

## Shaping an evangelistic sermon

- What are some of the challenges and trends in evangelistic preaching in our context?
  - Unmerited favour / love of God – little focus on wrath or historic work of Christ
  - Transformation / power for each day – what God can do for me now but not what Christ did 2000 years ago
  - Pragmatism – focus on present felt problem, transaction
  - Repentance and holiness – little on person and work of Jesus
  - God-shaped gap – light on seriousness of sin, psychological therapy gospel
  - Surrender control – light on grace or atonement
  - Decide for Christ – but I'm already under wrath, not a choice from a neutral position
- What does 'evangelistic' mean?
  - Evangel = Gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-11; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18)
- Who needs to hear the gospel? (1 Cor. 15:1-11 cf. Gal. 1:28)
- But a particular sort of gospel preaching: to unchurched unbelievers

### 1. Still very **careful**

Expository (Acts 8:26-40)

- a. Scripture driven (v35 cf. Acts 2; 17:1-3; 28:23) – doesn't all go out the window when evangelism – still important to be careful with the Scriptures, context, get the big idea, see what the natural application is.
- b. Good news about Jesus – about Jesus – and it's the gospel. Here – Isaiah 53 – we want the focus to be on the Cross of Christ. John 12:32

Q: What Scriptures would you chose?

Practical point – probably chose passages clearly focused on Jesus and the Cross, where not so much background needed, stories not complex arguments, but all Scripture is for making wise for salvation in Christ Jesus

Avoid notes but don't avoid the Bible. Very easy to get carried away, wander off from the big idea of the passage and from Jesus and start making wild unbiblical promises.

### 2. Totally **Christ**-centred

Wooing (John 3:25-30)

People are going away from John – he is really happy about that – he is happy when people leave his church... as long as they go down the road to Jesus.

- a) Points away from self to Jesus – v26 (cf. 1:7-8,15,29) – v30\_\_\_\_\_
- b) Driven by joy – v29 – loves hear the bridegroom's voice + his joy goes even higher when other people go to the bridegroom
- c) Put that together – he is the friend of the bridegroom introducing the bride to the bridegroom. Richard Sibbes – "woo for Christ, and open the riches, beauty, honour, and all that is lovely in him."

We want evangelistic preaching that is full of Jesus. When 'altar call' at end when no mention of Christ – what Christ am I accepting? What content about Christ – not just bland statements – he's wonderful, he's faithful – tell me what he's done, what he's said, tell me stories about him.

### 3. Extra **clear**

#### a) Sharpening the stick

To stick a broom handle in the ground is very difficult unless you whittle it to a very sharp point. It is very powerful to communicate one thing (the big message the passage is giving you) clearly. Be ruthless with material, get it very clear.

Mike Bullmore on preaching: "the sermon is not a container to contain everything you have discovered about the text."

But don't lose the details – that's what gives it the cutting edge

#### b) Introductions

In the **introduction**: Why should we listen?

- Start by showing the relevance - it *will* be relevant – if we've spent plenty of time working on the big idea and the primary application we will have started to see how massively relevant this is in our day and place.
- Raise the question/issue which the rest of the sermon will answer.
- Imagine you are a waiter at a restaurant: list the specials or give us a starter to whet our appetite for the main course.
- Get us quickly into the text.

#### c) Conclusions

In the **conclusion**:

- Don't introduce a new thought at the end.
- Tie it all together – what was the one thing I was trying to say
- Answer the question raised at the beginning.
- Imagine you are landing a plane or stopping a car: don't just crash to an instant stop at the end of your talk but don't be slowing down so slowly that it feels like we're going on forever – bring the sermon smoothly to a stop at its destination.

#### d) Style - Be as plain as possible - Not about flair or oratory – be happy to be thought 'simple' or 'unsophisticated' or even rude so long as you are making the Scriptures as plain and clear (and often blunt and gritty) as they are

#### e) Vocabulary - get rid of all churchy jargon and cliché – saved, born again, repentance

#### f) Avoiding misunderstanding

**“The gospel heard is different from the Gospel preached”,** said Walter Freytag.

How do our listeners understand key terms such as God, Spirit, Sin, Grace, Redemption etc. E.g. The blood of Jesus Christ (Have you stopped to consider the popular prayer of covering food, persons and property with the blood of Christ?)

As we preach and teach, we must keep asking ourselves how the Christian key words and phrases are understood by our African listeners. We should bring into confrontation the authentic Biblical meaning and the possible local re-interpretation. This will help our listeners filter out pagan and animistic concepts which many Africans sitting in our pews still hold very firmly.

(Steven Musa-Kormayea)

This might mean we have to say what we don't mean.

g) Illustrations

- In a narrative you will hardly need them – just bring out the tension and drama of the story itself. Retelling it in the present tense and with some more updated language can help it to live.
- If you do need to illustrate then save it for the main points and particularly the difficult points to grasp – don't just illustrate because you can
- Do them at end of preparation process
- Clear, short, everyday (e.g. from the market or matatu of family life, not from contexts far away or long ago that will take ages to explain), vivid
- Visual aids – for children's talks this can be helpful but be very careful:
  - We need to fight against our visual age which assumes that the visual is more powerful (and more entertaining) than the spoken/written word.
  - Biblical religion has always challenged the prevailing visual culture of idolatry and gives us a God revealed through words (e.g. Deut. 4:15-24; John 1).
  - Yes God did use visual things to teach of Christ (e.g. the snake on the pole) but the danger (and often reality) was the worship of those physical signs.
  - The real blessedness is for those who have not seen and yet believe on the basis of the written word (John 20:29-31).
  - In fact word pictures are more powerful than visual images which fail to deliver the full glory and reality of spiritual things (cf. the attempt to draw pictures of the things in the book of Revelation).

h) Cross-references – use very sparingly indeed it at all – use a) if the NT quotes the OT; b) if you really needed to show the background (e.g. Gen. 3:15 as a background to Joshua 10:24); or c) if you need to show the NT fulfilment of the OT (e.g. Col. 2:15 as the fulfilment of Gen. 3:15 etc.) – be very careful as very easily we start moving away from our focus on the main passage and introducing other thoughts – just use when really necessary to illuminate the main text.

i) Personal testimony, anecdotes and stories

- Sparingly – we want to hear the story of the text not our stories
- Not as distractions that take us away from the text but for illumination
- If personal they should show weakness not strength (2 Cor. 11:30)
- It is not about us (John 3:30)

j) Quotations from other authors – v. sparingly – our authority is the Word not the commentator or scholar, we mustn't teach like scribes and Pharisees. Leave most of your preparation and workings on the desk.

k) Using Greek and Hebrew words – don't do it! Don't want to take Bible out of hands of the believer in the pew.

## The value of structure

- a) Of the whole talk – we don't want to be prescriptive or restrictive here – it doesn't have to be three points – it doesn't even need to be points but there must be some kind of clear road map, some sort of route through with some kind of signposting for the listener so they know where they are. Without a structure it just becomes a ramble or a rant. (Or as a body without a skeleton it becomes a jellyfish.)

The Bible uses structure (e.g. repeated phrases or groups of three or seven or ten or 'bookends' or mirror/chiasm structures) because it was written in an oral culture and that helps the listeners to follow and remember.

Ways to get a structure:

E.g. Follow the structure of the passage – this is often the best thing to do – with a narrative there'll often be a natural division of the 'scenes' in the text. You can go back to that step of dividing the passage into these scenes (Session 6 point 5) and make these your sections or points.

The key thing, whatever structure you go for, is that you have one and that you are clear how each point or section within that structure contributes to the whole. You want all your guns pointed at the main target. If a point doesn't really contribute to the big point then either you've got the big idea wrong or it's a side point you can just drop it.



- b) Within each part of the talk

Sometimes the problem is that we have an overall structure (4 points or whatever) but we don't think about what we will say *within* each of those sections – we just think, "I'll say something about the broadness of God's love, then something about the narrowness, then say a bit about the freeness of grace." And the danger is that we ramble *within* each section and don't make the points clearly.

One method many people have found helpful is something like this:

- STATE – POINT – EXPLAIN – GROUND (SPEG)
- STATE: Say what the point is – work hard at coming up with a short, memorable, punchy, accurate phrase
- POINT: Show us where exactly in the text you are getting these things from (like Paul in Acts 17: "reasoning from the Scriptures")
- EXPLAIN: Make it clear, using illustrations and cross-references if necessary
- GROUND: Bring, it home, apply the point, show how this aspect of the gospel makes a difference to how we think, feel and live
- And then move on to the next point

## 4. Very cutting

- Urgency
- Preaching like Noah
  - We're told that Noah was a herald and the Spirit of Christ preached through him to his generation. What do you think his message was?

- Was it, “You can be transformed”, “How to be a better you”, “How to overcome all your problems and thrive in this life”
- No – it was, “Quick, get in the Ark!”
- And did he try to lure them into the Ark with promises that it was going to be lovely 5 star accommodation where they’d have a great time? No – it was going to be a cramp smelly ship where you’ll get sea sick and have not much to do for a year but feed and muck out animals and wait, wait, wait.
- Instead his appeal to get in the Ark was, “Save yourself from this wicked generation! There is a judgment coming because of your wickedness. Though it might not look like it, God will sweep everything away. But there is salvation right in front of you. Freely given. A way of escape from wrath and a way to the new world God will make.”
- It’s the same for us now isn’t it? (cf. Matt. 24:36-44) And yet so often we can lose that eternal perspective and preach like it’s all about this world.

“I stand vigilantly on the precipice of eternity speaking to people who this week could go over the edge whether they are ready to or not. I will be called to account for what I say there.” John Piper

“Preach as a dying man to dying men” Richard Baxter

E.g. the Rwandan preacher found preaching amidst the slaughter of the genocide.<sup>1</sup> What would you preach if you knew that you and your congregation would soon to face the machete?



There should be a right urgency and seriousness and focus on eternity.

Instead of always the classic ‘altar call’

- Encourage people to ‘receive Christ’ at various points throughout the talk. Hold out Christ to people and say, “Take him now. Feed on him now. Have him.”
- Give a ‘next step’ at the end of the talk, or range of next steps (e.g. talk to someone, read a Gospel)
- use the language of the passage (e.g. confess over head of the lamb)
- Link up with follow up
- Pray, Pray, Pray – no-one can respond without the Lord

## 5. Super **compassionate**

As a sinner to fellow sinners

With great love

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<sup>1</sup> Story at <http://www.commontheology.com/vol1no1july2002/thepreacher.htm>.

## Group exercise

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Read Malachi 4:1-6

- What is the good news and beauty of Jesus that you find here that you could preach?
- What could be misunderstood in these verses and ruin the gospel point?
- How could you introduce the message in a way that grabs?
- How could you bring out the urgency of this passage?

What is our aim?

- Numbers?
- Popularity?
- Luther: "Preach so that if the people don't hate their sin they will hate you." Offensive message. Be as winsome as possible – present Christ as the awesomely attractive bridegroom that he is – but in exalting him you must humble man and that will be offensive.

### OUR PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO PREACHING AS SOLDIERS ON THE FRONT LINE

- ✓ Be prepared and glad to turn your back on 'cheap popularity'
- ✓ Brace yourself up to go against popular trends
- ✓ Aim to have no regrets in losing friends, colleagues, contacts and sometimes family members
- ✓ Aim to have no regrets if people leave your church/ministry on account of sound doctrine (2 Tim 3:1-4:6)
- ✓ Only aim to be faithful to God, to yourself and to those who listen to you (2 Tim 4:6-8)  
(Steven Musa-Kormayea)