



“Ezra read from ‘The Book’ before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. ⁴ Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose.... ⁵ Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.”

— **Nehemiah 8:1-6**

A FEW PRESUPPOSITIONS ABOUT PREACHING

- **The Bible is inspired -- deserving of preaching**

“No congregation will revere the Bible more than the preacher does” (Al Mohler)

- **The man of God must be holy -- above reproach**

If a man is unholy and living in hidden sin, he ought not to attempt to speak for God.

“Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling-blocks before the blind, as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues. . . . Certainly, brethren, we have very great cause to take heed what we do, as well as what we say: if we will be the servants of Christ indeed, we must not be tongue servants only, but must serve him with our deeds. . . . We must study as hard how to live well, as how to preach well” (Richard Baxter).

“Let the minister take care that his personal character agrees in all respects with his ministry. We have all heard the story of the man who preached so well and lived so badly, that when he was in the pulpit everybody said he ought never to come out again, and when he was out of it they all declared he never ought to enter it again” (Charles Spurgeon).

- **You only are filled if you come hungry to hear from God.**

Those who are hungry leave well satisfied.

- **Preaching God's Word is not optional -- it's mandatory**

2 Timothy 4:1-5

- **The preaching of God's Word is the 'climactic' event of one's entire week -- it is nothing less than hearing from God as He speaks through the Bible.**

“The heart of Christian worship is the authentic preaching of the Word of God” (Al Mohler)

A FEW DEFINITIONS

- **PREACHING** — “Expository preaching is that mode of Christian preaching that takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible” (Al Mohler)

“The preacher's business is to take what is given him in the Scriptures, as it is given to him, and to endeavour to imprint it on the souls of men. All else is God's work” (RL Dabney)

- **SERMON** — An expository sermon is a sermon that takes the main point of a passage of Scripture, makes it the main point of the sermon, and applies it to life today.

I. The IMPORTANCE of the Sermon

"The supreme work of the Christian minister is the work of preaching. This is a day in which one of our great perils is that of doing a thousand little things to the neglect of the one thing, which is preaching" (G. Campbell Morgan).

A. Commanded by God

Matt 28:19-20, 1 Tim 4:13, 2 Tim 2:2; 4:2, Titus 2:1; Matt 4:17; Luke 4:18; Gal 1:16; Eph 3:8

B. Demonstrated in Scripture

OT - Jeremiah 7, 17; Zechariah 1:1-17 ('Thus says the LORD...')

NT - Acts 2; Hebrews 3-4

Jesus - Matthew 5-7, 24-25

C. the Mouthpiece of God

"The preacher rises in the pulpit to accomplish one central purpose: to set forth the message and meaning of the biblical text" (Al Mohler)

"Through our preaching the Lord seeks to change men's lives. We are to be evangelists, to awaken men to their high calling in Christ. We are to be heralds, proclaiming the messages of God to men. We are to be ambassadors, calling men to be reconciled to God. We are to be shepherds, nourishing and caring for men day by day. We are to be stewards of the mysteries of God, giving men the proper Word for their every need. We are to be witnesses, telling men of all that God has done for them. We are to be overseers, urging men to live their lives to God. We are to be ministers, preparing men to minister with us to other. As we reflect on each of these phases of our work, what emphasis each gives to the importance of preaching! What a task the Lord has given us" (Mark Steege)!

D. The Power of God

"Ministers knock at the door of men's hearts, the Spirit comes with a key and opens the door" (Thomas Watson)

E. The conversion from God

"The Word preached is the engine God uses to effect repentance. It is compared to a hammer and to a fire (Jer 23.29), the one to break, the other to melt the heart. How great a blessing it is to have the Word, which is of such virtue, dispensed! And how hard they who put out the lights of heaven will find it to escape hell!" (Thomas Watson)

"Every sermon presents the hearer with a forced decision. We will either obey or disobey the Word of God. The sovereign authority of God operates through the preaching of His Word to demand obedience from His people" (Al Mohler)

Practical Application

- Do you come hungry expecting to hear from God *and to be changed by His Word*?
- Pray for your preachers to make the Word clear so that God's people will be filled & changed.
- Do you trust in, pray for, and earnestly expect the Spirit-given power of God to work *while* the Word is preached? Do you believe this is *the* most important activity in your entire week?
- If every sermon presents the hearer with a forced decision of obedience or disobedience, *how* are you doing? Do you intentionally *apply* and *implement* the text to your life?

"I preached, as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men." (Richard Baxter)

II. The ELEMENTS of the Sermon

“Expository preaching is a most exacting discipline. Perhaps that is why it is so rare. Only those will undertake it who are prepared to follow the example of the apostles and say, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables. . . . We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word’ (Acts 6.2, 4). The systematic *preaching* of the Word is impossible without the systematic *study* of it. It will not be enough to skim through a few verses in daily Bible reading, nor to study a passage only when we have to preach from it. No. We must daily soak ourselves in the Scriptures. We must not just study, as through a microscope, the linguistic minutiae of a few verses, but take our telescope and scan the wide expanses of God’s Word, assimilating its grand theme of divine sovereignty in the redemption of mankind. ‘It is blessed,’ wrote CH Spurgeon, ‘to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in scriptural language, and your spirit is flavoured with the words of the Lord, so that your blood is *Bibline* and the very essence of the Bible flows from you’” (John Stott).

"The receiving of the word consists of two parts: attention of mind and intention of will." (William Ames)

“True biblical preaching ought to be a life-changing endeavor. The conscientious preacher does not merely seek to impart abstract doctrine or plain facts to his people; he also pleads with them for heartfelt and earnest obedience. . . . The ultimate goal of our teaching ministry is not merely to fill people’s heads with information; it is to press on their hearts the duty of obedience” (John MacArthur).

Make the cake tasty!

“That the feeding of the sheep is an essential duty of the shepherd-calling is known even to those who are least familiar with shepherds and their work. Sheep cannot feed themselves, nor water themselves. They must be conducted to the water and the pasture. . . . Everything depends on the proper feeding of the sheep. Unless wisely fed they become emaciated and sick, and the wealth invested in them is squandered. . . . When the minister goes into the pulpit, he is the shepherd in the act of feeding” (Charles Bridges).

SOME KEY ‘INGREDIENTS’ OF A SERMON

1. Introduction

Should include 3 elements:

- Grab the hearer’s attention and secure their interest
- Create a need; why should I listen to you?
- Introduces the theme of the passage and the body of the sermon

2. Thesis/Proposition

“Every sermon should have, like a telescope, but one object in [its] field.” (Charles Simeon)

“Whether a sermon has two points or ten points, it must have one point; it must be about something.” (John Broadus)

3. Outline/Explanation of Text

“Explanation is foundational for expository preaching and is its primary distinguishing factor.” (Tom Pennington)

4. Conclusion

- Should summarize the message, the text, and the main point
- Should appeal to the will
- Should plead for a decision & persuade hearers to act

5. Application

It's absolutely necessary to take the meaning & stamp it on the minds and hearts of the hearers.

“[...] applicatory preaching is often costly preaching. As has often been said, when John the Baptist preached generally, Herod heard him gladly. But when John applied his preaching particularly, he lost his head. Both internally in a preacher's own conscience, as well as in the consciences of his people, a fearless application of God's truth will cost a price” (Joel Beeke)

“Preaching is essentially a personal encounter, in which the preacher's will is making a claim through the truth upon the will of the hearer. If there is no summons, there is no sermon” (John A. Broadus).

6. Gospel

Summary:

William Perkins (Puritan 16th century) advocates that preachers ought to:

1. **Read the text** distinctly out of the canonical scriptures.
2. Give the **sense and understanding** of it being read, by the scripture itself.
3. Collect a few and profitable points of **doctrine** out of the natural sense.
4. To **apply** the doctrines rightly collected to the life and manners of men in a simple and plain speech.

Whatever you have and all that you have, if there is no biblical preaching, then you don't have a church.

Practical Application

- Throughout the week, earnestly pray for your pastor(s) to ‘rightly divide the Word’ -2 Tim 2.15
- Encourage those who teach/preach not by saying ‘good sermon’ but by thoughtfully, intentionally & specifically saying *what* impacted you and *why* and how you *applied* it -Gal 6.6
- Preaching has 2 elements: the preacher *actively* preaches & the hearer *actively* listens. Prepare!
- In so far as the man teaches the Word rightly, it may be the mouth of a man but it is the voice of God. Ready yourself to meet with & hear from God. Resist all wandering of the mind during the sermon. Prepare yourself & your family. Be serious and sober during the heralding of truth.

"There is not a sermon which is heard, but it sets us nearer heaven or hell." —John Preston

III. The NECESSITY of the Sermon

“If there is to be a Divine result from God’s Word, the Holy Ghost must go forth with it. As surely as God went before the children of Israel when He divided the Red Sea, as surely as He led them through the wilderness by the pillar of cloud and fire, so surely must the Lord’s powerful presence go with His Word if there is to be any blessing from it” (Charles Spurgeon)

Why Is the Sermon Necessary?

1. Obedience to God

1 Corinthians 1:17; 9:16; Titus 2:1, 15; 3:8; 2 Timothy 4:2

“Paul told Timothy, straight and clear, to "Preach the Word" (2 Tim. 4:2). This is the great imperative. This is why the apostles earlier had determined that, even though there were problems with the equitable distribution of financial aid in Jerusalem, the church would just have to find others to solve their problems, because, "We . . . will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4). Why this priority? Because this Word is "the word of life" (Phil. 2:16). That is the great task of the preacher: to "hold out the word of life" to people who need it for their souls" (Mark Dever).

2. Conformity to Christ

Galatians 4:12-19 (esp verse 19)

“The Word is a hammer (Jer 23:29). Every blow of the hammer is to fasten the nails to the building; so the preacher’s words are to fasten you the more to Christ; they weaken themselves to strengthen and settle you. This is the grand design of preaching, not only for the enlightening, but for the establishing of souls; not only to guide them in the right way, but to keep them in it” (Thomas Watson),

“What is the chief end of preaching? . . . To give men and women a sense of God and His presence. . . . I can forgive a man for a bad sermon, I can forgive the preacher almost anything if he gives me a sense of God, if he gives me something for my soul, if he gives me the sense that, though he is inadequate himself, he is handling something which is very great and very glorious, if he gives me some dim glimpse of the majesty and the glory of God, the love of Christ my Saviour, and the magnificence of the Gospel. If he does that I am his debtor, and I am profoundly grateful to him. Preaching is the most amazing, and the most thrilling activity that one can ever be engaged in, because of all that it holds out for all of us in the present, and because of the glorious endless possibilities in an eternal future” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

3. Hearing from God

...if preachers wish to preach with divine authority, they must proclaim this message of the inspired Scriptures, for the Scriptures alone have divine authority. If preachers wish to preach with divine authority, they must submit themselves and echo the Word of God. Preachers are literally to be ministers of the Word. (Sidney Greidanus)

Any study of church history, and particularly any study of the great periods of revival or reawakening, demonstrates above everything else just this one fact: that the Christian Church during all such periods has spoken with authority. The great characteristic of all revivals has been the authority of the preacher. There seemed to be something new, extra, and irresistible in what he declared on behalf of God (Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

How would this affect our perspective on preaching & our preparation for worship?

4. Meeting with God

"Do you go to church to meet God or to hear a sermon about Him? How many come to church expecting a confrontation with Deity?" (Leonard Ravenhill)

A meeting signifies importance, keeping current, receiving feedback and instructions.

"It is no secret that Christ's church is not at all in good health in many places in the world. She has been languishing because she has been fed, as the current line has it, 'junk food'; all kinds of artificial preservatives and all sorts of unnatural substitutes have been served up to her. As a result, theological and Biblical malnutrition has afflicted the very generation that has taken such giant steps to make sure its physical health is not damaged by using foods or products that are carcinogenic or otherwise harmful to their physical bodies. Simultaneously a worldwide spiritual famine resulting from the absence of any genuine publication of the Word of God (Amos 8:11) continues to run wild and almost unabated in most quarters of the Church" (Walter Kaiser).

The cure is expository preaching!

5. Satisfaction in the gospel

"Exhibit as much as you can of a glorious Christ. Yea, let the motto upon your whole ministry be: Christ is all. Let others develop the pulpit fads that come and go. Let us specialize in preaching our Lord Jesus Christ" (Cotton Mather).

"Let this be to you the mark of true gospel preaching - where Christ is everything, and the creature is nothing; where it is salvation all of grace, through the work of the Holy Spirit applying to the soul the precious blood of Jesus." (Charles Spurgeon)

6. Reminder of grace

Preaching should remind the hearer of Christ, His gospel & His grace.

1. **NEED** for grace
2. **GOD** of grace
3. **SALVATION** by grace
4. **HOPE** from grace
5. **POWER** from grace

7. Implementation of the sermon

Preaching converts, convicts, changes, corrects and conforms us to Christ!

If gospel preaching is necessary, then it follows that sermon implementation is also!

Meeting God [Puritan Prayer]

Great God,

In public and private, in sanctuary and home, may my life be steeped in prayer, filled with the spirit of grace and supplication, each prayer perfumed with the incense of atoning blood.

Help me, defend me, until from praying ground I pass to the realm of unceasing praise.

Urged by my need, invited by thy promises, called by thy Spirit, I enter thy presence, worshipping thee with godly fear, awed by thy majesty, greatness, glory, but encouraged by thy love.

I am all poverty as well as all guilt, having nothing of my own with which to repay thee, but I bring Jesus to thee in the arms of faith, pleading his righteousness to offset my iniquities, rejoicing that he will weigh down the scales for me, and satisfy thy justice.

I bless thee that great sin draws out great grace, that, although he lest sin deserves infinite punishment because done against an infinite God, yet there is mercy for me, for where guilt is not terrible, there thy mercy in Christ is most free and deep.

Bless me by revealing to me more of his saving merits, by causing thy goodness to pass before me, by speaking peace to my contrite heart;

Strengthen me to give thee no rest until christ shall reign supreme within me, in every thought, word, and deed, in a faith that purifies the heart, overcomes the world, works by love, fastens me to thee, and every clings to the cross.

Practical Application

- If God requires that preaching is necessary, then how ought we to view the 'preached Word'?
- How can you lead your heart, your wife & your children into readiness *before* the preaching?
- Does God use the sermon to *shape more of Christ* in you? Ponder & journal your growth in the last year. If there has been much growth, praise God. If not, repent and seek God's mercy!
- Have you preached the gospel of grace to yourself today? Yesterday? This week? If not, take time today & do it!

IV. The APPLICATION of the Sermon

“The purpose of preaching is not to stir people to action while bypassing their minds, so that they never see what reason God gives them for doing what the preacher requires of them (that is manipulation); nor is the purpose to stock people’s minds with truth, no matter how vital and clear, which then lies fallow and does not become the seedbed and source of changed lives (that is academicism). . . . The purpose of preaching is to inform, persuade, and call forth an appropriate response to the God whose message and instruction are being delivered” (JI Packer).

“Of all the preaching in the world, I hate that preaching which tends to make the hearers laugh, or to move their minds with tickling levity and affect them as stage plays used to, instead of affecting them with a holy reverence for the name of God” (Richard Baxter).

Texts: Joshua 5:6; 2 Kings 22:13; Jeremiah 6:10-17; Proverbs 1:33; Luke 8:18; 11:28; James 1:19-25

Mark 4:1-25 - the parable of the soils [cf.Luke 8:4-21]

4 kinds of listeners to the Word of God preached:

1. Some have a **stubborn**, unreceptive heart (**unsaved**)
2. Some have a **shallow**, superficial heart (**unsaved**)
3. Some have a **worldly**, strangled/distracted heart (**unsaved**)
4. Some have a **soft**, receptive/obedient heart (**saved***)

Listen to a sermon...

1. Expectantly
2. Attentively
3. Carefully
4. Humbly
5. Frequently
6. Responsively

Directives for Listening to & Applying Sermons

Jesus said: “Take care how you listen” (Luke 8:18)

1. Come to hear them, not out of curiosity, but from a sincere desire to know and do your duty.
2. Give diligent heed to the things that are spoken from the Word of God.
3. Do not entertain even the least prejudice against the minister.
4. Be careful not to depend too much on a preacher, or think more highly of him than you ought to think.
5. Make particular application to your own hearts of everything that is delivered.
6. Pray to the Lord, before, during, and after every sermon.

“If only all who hear me this day would seriously apply their hearts to practice what has now been told them! How ministers would see Satan, like lightning, fall from heaven, and people find the Word preached sharper than a two-edged sword and mighty, through God, to the pulling down of the devil’s strongholds” (George Whitefield)!

“Come not to hear with a careless heart, as if you were to hear a matter that little concerned you, but come with a sense of the unspeakable weight, necessity, and consequence of the holy word which you are to hear; . . . Make it your work with diligence to apply the word as you are hearing it. . . . You have work to do as well as the preacher, and should all the time be as busy as he . . . you must open your mouths, and digest it, for another cannot digest it for you . . . therefore be all the while at work, and abhor an idle heart in hearing, as well as an idle minister. . . . Chew the cud, and call up all when you come home in secret, and by meditation preach it over to yourselves. If it were coldly delivered by the preacher, do you . . . preach it more earnestly over to your own hearts. . . .” (Richard Baxter).

“Listen to sermons as if your life depended on it” (Ken Ramey) [Matt 7:24-27]

Ways in Which Sermons Can Be Applied (*how can you implement*)

1. Where does your own practice need to change?
2. How can you apply a point from the sermon (*I specific way you can begin tonight*)
3. So what do I have to do in order to “implement” — *actually making it happen*.
4. How can I instruct my family/wife/children further in this matter? Instruct further.
5. How can your wife benefit from the sermon? How can you pastor your wife?
6. How do your children benefit from the sermon? How can you drive it deeper for them specifically?
7. Are there other men at CFBC that you can ask to help you apply this? How can you seek accountability with others?
8. Are there discipling relationships that need to be formed and reinforced and more honest?
9. What part of the Scriptures (the sermon) are you not obeying? Take serious & diligent pains to ensure you apply it to your heart, mind & life.

“The Word will be effectual one way or the other; if it does not make your hearts better, it will make your chains heavier.... Dreadful is their case who go loaded with sermons to hell” (Thomas Watson).

“Merely listening to and not practicing the Word will contribute to our condemnation” (Joel Beeke).

"There is not a sermon which is heard, but it sets us nearer heaven or hell" (John Preston).

Practical Application

- Your pastor studies throughout the week & prepares to preach; how do *you* prepare to listen? In the last month, how much time did you devote to *preparing* for the Word?
- Your pastor actively speaks during the sermon; your job is to actively listen (not passive!) during the sermon & strive to engage with the Word, the sermon, and application.
- How can you take what has been preached and bring it up again during the week to your wife/kids and further draw out (more) specific applications to the family life (e.g., praise in hardship, prayer in pain, trust in confusion, etc.)
- Immediately when church is finished, how can you improve in having ‘*sermon-applicational conversations*’ with folks as you are in the sanctuary & exit church. Rather than talking about the week, politics, etc., how can we ask very poignant, pointed and provoking **questions** such as...
 - ✓ How did that sermon encourage you?
 - ✓ How did that message convict you & reveal your sin?
 - ✓ Did God show you one thing you need to apply/change this week? How can I help & pray with you for that?
 - ✓ Is there anything in that text that you now see that you never saw before about Christ & the gospel?

“Come from your knees to the sermon, and come from the sermon to your knees” (Joseph Alleine)

“Hearing is the provision made for the soul’s eternal well-being, its everlasting welfare depends on it; if you fail here, your souls perish without remedy. For salvation comes by faith and faith comes by hearing. It is an act of eternal consequence. According to our hearing, so shall the state of our souls be to eternity” (David Clarkson).

More Resources:

More from Richard Baxter: “Directions for Profitable Hearing the Word Preached” (*google* it)

Christopher Ash, *Listen Up!*

Ken Ramey, *Expository Listening!*

Preparing, Persevering & Practicing the Preached Word

Some Very Practical Suggestions

Before the Sermon

- 1. Read and mediate on God's Word every day:** Daily Bible reading whets our appetite for the main course on the Lord's Day. We can't expect to be ready to digest spiritual food if we've not been eating through the week. And don't spoil your appetite by feasting on sin.
- 2. Limit media consumption:** Most Americans consume 9-11 hours of media a day (James 1:21). In [*Preaching to Programmed People: Effective Communication in a Media-Saturated Society*](#), Timothy Turner explains how "TV watching and preaching are diametrically opposed to one another—one is visual, the other is rational; one involves the eyes, the other involves the ears; one creates passive watchers, the other requires active hearers." After watching TV and going to the movies and surfing the Internet all week long, you come to church and have to sit and listen to a lengthy sermon that requires a great deal of concentration and exertion you aren't used to. You're expected to go from being a passive viewer to an aggressive listener literally overnight. Listening demands a great deal of concentration and self-discipline. (*Expository Listening*, 42)
- 3. Use Saturday evening well:** Tidy up the previous week, prepare for next week, get to bed early, discourage children out late on Saturday night.
- 4. Pray for yourself and the pastor:** Do this daily but especially on Sunday. In many ways, "you will get what you pray for."
- 5. Train yourself to listen:** There are multiple resources on how to preach but, apart from the few mentioned above, very few on how to listen. Preachers have many resources to train and equip them to become better preachers, but listeners have hardly any resources to train and equip them to become better listeners. This is astounding when you consider that the number of listeners far exceeds the number of preachers and even more so when you realize that the Bible says more about the listener's responsibility to hear and obey the Word of God than it does about the preacher's responsibility to explain and apply the Word of God. From cover to cover, the Bible is jam-packed with verses and passages that talk about the vital necessity of hearing and obeying God's Word. God is very concerned about how preachers preach. But based on the sheer amount of biblical references to hearing and listening, it is unmistakable that God is just as, if not more, concerned about how listeners listen. (*Expository Listening*, 3)

The Sermon

- 1. Come to church in good time to get calm, settled, and focused.**
- 2. Respect the silence of the sanctuary:** This includes training your children not to distract others
- 3. Engage your body and soul in worship and prayer:** Stir up your whole body, mind, and soul in the worship before the sermon.
- 4. Tell yourself that God is about to speak:** Keep praying that He will speak to you through His Word.
- 5. Recognize that this is a team effort and take personal responsibility.** It is a joint venture between the preacher and the listener. Successful sermons result from the listener teaming up with the preacher much like a catcher works in unison with a pitcher. Both the pitcher and the catcher have an important role to play in the pitching process. The responsibility doesn't all rest on the pitcher's shoulders. (*Expository Listening*, 4)
- 6. Take brief notes:** Enough to help you concentrate but not so many that it turns into a lecture that only engages the head.
- 7. Check that the preacher is preaching God's Word:** Not a critical Pharisaical spirit (Luke 11:54), but with a discerning Berean spirit (Acts 17:11).

- 8. Accept there will be times when the Word hurts you:** Don't react against this and shut down, but receive it and try to profit from it.
- 9. Build up good-will towards the preacher:** Ill-will or malice towards the preacher is a hardener of the heart. It blocks the Word.
- 10. Try to find one thing to benefit from:** You can usually find a crumb or two in even the poorest preacher's poorest sermon.

After the Sermon

- 1. Talk about it with others:** Share what helped you with friends and family.
- 2. Put it into practice:** Obey and do the Word.
- 3. Be patient in looking for results:** Sowing and fruit-bearing presuppose a gradual and time-consuming process of development.
- 4. Work on your soil:** Soil can change from bad to good to very good. We are responsible for preparing the soil of our hearts (Mark 4:1-20).
- 5. Give feedback:** Encourage preachers from time to time with specifics about how particular sermons helped you and in which way.

Adapted from David Murray, *20 helps for Sermon Listening* <<http://headhearhand.org/blog/2013/09/04/20-helps-to-sermon-listening/>>