

Keller Sermon Prep.

– Lecture 4. Reading, Preparing, Conversation, and Preaching, p. 13

In June, takes a week out to plan preaching for coming year – give music person title, text, synopsis of each sermon – September to September.

- 2 Days to come up with series ideas, 2 days to dig into the text to get an idea of what's there, day to figure out how long series should be = 50 sermons.
- On vacation, reads a few major books to undergird the sermon series – justification, secular authors on evil, etc depending on the series. Alleviates redundancy.

Weekly

- Wednesday, ten days before the sermon, spends 3 or 4 hours exegeting the text.
 - Gets the Commentaries out.
 - Provisional outline for the sermon.
 - Bulletin people get the text, title, quotes; small group people get outline for small group prep.
- Friday before – write the sermon, turn it into a sermon outline.
 - Able to preach it at that point.
 - Thinks, “Crisis, crisis, crisis – you’re gonna have to preach this in two hours”.
- Saturday morning – rewrite
- Saturday night – rewrite.

Doesn't write it in stages, does the whole sermon, and then re-writes it. If he has three points, usually throws two away. Makes one point and expands it – narrower.

Keller Q&A - *“I don't believe you should spend a lot of time preparing your sermon, when you're a younger minister. I think because we are so desperately want our sermon to be good, that when you're younger you spend way too much time preparing. And, you know, its scary to say this to the younger ministers... you're not going to be much better by putting in twenty hours on that sermon – the only way you're going to be a better preacher is if you preach often. For the first two hundred sermons, not matter what you do, your first two hundred sermons are going to be terrible. (laughter from the crowd). And, if you put in... fifteen or twenty hours in the sermon you probably won't preach that many sermons because you won't last in ministry, because your people will feel neglected. In most churches the pasturing sets up the preaching. People will listen to you if they know that you love them, and you're there for them. In a big church like mine, it's the other way around – the preaching sets up the pastoring ministry. 'Because you're such a good expert on preaching, I'll come to you with my problems.'*

How do you study a passage in preparation for preaching? Handout pages 14-17.

Flow. Read it through several times – 5 to 10. (Do this in English. Of course, it is desirable if you can read through it in the original too, but unless you are a professor, you probably won't get a sense of the 'flow' unless you read in your native, heart language. if you simply cannot read well enough for "flow", stick to English!) What is the purpose? You are seeking to "fly over" the passage, the way you fly over a region in an airplane to get the "big picture". You are to look for the main features.

- Underline anything that impresses you, and provide a brief explanation of why it does. Note anything that puzzles you and pose it as a question.
- Now, write a paraphrase of the passage in your own words. This will force you to make decisions about flow--an important exercise.
- Finally, answer this question: what is the basic purpose of the author in writing this? What is the basic point he is trying to make?

Parts. Only now, turn to the use of lexical aids and commentaries. Why should you wait until now? To turn too quickly to the views of the experts can make it impossible for you to develop your own insights. Now that you do--turn to the technical books, use at least a halfdozen (and preferably a dozen), to avoid one-sidedness.

- Use these aids to find the original setting--the people the author was writing to.
- Use these aids to add to your list of "impressions" you developed.
- Then use them to answer your list of questions you have already developed.
- Now divide the passage into parts (idea units) and give each a title. The titles is just another mental discipline to help you determine the author's intent. Make the outline a detailed one if you wish.
- Next, look for connectors within the parts and especially between the parts. Here are four kinds of connectors:
 - a) contrast (e.g. "but"),
 - b) comparison (e.g. "even as"),
 - c) repetition of words or ideas,
 - d) cause and effect or explanation (e.g. "because", "for", "in order", "therefore", "if" "then").
- In the case of each connector, ask: "why did the author use this? how does it help him make a point, and what is the point?"
- Finally choose the main things (2-3) that impressed you. Now meditate on each:
 - What is the teaching?
 - What does this tell me about God or Christ that leads me to praise?
 - What does this tell me about my fallen condition that I can confess?
 - What does this tell me about how I should live, rejoice, trust, or change?

Shaft. Now you are ready to return to your original question. In light of all the detailed study you have just done, ask yourself: what is the basic purpose of the author in writing this? What is the basic point of the passage? Of course, you already answered this question once, but now use all your study to refine your previous answer. Now write it down in a single sentence, if possible. This is what I call the "shaft" of the sermon. (Jay Adams calls it the *telos*, while Haddon Robinson calls it the "Big Idea". Others call it the "CIT"--the central interpretive theme.) A sermon must be like an arrow, streamlined and clearly driving at a single point, a single message, the theme of the passage.

c. Writing the Sermon.

Now that you know the shaft of the passage, it remains to design a sermon outline or structure that preserves and promotes that shaft. Good sermon structure brings clarity. We must not be legalistic about sermon structure. I also do not intend this book to offer much detail on this subject. Let me simply propose one approach which preserves both a concern for a single, clear point and for application. This approach is based on (with just a few amendments) John Bettler's excellent chapter on "Application" in Sam Logan, ed. *The Preacher and Preaching*.

(1) Make the Shaft into a Sermon Proposition. Turn the "shaft", the central interpretive theme, into a practical proposition. The characteristics of the proposition are the following: a) Make it an active, declarative sentence (even with a second person pronoun, if possible). b) Make it person-oriented, "need-related". It should be oriented to a need and pointing to the satisfaction of that need. In other words, the proposition relates one central truth to the audience. For example, suppose you have studied John 16:16-23, and determined that the shaft is: "Jesus comforts his disciples with teaching about his second coming." But it must be turned into a sermon proposition. Here is one example for John 16:16-23: "Christians, through hope, can face anything." Here are some other examples of sermon propositions.

- Concealing your sin is no security.
- Regardless of your status everyone needs to be remade by the Holy Spirit.
- Nothing will cast out fear except the gospel.
- Communication is the key to marriage.
- Men who are interested in religion as a theory often revolt from it as an experience.

(2) Ask the passage a question or questions about the proposition.

Now, we are looking for more information on this central sermon proposition. We get it by asking the passage a question *about* the proposition. We want to be sure to only get what the passage tells you about this main point. Avoid all tangents and detours! What kind of questions should you ask? Your questions should be asking: either what, or why, or how or where or what for the need or issue (addressed in the proposition) is met (resolved, embodied, satisfied) in Christ. The question could be seeking to discover a) ways the satisfaction in Christ fits the need, or b) examples of how the satisfaction in Christ works, or c) concrete effects of the satisfaction (e.g. descriptions of positive conditions that result with him and negative conditions that result without him), or d) actions that will secure the satisfaction, or e) combinations of the above. Write down all the passage tells you and arrange it in an outline. Example:

John 16:16-23

Shaft - Jesus comforts his disciples with teaching about his second coming.

Proposition - Christians, through hope, can face anything.

Question - (If we ask the text) *Why?* (the following outline emerges)

- I. Our Hope is powerful. (v. 21 - "she forgets the anguish because of her joy")
- II. Our Hope is grounded in Christ. (v.22 - "no one will take away your joy")
- III. Our Hope is permanent. (v.23 - "you will no longer ask me anything")

Question - (If we ask the text) *How?* (the following outline emerges)

- I. By remembering Christ's timing. (v.20 - "you will weep while the world rejoices")
- II. By seeking Christ's face. (v.22 - "I will see you again and you will rejoice")
- III. By reflecting on Christ's triumph. (v.17 - "Because I go to the Father"; v. 23 - "In that day you will no longer ask me anything")

(3) Consider different arrangements. Many authors provide categories of sermon outlines.

Here are just three types that are common and helpful.

Faceting - The central subject is looked at in different aspects.

Luke 8:16-18

- I. A witness must be properly placed. (v.16 - "on a stand")
- II. A witness will be a threat to some. (v.17 - "brought out in the open")
- III. A witness must be informed. (v.18 - "consider how you listen")

Mark 1:17

- I. The Duty of discipleship ("follow me")
- II. The Promise of discipleship ("I will make you")
- III. The Test of discipleship ("fishers of men")

Contrasting - The central subject is looked at in terms of opposites: good/bad, right/wrong, temporal/eternal, divine/human.

Matthew 25 - "Waiting for Jesus"

- I. The foolish maidens: are you one of them?
- II. The wise maidens: are you one of these?

Exposing - This outline begins by posing a question or presenting a problem or a controversial assumption. Then answer or solution is unfolded in stages.

Luke 11:1-13 - "The Problem of Prayer"

- I. The Problem of Prayer (v.1 "teach us")
- II. Prayers must be balanced (v.2-4)
- III. Prayers must be persistent. (v.5-10)
- IV. Prayers must be believing. (v.11-13)

(4) Amass and attach supporting materials. Now that you have an outline, you have the "bones" or skeleton of the sermon. "Flesh out" the points with supporting materials which you have amassed through reading and your own experience. Attach them to appropriate points. Here are some types of supporting material.

(1.) Illuminating/persuading materials:

- analogy-illustrations (which explain abstract concepts through concrete comparisons),
- example-illustration (showing how principles are fleshed out in practice),
- statistics and other "objective" evidence, and
- testimony (from experts, peers, or others that the audience give weight to).

(2.) Application materials. (See below).

Now, if possible, put the sermon away for at least a week before you revise it for the final time. (See above for the rationale for this.)

Summary for preparing a message that expounds a text:

1. Read for the flow.
2. Study the parts.
3. Crystallize the shaft.
4. Write the sermon proposition.
5. Ask it a question or questions.
6. Arrange the answers into an outline.
7. Attach supporting material.
8. Live with the sermon.