applies to you and speaks to you. In what way do the law elements in your text accuse you of wrong-doing? How do you react to the accusations that God is bringing against you in your text? This will help you know how to speak to others. What touches your heart will often touch the hearts of others. The same is true of the Gospel elements in your text. How has the Gospel in your text comforted you and assured you of your forgiveness and salvation? Give the same comfort and encouragement you receive from the text to the persons in your audience.

In order to impress on your listeners the important points found in your text, it is often helpful to find other passages in Scripture that teach the same things that your text teaches. Use these other passages to emphasize the point that your text is making. The more we know the Scriptures, the easier it will be to find and use other passages. Your Bible probably gives related passages in the center column or in footnotes at the bottom of the page. It is important, however, to be sure that these other Scripture passages do indeed teach what you say they are teaching. We do not want to use Bible passages to prove certain points that these passages do not really prove.

When you are dealing with concepts like love or obedience or faith, it is often helpful to look for an example from Bible history. The explanations to Luther's Small Catechism are often helpful with this. Say, for example, that you want to give an example of a person who trusts in God's Word. The Luther's Small Catechism by Michael Sydow¹ gives three examples of persons who trusted in God in its explanation of the First Commandment: David in his battle against Goliath, Daniel when he was thrown into the den of lions, and the three friends of Daniel who were thrown into the fiery furnace. This catechism also supplies some Bible passages that refer to trust in God. If you are trying to present the concept of trust in your sermon, you may find some of these Bible passages helpful to quote in your sermon because they help you to establish the point you are trying to make. Remember that when you are quoting Scripture, you are quoting highest authority possible: the very Word of God. But make sure that you fully understand the meaning of the passage you want to quote in its context in Scripture.

You can also use other sources outside of the Bible in order to illustrate or give an example of the point you are making in your sermon. Perhaps there is a song stanza known by your listeners that illustrates the point you want to make. If your church body or congregation has a statement of its faith, a fitting quotation from that may be helpful. Perhaps there is a well-known incident from the history of your country or people that illustrates the point you are making. Or maybe you can use current events in your country, or some popular saying or song.

As you become better acquainted with the individuals you are addressing in your sermons, you may learn that they have certain questions in their minds that they have been asking you or have been discussing among themselves. You may find that the text of your sermon provides answers to some of these questions. Since these are matters you know your listeners are thinking about, use your sermon as an opportunity to mention the question or questions and present the answer from your text. However, you must do this without betraying any private conversations you have had with your listeners.

Some preachers tell little stories that may have something to do with the sermon and its theme. These may be stories from your own life and experience, or stories that you have heard from others. If you want to use a story, you should ask yourself whether you are telling the story simply to entertain your or please your audience. If that is the case, you should omit the story and save it for some other occasion.

¹ *Martin Luther's Small Catechism – A Handbook of Christian Doctrine*

A story that illustrates the point you are making can not only help your audience understand your point, but a story can provide a needed brief break in your sermon. Listening to a sermon filled with information can be tiring. A story, or even pausing to review what you have said so far, can provide an important interlude that lets your audience “catch their breath” before you continue presenting additional information and encouragement. You could think of this as an island in the sea of your sermon. You will exhaust your audience if they have to continually swim to keep up with what you are saying. If you provide one or two “islands” (so to speak) in your sermon – lighter sections that review or illustrate what you already said – you can help your audience reflect on what you have said so far and help them regain some stamina so they will be able to listen attentively to the rest of your sermon.

Questions

1. Why is it important limit your sermon to one main point?
2. What is the difference between saying “a little about a lot” and “a lot about little”? Which is better in a sermon?
3. Why is it important to apply the text to yourself first before you write your sermon?
4. What books are available to you that can to help you write your sermons?
5. Where can you find examples to illustrate concepts found in your text?
6. When should you tell a story in your sermon, and when should you refrain from telling a story?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #28

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

You should have a good idea of what you are going to say in your sermon before you work on an introduction. The purpose of an introduction is to let your listeners know why they should listen to what you have to say. In the introduction, you want to arouse their interest in what you are about to tell them from God's Word. You can bring up a topic of current interest, present a question about that topic that they will want to be able to answer, and then answer the question in your sermon. You want your listeners to be eager to listen to what the answer might be. Of course, you want them to understand that the answer to this question does not come from you, but from the Word of God, and that you are only a messenger.

The apostle Paul introduced his message to the people of Athens by referring to a shrine that he saw in their city to an unknown God. He then told them that he would tell them about the God they did not know.

It is customary in America to read the text from the Bible before speaking about it. If you read the text first, the introduction will then move from the text you have read to the main point of your sermon. Another way is to speak a few words of introduction before reading your sermon text. This can help focus your hearers' attention the text and the main idea you want them to hear from the text.

In your introduction you are trying to get the good will of your audience. You do not want them to tune you out or stop listening even before you get to your main point. Your introduction, then, should be pleasant and not confrontational. You want a member of your audience to think to himself: "I am glad I am here because I want to hear what God has to say about this topic. This should be interesting."

In their book, *Preach the Gospel* (pp. 80-85), Joel Gerlach and Richard Balge present several suggestions concerning the introduction to a sermon:

1. Make it friendly. The introduction is not the time to accuse your audience of sin or to warn against false teaching. That can come later on in your sermon, if your text refers to such things.
2. Make it preparatory by raising questions that the sermon will answer.
3. Make it serve a purpose by building a bridge between the text and the main point of your sermon.
4. Make it personal by using the pronoun "you" in your introduction.

5. Keep it short. You do not want your audience to think to themselves: “Come on, get to the point.”
6. Keep it simple. Use short sentences. Save your thunder and lightning for what is to follow. The introduction is not the place to get deep or profound. Save that for the body of your sermon.

Gerlach and Balge warn against using the same kind of introduction for every sermon. For example, do not begin every sermon by going back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, or by saying what particular Sunday it is, whether Christmas or Easter or Pentecost, or some other special day. You do not want your audience to know exactly what you are going to say because that is what you always say. Use variety. Try to surprise your audience from time to time.

The important thing is that your introduction should always lead to the main point of your sermon, not away from it. If you refer to recent events in the life of the community or to various experiences the congregation or you, yourself, may have had, make sure that these lead to the subject of the sermon. You can refer to the season or time of the church year, if that helps draw attention to your point, but you should not do this in every introduction. You may want to explain briefly the reason you have made the main point of your sermon the main point, that is, why you think this is something that your audience needs to hear.

Besides planning an introduction for your sermon, you should also plan your conclusion. It is important to know when to stop. Sometimes a preacher has a hard time stopping. He may feel the need to repeat over and over again what he has just said to the point no one in his audience is listening anymore. The important point to remember is: when you have no more to say, stop talking.

It is often helpful to refer to the introduction in your conclusion. You introduced the topic of your sermon, you presented the topic in your sermon, and now, in the conclusion, you wrap it up with a short summary of what God says about the topic in the text. If you asked a question at the beginning, you can review in a brief way the answer God gives to this question in the text. Another thing you may want to do in your conclusion is to suggest to your audience the proper way for them to apply that answer in their own lives. If your text is predominantly a Gospel text, you will plead with your listeners to take the gift that God is giving them in Christ and His teaching. Remember Paul’s words: **“We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain”** (2 Corinthians 5:20-6:1).

If your text is urging Christians to carry out a certain action or to have a certain attitude because of what God has done for us, use your conclusion to encourage your listeners to put this into action in their own lives. Sometimes the best conclusion is simply to repeat your text or a portion of it. Now that you have made this text clear to your audience, they will be able to apply it more easily in their own lives. In many cases, it is also fitting to conclude your sermon with a prayer that God, through His Word, will accomplish in the listeners what He desires to accomplish: namely, create in them a stronger faith in Christ their Savior and a stronger desire to do what he wants out of love for Him. **“We love Him because He first loved us”** (1 John 4:19).

Questions

1. Which should you plan first: the main point of the sermon or the introduction? Why?
2. How did the apostle Paul introduce his message to the Athenians?
3. What is the custom in your locale: to read the text of the sermon first, or to say some words of introduction first? Which do you prefer?
4. Why is it important to make the introduction friendly?
5. What are some ways you can encourage your audience to listen to you?
6. Why is it important to make your introduction short and simple?
7. Why is it good to use variety in your introductions?
8. What makes for a good conclusion to a sermon?
9. What are some ways of concluding sermons that are not good?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #29

E. Preaching the Sermon You Have Prepared

Everything we have said up to now has dealt with preparation to preach a sermon. Preparing to preach the Word of God is very important. That is why we have spent so much time talking about it. But all of this preparation has one purpose: to preach the Word of God to people. This is our directive from the Lord Himself. We are to open our mouths and proclaim the good news. Jesus said: **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15). **“And they went out and preached everywhere”** (Mark 16:20). The apostle Paul told Timothy: **“Preach the word!”** (2 Timothy 4:2).

The sermons you prepare to preach must be preached. The words you have worked on must be spoken to an audience. The thoughts you have put together from your study of God’s Word must be delivered to the glory of God and for the benefit of sinful human beings who need to hear what you are going to tell them. Therefore, just as we need to devote ourselves to sermon preparation, we need to devote ourselves to sermon delivery. And here, as always, the first step must be prayer. David’s prayer in Psalm 19:14 should be ours as we step forward to deliver a sermon in Jesus’ name: **“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.”** Another good prayer is found in Psalm 51: **“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You... O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise”** (Psalm 51:12-15).

The voice we have is the voice God has given us. Some speakers have high voices; some have low voices. Some have loud voices; some have softer voices. Whatever voice we have been given, we can learn how to use it in a way that delivers God’s message. Speaking may be easy for you, or it may be difficult. But try to do your best with the voice God has given you.

Our aim in preaching is to be conversational. That means you are thinking what you are saying at the moment you are saying it. This is the way all of us speak naturally in our ordinary conversation. We are thinking what we are saying as we say it. If you have the words of your sermon written out in front of you, you might simply read your sermon without thinking of what you are saying, or give that impression to your listeners. Perhaps you have tried to memorize what you have written, so that you can speak without anything written down. But from the way you speak we can see that you are trying to remember what you have memorized – what you are saying does not appear to be what you are thinking. You are thinking only of remembering the words you have memorized instead of speaking freely.

Do not concentrate on the exact words you are going to use. Concentrate on getting your thoughts across to your audience. Be concerned with getting your message across, which is a message from God. You are speaking what God has revealed in His holy Word.

The goal in preaching is a free presentation of your sermon. This means that you are full of the truths and thoughts you have learned from your careful study of God’s Word, and now you are presenting your message to your audience from your heart. Do not be concerned with anything else except getting your message across, so that your listeners can hear and understand what you are saying. Pray that the Holy Spirit will use your words to accomplish what He pleases, that is, to make sinners aware of their sins and to comfort such sinners with the good news of Jesus Christ and what He has done to save sinners from their sins.

It is not necessary to know word for word what you are going to say, but it is important that you know the ideas and thoughts you are going to present and the general order in which you are going to present them. If you have had time to write out your sermon in detail, read it over and over again, so that you have the thoughts clear in your mind. If you have only an outline or summary of what you are going to say, go through that outline until you know it well.

When you first begin preaching, it is a good idea to rehearse speaking your sermon out loud in a private place when you are all alone. This gives you an idea of what it is like to say what you want to say in the order you want to say it. After you have had more experience, such a rehearsal is usually not necessary.

My own practice as a preacher is to write out a sermon fully and to read it over and over again until the ideas and the progress of thoughts are clear to me. I do not take a printed copy of my sermon to the pulpit, but I usually write down the Bible passages that I want to quote, so that I quote them accurately. I make a few notes for myself, that is, the main points I want to cover, so that if I somehow get lost or have forget what I want to say, I can look down and have my memory refreshed. Usually I do not have to refer to my notes, but they are there just in case I need them. You should do what makes you the most comfortable, but still allows you to preach naturally and focus on your message as you are saying it.

You may be very self-conscious the first few times you address an audience. You will probably think about yourself and how well you will do. You will probably wonder what people are thinking of your preaching. What is important to think about, however, is God's Word and how to get it across to our audience. Do not think about yourself. You should be filled with your message from God's Word. The more you stop thinking about yourself, the more natural you will be in your preaching and less of an obstacle you will be to the Holy Spirit in His use of your words.

The voice you use should be the voice you normally use in your speaking with others. Do not call attention to yourself by speaking in some way that appears artificial or unreal. Speak loudly and clearly enough for your listeners to hear what you have to say. An unheard message does not accomplish anything for anyone. If you speak too fast, the minds of your listeners will not be able to keep up with you. If you speak too slowly, your listeners may lose interest. If your voice always sounds the same, your listeners may tune you out and not pay attention to your message. You should vary your volume and pace based on what you say – you should get louder or softer at times, slow down or speed up, and change your pitch to show your excitement or interest. Do not make it difficult for your hearers to understand you. Do not it difficult for the Holy Spirit to use you because of your dull manner of speaking. Changing how you speak to match what you are saying can require some practice and will become more natural the more you preach.

Your facial expression and the movement of your hands and body should fit with the words that you are saying. For example, you should not preach God's law as though you were telling a joke, nor should you preach the Good News of Jesus with a frown on your face. If you are thinking of what you are saying as you are saying it, your facial expression and your gestures will match what you are saying in a very natural way and you do not need to be thinking about it at all.

The best way to become a good preacher is to preach. You will improve as you gain experience. You will no longer be thinking about yourself and the impression you are making, but you will be concentrating on getting your message across.

What will be most helpful in most cases is to have a good mentor or good friend listen to your sermons and give you suggestions as to ways in you can improve. They can tell you whether you are speaking clearly, loudly, with good emphasis, at the right speed, and so forth. They can tell you if you are developing bad habits that interfere with the transmission of God's Word, such as mispronouncing certain words, or failing to make eye contact with your audience. Sometimes family member, such as your wife or a brother or sister can give you helpful advice that will improve your sermon delivery.

To summarize, we quote the following paragraphs from *Preach the Gospel* (p. 130) by Richard Balge and Joel Gerlach:

Sermon effectiveness depends on a good delivery. To qualify as good, the delivery of the sermon must be free. The sermon must neither be read nor mechanically memorized, but should be delivered without hesitation and without reliance upon notes.

The role of the voice in the delivery of the sermon is another element of critical importance. Whether or not the preacher's voice is natural and appropriate to his task depends on his attitude toward his task. Practical consideration regarding the role of the voice include: speaking with proper volume, speaking naturally, speaking clearly and speaking with proper modulation and emphasis.

The body also plays an important role in the delivery of the sermon. Facial expressions, gestures, and body movement assist the preacher in the communication of the message. Most important of all is the necessity to be yourself.

Questions

1. For what purpose does a preacher study a text and prepare a sermon?
2. What differences are there in the way preachers speak?
3. Why is it important to think what you are saying as you say it?
4. Why is it usually not a good idea to read your sermon?
5. What problem arises from memorizing your sermon word for word?
6. What is meant by memorizing a sermon thought by thought?
7. What is meant by free delivery?
8. What should you be thinking about as you preach your sermon?
9. What do beginning preachers often think about?
10. What do you want to avoid with respect to facial expression and hand gestures?
11. How can we avoid developing bad habits in our preaching?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #30

F. Helpful Ideas from Various Sources

Ever since God first introduced the Gospel of Christ to Adam and Eve after their disobedience in the Garden of Eden, God has used human beings to proclaim His Gospel in the world. There has been a long history of preaching God's Word during which God has used many different preachers in many different languages with many different gifts and styles. Our generation is not the first to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Some of the preachers from previous times have passed on some ideas or thoughts about preaching that may help us today. The following paragraphs contain helpful ideas from various sources.

1. Martin Luther

Luther warned preachers not to expect the Holy Spirit to speak to them directly and individually to give them the words for their sermons. The Holy Spirit speaks through the Holy Scriptures, and it is through our reading and studying of the Scriptures that we hear God's Word. It is only when we speak God's Word that we can be confident that the Holy Spirit is speaking through us.

Often you will see little or no fruit from your faithful preaching. You may think that you should be preaching and teaching something different. In response to such thoughts Luther said: "Do as you please, nothing seems to help. Yet faith in Christ should and must be preached, no matter what happens. I would much rather hear people say of me that I preach too sweetly... than not preach faith in Christ at all" (*What Luther Says*, #3603).

Luther noticed that some preachers want to be known for their long words and fancy language, so he said: "A sincere preacher must consider the young people, the servants and maids in the church, those who lack education... They should be simple in their sermons" (*What Luther Says*, #3609).

It is easy to look for praise from your listeners and choose your words with that in mind, that is, to try to gain approval from your audience. But Luther said: "Let us preach to the glory of God and pay no attention to the judgment of men... Let us preach only Christ and the Catechism. This is the wisdom that exalts us, because it is the Word of God" (*What Luther Says*, #3612).

2. C. F. W. Walther

Walther was a preacher and teacher of Lutherans in America in the nineteenth century. In his book titled *Pastoral Theology*, Walther listed what he considered the chief requirements of a Christian sermon:

1. "The first requirement of a sermon is that it contains nothing but God's Word – and that pure and unadulterated" (p. 97).
2. "The second requirement for a sermon is that God's Word is also rightly applied in it" (p. 98).
3. "The third requirement of a sermon is that the whole counsel of God is proclaimed to the hearers in it for their salvation" (p. 109).

He does not mean that every teaching in the Bible must be found in every sermon. He explained it in this way: "Every fundamental article of the Christian faith has its place over the course of a year" (p. 109). Yet "it is also necessary for every single sermon he preaches to contain enough of the entire order of salvation that a person, even if he heard only this single sermon, could learn the way of salvation through it" (p. 113).

4. "The fourth requirement for a proper sermon is that it corresponds to the specific needs of the hearers... One of the main tasks of a pastor in preparing his sermons is to keep in mind the particular condition of the congregation and the particular needs that follow from their condition" (p. 114).
5. "The fifth main requirement of sermons is that they should be contemporary" (p. 124). That is, "one preaches in a contemporary way if he is not satisfied that his sermons merely contain the Word of God, but consistently takes special account of the prejudices, errors, sins, vices, and dangers that predominate in his era" (p. 125).
6. "The sixth and seventh main requirements of a sermon are that it should be well structured and not too long... Disorder in the sermon cannot help but cause confusion in the hearers" (p. 127). "A sermon... should thus treat one main truth" (p. 128).
7. Walther quotes Luther: "It is the office and mark of a good speaker that he stops when people enjoy hearing him the most and think he is just beginning to speak" (p. 128).
8. "There is another point that we may not fail to bring to mind regarding the sermon. There are many sermons regarding which one cannot say whether they contain any false teaching or clearly violate one of the main requirements already listed. Nevertheless, they still lack one of the most important attributes of a good sermon. They do not affect the heart and conscience of the hearers" (p. 128).

3. R. C. H. Lenski

Lenski was an American Lutheran preacher and teacher. He studied the Greek original text of every book in the New Testament and wrote a series of commentaries on the whole New Testament. In his book, *The Sermon* (pp. 246-261), he mentions various materials that you can use in a sermon to explain the text and emphasize the main point of the sermon.

1. "Scripture Passages. For every thought in the text there are other Scriptural statements, supporting that thought in one way or another... Use only telling passages, such as are to the point and easily understood. Use none that themselves need further explanation. Use only a few for any one point."
2. "Confessional Statements. In the confessional writings there are many excellent passages that deserve to be used in sermons. Among them are illustrations, definitions, and choice ways of saying things." Luther's *Small Catechism* is a good example of one book that you can use.
3. "Quotations from the Church Fathers, especially also Hymn Writers... Luther will always be a favorite." Quoting hymns or spiritual songs that are familiar to your audience may be helpful in emphasizing your point.
4. "Historical Incidents. Bible references are the best, and the preacher should master their use."
5. "Conditions and Happenings in Every Day Life. The preacher must have a keen eye and a keen ear for all that meets him day by day. He will discover a wealth of material for his sermons, in fact, so much of it that he will be unable to use it all, selecting only what is most telling for his spiritual purpose. He will see about him many things that tally with the good or the bad mentioned in his texts."
6. "Illustrations of All Kinds... The Bible is a masterpiece in the art of using illustration. The preacher must produce his own illustrations. Only occasionally will he be able to pick one up elsewhere suitable for his purpose."
7. "Individualization, Specialization... Instead of speaking at length on the general topic of brotherly love, describe actual cases of one Christian showing love to another, or of neglecting to show it. Instead of piling up sentences on worldliness or godliness, picture an actual worldly man, an actual godly man, how each thinks and acts. Do not merely define faith, but rather show us a man who trusts the Lord or His promises in actual life."

4. Joel Gerlach and Richard Balge

From their book *Preach the Gospel*:

“Four important corollaries derive from the truth that a preacher serves as an ambassador of Jesus Christ.

1. “The first corollary is that the sermon must be scriptural” (p. 2).
2. “Secondly, the sermon must proclaim the pure Word” (p. 3).
3. “Thirdly, the sermon must be Christ-centered” (p. 3).
4. “Finally, preachers who understand their role as ambassadors for Christ will restrict themselves to subjects Scripture certifies for pulpit proclamation. Their sermons will serve the salvation of souls the Savior shed His blood to redeem. They will promote sanctified Christian living... Nor is the pulpit a forum for economic, social, or political matters except when scriptural principles are involved and God’s people face the prospect of being misled” (p. 3).

“The purpose of preaching...is two fold. It is (1) to lead sinners to Jesus and (2) to edify those who already confess Him as Savior and Lord” (p. 4).

“Every sermon... will have as its purpose to teach, or to rebuke, or to correct, or to train in righteousness, or to encourage hope” (p. 5).

5. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Lloyd-Jones was a preacher in England from 1938 to 1968. The following comments on preaching come from his book *Preaching and Preachers*, published in 1971.

Chapter One: The Primacy of Preaching

“To me the work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called.” “The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching.” “The primary task of the Church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God.”

Chapter Two: No Substitute

“The ultimate justification for asserting the primacy of preaching is theological... The moment you consider man’s real need, and also the nature of the salvation announced and proclaimed in the Scriptures, you are driven to the conclusion that the primary task of the Church is to preach and to proclaim this, to show man’s real need, and to show the only remedy, the only cure for it.”

“The primary task of the Church is not to educate man, is not to heal him physically or psychologically, it is not to make him happy. I will go further; it is not even to make him good... The Church’s primary purpose is rather to put man into the right relationship with God, to reconcile man to God.” [Note: The reconciliation is complete; but the Word of reconciliation must be brought to sinful man.]

“The Church has been trying to preach morality and ethics without the Gospel as a basis; and it simply does not work.”

“If a man is not a Christian you cannot give him spiritual help. If he is not a Christian the first thing you have to do is to help him become a Christian... A spiritual rebirth is generally produced by the preaching of the Gospel.”

“The Church is a missionary body, and we must recapture this notion that the whole Church is a part of this witness to the Gospel and its truth and its message.”

Chapter Three: The Sermon and the Preaching

“What the natural man needs above everything else is to be humbled.”

There are “two elements in preaching. There is first of all the sermon or the message – the content of that which is being delivered. But secondly, there is the act of preaching, the delivery.”

“I deliver to them what has been given to me. I have been given it, and I give it to them. I am a vehicle, I am a channel, I am an instrument, I am a representative.”

Chapter Eight: The Character of the Message

“The preacher has to assess the condition of those in the pew and to bear that in mind in the preparation and delivery of his message.”

Chapter Nine: The Preparation of the Preacher

“The preacher’s first, and the most important task is to prepare himself, not his sermon.”

“Always respond to every impulse to pray.”

“Read your Bible systematically... All preachers should read through the whole Bible in its entirety at least once every year.”

Chapter Ten: The Preparation of the Sermon

“Deal with the meaning of your text... You have got to be honest with your text.” “You must sacrifice a good sermon rather than force a text.”

Chapter Twelve: Extemporary Preaching

“Prepare as thoroughly as you can so that you will know in your mind what you want to say from beginning to end.”

“Some men read their sermon in the pulpit... That must be bad.”

“There never has been a preacher that has not had to learn by experience. Do not be discouraged... Experiment... Try various modifications and variations.”

“Stories and illustrations are only meant to illustrate truth, not to call attention to themselves.” “Our business is not to entertain people.” “If you use too many illustrations in your sermons your preaching will be ineffective.”

Chapter Thirteen: What to Avoid

“I have always opposed the idea of trying to force people to attend church services; what I am saying is that our preaching ought to fill them with a desire to do this.”

“Pride is the greatest of all the temptations that assail a preacher.”

“What is the rule then? It is: be natural; forget yourself; be so absorbed in what you are doing and in the realization of the presence of God, and in the glory and the greatness of the Truth that you are preaching, and the occasion that brings you together, that you are so taken up by all this that you forget yourself completely... Self is the greatest enemy of the preacher.”

Chapter Fourteen: Calling for Decisions

“The appeal must be in the Truth itself, and in the message.”

“Make yourself available, let it be known that you are available, and so you will find that people... will come to speak to you.”

“Do not force these things. This is the work of the Holy Spirit of God... We must learn to trust the Spirit and to rely upon His infallible work.”

Chapter Fifteen: The Pitfalls and the Romance

“We should never give a performance; we cannot reprobate [condemn] this too strongly.”

“I know of nothing comparable to the feeling one has as one walks up the steps of one’s pulpit with a fresh sermon... when you feel that you have a message from God and are longing to give it to the people.”

“You will reach the stage in which you will be longing for the next Sunday to come.”

Chapter Sixteen: Demonstration of the Spirit and of the Power

“Careful preparation, and the unction of the Holy Spirit, must never be regarded as alternatives but as complementary to each other.”

6. John Stott

The following outline is condensed from John Stott’s book, *Between Two Worlds* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 211-216.

I. Choose your text.

II. Meditate on the text.

- A. Whenever possible, plan out the text on which you will preach weeks or months in advance. This gives the benefit of “subconscious incubation.”
- B. Begin concentrated “incubation” at least one week before preaching. This involves the following:

Read, re-read, and re-re-read the text.

Be sure you understand what it means. Do your own interpretive work. Don’t use commentaries until you have formulated specific interpretive questions which you have been unable to answer, or until you have completed your interpretive work.

Brood longer over how it applies to your people, to the culture, to you, etc.

Pray for God to illuminate the text, especially its application.

Write down notes of your thoughts, ideas, etc.

Get the insights of others through recordings, talking with other preachers, etc.

III. Isolate the dominant thought.

- A. Your sermon should convey only one major message. All of the details of your sermon should help your people grasp that message and feel its power.
- B. You should be able to express the dominant thought in one short, clear, vivid sentence.

IV. Arrange your material to serve the dominant thought.

- A. Chisel and shape your material. Ruthlessly discard all material which is irrelevant to the dominant thought. Subordinate the remaining material to the dominant thought by using that material to illuminate and reinforce the dominant thought.
- B. Your sermon structure should be suited to the text, not artificially imposed. Avoid structure which is too clever, prominent or complex.

- C. Carefully choose words that are precise, simple, clear, vivid and honest. Write out the key sections, phrases, and sentences to help you in your word choice. Stick to short declarative and interrogative sentences with few, if any, subordinate clauses.
- D. Come up with illustrations and examples which will explain and convict. Employ a wide variety: figures of speech, images, biblical stories retold in contemporary language, inventing fresh parables, true historical and/or biographical events, etc. Avoid making illustrations and examples so prominent that they detract from the dominant thought. Also, avoid applying them inappropriately or overusing them.

V. Add the introduction and conclusion

- A. The introduction should not be elaborate, but enough to arouse curiosity; whet your audience's appetites and introduce the dominant thought. You can do this by a variety of means: explaining the setting of the passage, story, using a current event or issue, etc.
- B. The conclusion should not merely summarize your sermon – it should apply it. Preach through the head to the heart (i.e. the will).

VI. Write down and pray over your message

- A. Writing out your sermon forces you to think clearly and sufficiently. It exposes lazy thinking and cures it.
- B. After you are thoroughly familiar with your outline, reduce it to small notes.
- C. Pray that God will enable you to “so possess the message that the message possesses you.”

Questions

1. What five pieces of advice from this lesson that you think will be the most useful to you in preaching sermons?
2. Write down any advice that you have received from other preachers or friends that you think will be very useful to you as you preach.
3. Why do you want to be a preacher of the Gospel of Christ?



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Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #31

G. A Sermon Checklist

This checklist is based on the checklist by Gerlach and Balge in *Preach the Gospel* (pp. 173-176).

Preparation:

1. Allow enough time to prepare your sermon, if at all possible.
2. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work in you and through you before beginning your preparation.
3. Determine how your sermon text fits into the season of the church year and the rest of the service.
4. Study your sermon text thoroughly, in the language you will be using in preaching, and in its original language, in Greek or in Hebrew, if you have some training in these languages.
5. Read the context of your sermon text, as much as you are able in the time you have.
6. Determine what the main point of your text is.
7. Examine the law elements in your text as well as the Gospel elements.
8. Determine what the main point of your sermon will be.

The Theme:

1. Do your best to come up with a short sentence or phrase that summarizes what you want to say.
2. Make sure your sentence expresses an answer to a question that your audience needs to know.
3. Consider the order in which you plan to discuss your text and get across your main point.
4. Determine how you are going to apply your main point to your audience.

Introduction:

1. Begin on a friendly note.
2. Make sure your introduction leads up to the main point of your sermon.
3. Use life situations, or community or church events, or an example from Bible history in your introduction, but be make it short and simple.
4. Try to use variety in your introductions.

The Body of the Sermon:

1. Check your sermon to see whether it stays close to the main point.
2. Make sure your sermon includes both law and Gospel, and let the Gospel predominate.
3. Refer to specific sins your text denounces, and make sure your audience knows that all of them have sinned in these or similar ways.
4. Most importantly, check your sermon to make sure that you are teaching God's Word, not yours.

5. Make sure you have presented the Gospel (Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life) clearly to your listeners.
6. Make sure you have not implied anywhere that eternal life is a reward for good behavior.
7. Check your sermon to see if you have made it clear that Jesus' forgiveness is intended for each person in your audience. The words "for you" are very important.

Conclusion:

1. Make sure you stop when you have nothing more to say.
2. Make it short and simple, and to the point.
3. If you have introduced a question in your introduction, make sure your conclusion answers the question according to God's Word.
4. Try to use variety in the way you conclude your sermons.

Style and Wording of the Sermon:

1. Do not overuse abstract expressions like love or mercy or grace or faith, without explanation, illustration, or example.
2. Use Bible history examples, or other examples to make concepts like love and grace and faith vivid in the minds of your listeners.
3. If you find a Bible story or some other story that illustrates the main point of your sermon, use it.
4. Do not be vague or general in what you say, but specific and pointed.
5. Do not use words or expressions that most of your audience will not understand.
6. Do not try to impress your audience with your superior knowledge, but present the Word of God in the simple language of the common people.
7. Remember that you are not above the people you are addressing, but that you too are a sinner whom the law of God condemns and who needs the Gospel of Christ for forgiveness just like others.

Delivery:

1. Speak freely without reading your sermon or having extensive notes that put a barrier between you and your audience.
2. Use your ordinary way of speaking, without being artificial or official.
3. Maintain constant eye contact with your audience.
4. Make sure your audience hears what you are saying.
5. Do not speak too fast or too slowly for your audience.
6. Let your facial expression and your hand gestures fit naturally with what you are saying.
7. Use variety in your speech. Slow down for the profound. Speed up for the simple.
8. Forget yourself, and think of getting your message across, because it is God's message.