



HEBRON

Wednesday, February 27, 2019

Dr. Landon Dowden

WHAT IS A HEALTHY CHURCH?

LESSON 2

EXPOSITIONAL PREACHING AND LISTENING

I. Initial questions:

- a. What do you think determines if a sermon is a “good” or “faithful” sermon?
- b. In a worship service, should a primacy be placed on the preaching of God’s Word? What Scriptures would you use to answer this question?
- c. My grandmother used to say of her pastor that he was not a great preacher but he was a wonderful pastor. Why are people willing to endure preaching that is not “great”?
- d. What should we do if we are hearing unbiblical preaching?

II. Unhealthy churches are due in part to unhealthy preaching

- a. Kaiser (in 1981): It is no secret that Christ’s Church is not at all in good health in many places of 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.

III. As Pastors, we are called to:

a. Give our people the Word

- i. Luke 24:27; 44-49; 2 Tim. 3:14-4:2; Psalm 19:7-11; 2 Tim. 2:15; Col. 3:16

b. Give our people ALL of the Word

- i. When we do not give our people the whole counsel, then we rob them of aspects of God’s voice that are important and needed.



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1. Smith (Recapturing the Voice of God): In God's Word we have at least nine different genres. I'm so glad we have the robust poetry of the Psalms, the direct wisdom of Proverbs, the biting irony of Ecclesiastes, the shocking narratives of the Old Testament, the richness of the Gospel narratives, the personal nature of the epistles, and the glorious joy of kingdom consummation in Revelation.
- ii. God has spoken in various ways and all are needed, important, and useful.
 1. Lamentations
 - a. A Lament is...
 - i. A call to acknowledge and describe mourning.
 - ii. Part of the worship life of ancient Israel.
 - iii. Hebrew poetry.
 - iv. Found on the lips of kings, priests, and the prophets.
 - v. Central to putting words to the worst times in history.
 - b. Kaiser: God has placed personal and national laments in Scripture, it would appear, as a corrective against euphoric, celebratory notions of faith, which romantically portray life as consisting only of sweetness and light....God has given us in the laments of Scripture a solace where the full spectrum of our earthly journey can be represented.
 - c. Lamentations, like other laments, forces us to deal with suffering by directing our despair not away from God, but toward Him.
 - d. It also performs the pastoral work of comforting us without downplaying the human realities of suffering and pain.
 - c. **Give our people JESUS in ALL of HIS WORD**
 - i. Luke 24:27 – ALL THE THINGS CONCERNING HIMSELF
 - ii. Mohler: "Every single text of Scripture points to Christ. He is the Lord of all, and therefore He is the Lord of the Scriptures too. From Moses to the prophets, He is the focus of every single word of the Bible. Every verse of Scripture finds its fulfillment in Him, and every story in the Bible ends with Him" (Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 96).



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- iii. Shaddix: “While some texts have Christ as their center (christocentric), and others have Christ as their intended realization (christotelic), some texts simply reflect the character and image of Christ into which God is re-creating us (christiconic)” (Vines and Shaddix, *Progress In The Pulpit*, 119). He goes on to add, “Whether the best line to the cross is a beeline, or whether you and I need to take a few side roads in order to preserve hermeneutical integrity, we must make sure we reach the cross in every message. And when we do, we must make sure to unpack the good news enough that people have the whole story” (Vines and Shaddix, *Progress In The Pulpit*, 124).
- iv. Genesis. 3:15 – Jesus is the Seed of the Woman.
- v. Isaiah. 53 – Jesus is the Suffering Servant.
- vi. Daniel. 7 – Jesus is the Son of Man.
- vii. Psalm 24:7-10 – Jesus is the King of Glory.
- viii. Micah 5 – Jesus is our shepherd and peace.
- ix. John 1:29 – Jesus is our sacrificial substitute.
- x. John 19:30 – Jesus is our sufficient Savior.
- xi. 1 Cor. 15:24-26 – Jesus is our victor who destroys all of our enemies.
- xii. Hebrews. 4:14-16 – Jesus is our high priest to whom we can run for mercy and grace.
- xiii. Revelation. 19:11-16 – Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.
- xiv. When we do not give God’s people all of God’s Word we not only rob them of important ways God has spoken to us, but we more tragically rob them of pictures of Christ that could be used to fuel their worship of, their obedience to, and their love for Him.

IV. Primacy of preaching

- a. In his opening chapter *The Primacy of Preaching* from the book *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, Mohler writes: “Evangelical pastors commonly state that biblical preaching is the hallmark of their calling. Nevertheless, a careful observer might come to a very different conclusion. The priority of preaching is simply not evident in far too many churches.”
- b. Mark 1:38; Acts 6:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:21
- c. Should we easily exchange preaching for some other element – creative dance performance; an artist drawing and talking; etc.?
- d. Dever: Expository preaching is the starting point for all the other marks of a healthy church. Why? Because only through expository preaching will a congregation hear God’s word clearly taught every week. And a congregation will only begin to image God--whether in its evangelism, discipleship, leadership, or anything else--as it listens to God’s word.



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- e. Dever: There are many other types of preaching. Topical preaching, for example, gathers up one or more Scriptures on a particular topic, such as the topic of prayer or the topic of giving. Biographical preaching takes the life of someone in the [Bible](#) and portrays the individual's life as a display of God's grace and as an example of hope and faithfulness. And these other types may be employed helpfully on occasion. But the regular diet of the church should consist of the explanation and application of particular portions of God's Word.
- f. Lloyd-Jones (via Lawson): believed that the chief business of the church is what Paul charged Timothy with his dying words, to "preach the word" ([2 Tim. 4:2](#)). Preaching must come first in the life of the church before anything else can find its rightful place. With compelling clarity, he stated, "The primary task of the Church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God." Nothing, he maintained, must ever supplant the primacy of biblical preaching in the pulpit. The Doctor believed everything in the life of the church is defined and directed by the proclamation of the Scripture.
- g. Luther: 'Now, wherever you hear or see this Word preached, believed, professed, and lived, do not doubt that the true ecclesia sancta catholica (Christian, holy people) must be there....And even were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God's Word cannot be without God's people and, conversely, God's people cannot be without God's Word.'
- h. Boice: "I do not think it is too much to say that preaching really is an essential means perhaps even the most important means, of grace. If that is the case, then we should be very careful in our Christian lives to expose ourselves to the best teaching and attend the best churches available."

V. **An Essential Mark of a healthy Church: Expository Preaching (Dever)**

- a. Definition
 - i. The Kind of preaching which exposes God's Word
 - ii. Nehemiah 8
 - iii. MacArthur: The special attention evangelicalism has given to the inerrancy of Scripture in recent years carries with it a mandate to emphasize expository preaching of the Scriptures. The existence of God and His nature requires the conclusion that He has communicated accurately and that an adequate exegetical process to determine His meaning is required. The Christian commission to preach God's Word involves the transmitting of that meaning to an audience, a weighty responsibility. A belief in inerrancy thus requires, most important of all, expository preaching.



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- iv. Packer: Preaching appears in the Bible as a relaying of what God has said about Himself and His doings, and about men in relation to Him, plus a pressing of His commands, promises, warnings, and assurances, with a view to winning the hearer or hearers . . . to a positive response.
 - v. Lloyd-Jones: I therefore lay down this proposition that a sermon should always be expository.
 - vi. Vines and Shaddix: Expository preaching is the process of laying open the biblical text in such a way that the Holy Spirit's intended meaning and accompanying power are brought to bear on the lives of contemporary listeners.
- b. What is it?
- i. It takes a particular passage of Scripture, explains that passage, and then applies the meaning of the passage to the life of the congregation.
 - ii. Expository preaching presumes a belief that what God says is authoritative for His people.
 - iii. Expository preaching presumes that God's people should hear God's Word and need to hear it, lest our congregations be deprived of what God intends to use for shaping us after His image. It presumes that God intends the church to learn from both Testaments, as well as from every genre of Scripture—law, history, wisdom, prophesy, gospels, and epistles. An expositional preacher who moves straight through books of the Bible and who regularly rotates between the different Testaments and genres of Scripture, I believe, is like a mother who serves her children food from every food group, not just their two or three favorite meals.
 - iv. An expositional preacher's authority begins and ends with Scripture. Even as Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles were given not just a commission to go and speak, but to speak a particular message, so Christian preachers today have authority to speak from God so long as they speak his words.
- c. What Expository Preaching Is and Is Not
- i. Expository preaching is not so much about how a preacher says what he says, but about how a preacher decides what to say. Is Scripture determining our content or is something else?
 - ii. Expository preaching requires careful attention to the context of a passage, because it aims to make the point of the biblical text the point of the sermon.
 - iii. It is ultimately the congregation's responsibility to ensure that this is true of its preachers.



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1. Jesus assumes that congregations have the final responsibility for what happens in a church in Matthew 18, as does Paul in Galatians 1. A church, therefore, must never give a person spiritual oversight over the body who does not show a practical commitment to hearing and teaching God's Word. When it does, it hampers its growth, ensuring that it won't mature beyond the level of the pastor. The church will slowly be conformed to the image of the pastor, rather than to the image of God.
- d. God has always used His Word to give life.
 - i. God's people have always been created by God's Word. From creation in Genesis 1 to the call of Abram in Genesis 12, from the vision of the valley of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37 to the coming of the living Word, Jesus Christ—God has always created his people by his Word. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). Or, as he wrote to the Corinthians, "Since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).
 - ii. Sound, expositional preaching is often the fountainhead of true growth in a church. Martin Luther found that carefully attending to God's Word began a reformation. We, too, must commit to seeing that our churches are always being reformed by the Word of God.
 - e. Back to the Heart of worship.
 - i. Our churches must recover the centrality of the Word in our worship.
 - ii. Pray for your pastor's preparation. Grant him time to study.
 - iii. Preaching is the fundamental component of pastoring.

VI. A Healthy Church Member is an Expositional Listener (Anyabwile)

- a. What is it?
 - i. Expositional preaching is not simply producing a verbal commentary on some passage of Scripture. Rather, expositional preaching is that preaching which takes for the main point of the sermon the point of a particular passage of Scripture.
 - ii. Expositional listening is listening for the meaning of a passage of Scripture and accepting that meaning as the main idea to be grasped for our personal and corporate lives as Christians.



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- b. Benefits of Expository Listening
 - i. Cultivating a hunger for God's Word.
 - ii. Helps us to focus on God's Will and to follow Him.
 - iii. Protects the gospel and our lives from corruption.
 - iv. Encourages faithful pastors.
 - v. Benefits the gathered congregation.

- c. How should we prepare to listen to a sermon? (from Dustin Bengé)
 - i. Pray for a receptive heart.
 - ii. Confess known sin before.
 - iii. Keep your Bible open.
 - iv. Take notes to stay focused.
 - v. Remove distractions, like phones.
 - vi. Never look at your watch.
 - vii. Don't think it's for someone else.
 - viii. Genuinely respond.

- d. How can we become expository listeners?
 - i. Meditate on the sermon passage during your quiet time.
 - ii. Invest in a good set of commentaries.
 - iii. Talk and pray with friends about the sermon after church.
 - iv. Listen to and act on the sermon throughout the week.
 - v. Develop the habit of addressing any questions about the text itself.
 - vi. Cultivate humility.

VII. Listen Up! A practical guide to listening to sermons (by Christopher Ash)

- a. Seven Ingredients for healthy sermon listening
 - i. Expect God to Speak
 - 1. Look up next Sunday's Bible passage and read it at home during the week.
 - 2. Pray for next Sunday's preacher in the middle of the week.
 - 3. Pray often for yourself, that, by His Spirit, God will grow in you a heartfelt expectation that God Himself will speak to you as His word is preached.
 - 4. Deliberately quieten your mind and heart before the sermon and say to yourself: 'This is when God speaks to me'. Pray again: 'Lord, speak to me. I am listening'.
 - ii. Admit God knows better than you.
 - 1. Faithful Bible teaching will always cause offense.
 - 2. To listen humbly is to admit that the Bible is right and I am wrong, that God is God and I need to change.



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- iii. Check that the preacher says what the passage says.
 - 1. Was the message of the sermon an unpacking and pressing home to us the message of the passage?
- iv. Hear the sermon in church.
 - 1. When we listen together, we respond together.
 - 2. By nature, we won't want to hear the word of God corporately, because it's much too uncomfortable.
- v. Be there week by week.
 - 1. We need to listen today, repent today, and believe today. But that doesn't mean that every sermon will scratch precisely where we are itching.
 - 2. The Bible is not designed to give me a series of instant fixes. It is God's instrument to shape and mold my mind and my character into the likeness of Christ. And that takes time.
- vi. Do what the Bible says.
 - 1. We must not expect sermon to entertain us. We might shop around churches until we find a style of preaching to suit our taste, because our aim is to be entertained, rather than to be taught, rebuked, corrected, and trained in righteousness.
 - 2. We need to pray for God to open our hearts week by week to His truth.
- vii. Do what the Bible says today – and rejoice!
 - 1. Every time we hear the word of God preached, we must respond today by a turning of the heart away from sin (repentance) and towards God and Jesus Christ (faith).
 - 2. We need to receive the word of God humbly and urgently day by day (James 1:21).
 - 3. To hear a sermon and not respond is worse than not hearing it at all; it makes us more guilty than we were before (John. 15:22).
 - 4. Ask yourself how the preached passage shows you an attitude, or words, or actions that need to change.
 - 5. Ask yourself in what way the passage encourages you to trust in God and in Christ afresh. Then resolve, urgently, to put that fresh trust into your life as God helps you.
 - 6. Enjoy preaching, not as entertainment but as God's regular gracious invitation to walk with Him, rejoicing in a clear conscience.



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viii. Summary:

- I. Preaching that makes a church Christ-like under grace takes a double miracle: the sinful preacher must be shaped by grace to preach; and sinful listeners must be awakened by grace to listen together week by week in humble expectancy. Only God can do this. So praying before the sermon is not a formality. Unless God works, the whole thing will be a waste of time. But God loves to change us through preaching, and He loves it when we pray to be given fresh repentance, renewed faith, joyful obedience and a corporate Christlikeness in the local church. So let us pray for this with confidence.