

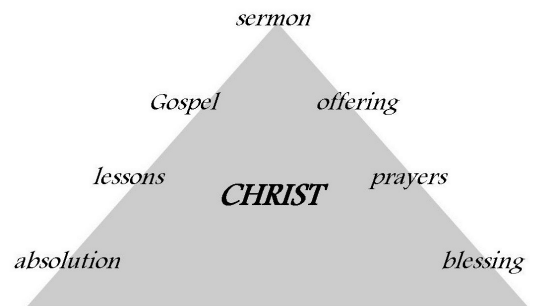


WORSHIP MATTERS

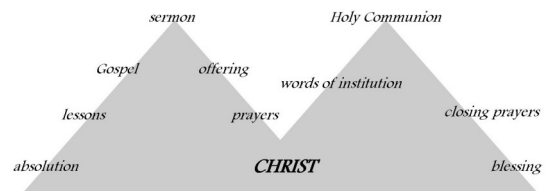
LESSON 5: THE APEX OF WORSHIP

Introduction

Worship builds. It starts as believers gather. Then they confess their sins and have them absolved. Then God speaks to them through the Word. We see Christ and his love in the Gospel. Throughout the service, God's grace is seen more and more clearly. Then comes the apex, the high point—the sermon. In the sermon, God's called servant speaks and teaches and applies the truths of God's Word, allowing the believer to understand and appreciate the Word to the highest possible degree. After that, the worship service winds down. Believers respond to the Gospel which has been proclaimed by giving joyful gifts. God has spoken to them through the lessons. They now speak to God in prayer. At the beginning of the service, believers heard the absolution pronounced. Now at the end, they hear of God's grace again, through the final benediction — God's blessing. Not only does God forgive our sins, but he treats us as if they never occurred!



In services where the Lord's Supper is celebrated, you can rightly say there are two high-points. Jesus, the word-incarnate, comes to us in the sermon. But then he comes to us again, giving us his body and blood, in Holy Communion. For the purpose of this lesson, we'll be focusing on just the first apex: the sermon.



- What is it, to you, that makes a sermon memorable?

- List all the things you believe are necessary for a sermon to be called “good.”

Worship Matters. And if the sermon is indeed the apex of worship, it *really* matters. The reality is that for many Christians the twenty-or-so minutes of a sermon is the greatest (and maybe the only) contact with the Word that they will have that entire week. Since that is the case, it is important that people get as much as possible out of the sermon.

In this lesson, we're going to look at how sermons are constructed and presented. Hopefully, it will make us sharper hearers of the Word.

Part 1: The seven steps of sermon production

The following is an outline of the time frame a pastor might use to work on his sermon, step-by-step.

Step 1 — Quarterly: See the _____ (8 hours per quarter)

It begins with worship planning, where the pastor sees how one Sunday relates to the next. Sometimes the texts for two or three weeks in a row are very similar. And so the pastor looks for the differences, carefully crafting unique themes for the day to avoid redundancy.

Step 2 — Sunday/Monday : Read through all the lessons and pick your _____. (2 hours)

The pastor looks at the lessons, the Gospel and the Psalm of the Day. He probably does this by skimming through the original languages and then looking at them in English too. He compares them, seeing how they relate to the theme of the day. He looks for common words (Greek and Hebrew) in the texts that might tie them together. He perhaps does some research on things such as the historical background of the text. Finally, he chooses the text he thinks will best help him share the theme of the day. (Some pastors choose simply to rotate through texts: Old Testament one week, Epistle the next week, etc.)

Step 3 — Monday/Tuesday : _____ and thorough text study. (4 to 6 hours)

The pastor carefully goes through the original language verse by verse and word by word. He takes notes of special words and grammatical usages. The original languages give the sermon its flavor. The goal of the preacher is to preach Law and Gospel in terms *unique to that text*. For key words, he may look at how Scripture uses the same word elsewhere. He may use Greek and Hebrew dictionaries to see how the word was used in secular writing at that time.

When the pastor is done with his translation, he begins to focus in on specific verses, determining how they proclaim Law (showing us our sin) and Gospel (showing us our Savior). He prioritizes them, determining which ones he is going to explain thoroughly and which will serve simply as supporting verses.

Step 4 — Wednesday : _____ the sermon (2 to 4 hours)

The pastor first must decide how he wants to present his text. (More on this later). Once he decides, he begins to sketch out a sermon theme and parts. This is the basic framework for the sermon.

After the initial outline, the pastor may expand it, adding in notes for possible introductions, transitions, illustrations, and the conclusion.

Step 5 — Thursday: Write the _____ (4 to 6 hours)

After a day of letting the outline “germinate” in his brain a bit, the pastor now sits down and begins to write. The goal is simply to add meat to the outline of the skeleton. Polished writing is not necessary yet. Nor is it necessary to whittle down thoughts. The pastor writes the sermon, putting in everything that comes to mind, everything he might like to say to God’s people about this text.

Step 6 — Friday : Write the _____ (2 to 4 hours)

Here is where the pastor goes through the rough draft and starts to whittle out things that are extraneous to making his point. He reads through his rough draft as though he were not theologically training, but hearing it all for the very first time. He makes certain it follows logically. He polishes language and grammar.

Step 7 — Saturday: _____ the sermon (2 to 4 hours)

Generally this is done by the pastor reading through his sermon out loud once or twice. Then he practices it. Some pastors memorize until they can recite their manuscript word-for-word. Other pastors simply want to get the main thoughts of the paragraphs memorized. Then each time they preach it, it will come out a bit differently, but the overall flow will be the same.

- Of those seven steps, which one or two do you think are the most important? Which do you think might be the least important?
- Consider the following passages.

1 Timothy 3:2

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...

2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:24

And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.

How, if at all, do those passages tie into our discussion of sermon preparation?

- Evaluate: The power to change hearts lies in the Word of God. Therefore, the pastor and his presentation are unimportant. The only thing that matters is that God's Word is preached truthfully.
- Someone says to you, "As we've grown pastor's sermons have seemed like they aren't nearly as good as they once were. That's a problem! If we want to keep the people we have and continue to grow, we need his sermons to be high quality." You actually agree that the pastor's sermon quality has slipped as you have grown. Do these seven steps to sermon preparation suggest any possible reasons for that?
- Step 7 was memorization. Which, in your opinion, comes across better: a sermon that you can tell is memorized almost word-for-word or a sermon where the thoughts are memorized, but then presented in a more informal manner? What might be some factors in determining whether a pastor uses one or the other style?

Part 2: The parts of a sermon

Automobiles can be quite different. A sporty coupe looks nothing like a 4X4 pickup, which looks nothing like a minivan. Those vehicles have different purposes. The 4X4 is designed to handle rugged terrain and haul goods. The minivan is meant to be a comfortable ride for a family. And yet, automobiles are all quite the same. Every vehicle, no matter how it looks or what its purpose is, will need an engine, a transmission, some wheels, etc.

So it is with sermons. Sermons can vary widely depending on the text. If every sermon was the same — "You sinned. God forgave you." — then preaching would quickly descend into cliché. Some sermons are more story based. Others are based on a letter. Some sermons focus on what God does for us. Others focus on what God does *in* us, enabling us to do things for God and others. And yet all sermons are made up of the same key parts. If any of these is missing, the sermon performs as well as an automobile without a transmission. Here are the key parts of a sermon.

1. _____

This is any portion of Scripture which places demands upon us. The Law shows us our sin, which is vital. Because without seeing our sin clearly, we will never see our need for a Savior. In this, God confronts and condemns us.

When preparing the sermon, the pastor identifies *specific* Law. It is not enough to say, week after week, "You are sinners." The pastor needs to show his people which *specific* laws they have broken. He convicts them of the sins addressed in that specific text.

2. _____

This is the portion of God's Word which lifts guilt and burdens off of us. It proclaims God's forgiveness to us. The heart and core of the Gospel comes from the life of Jesus Christ.

In the wide sense, we can call *any* loving promise that God gives to us "Gospel," not just to those which refer to the forgiveness of sins. Thus, much like with the Law, in his text study the pastor identifies *specific* Gospel. Not every text contains the good news that God forgives sins. But every text *does* contain good news! While the pastor will mention God's forgiveness every week, he *must* touch on the *specific* Gospel in that text, if he is going to faithfully expound the Word. If he fails, his preaching will quickly become monotonous, sounding identical week-after-week.



The Law and Gospel contain two seemingly antithetical messages. 1) God cannot stand sin and is filled with wrath when he sees it. 2) God is totally and perfectly loving, forgiving any and every sinner. Thus, each sermon will have to bring believers to the cross. For only there are those two messages reconciled. At the cross, we see both God's wrath against sin and love for sinners.

3. _____

This is closely related to the Law. This is the major thing which the sermon text warns against. It might be a problem or temptation which Christians will face. It might be a call to change our way of thinking about something. The malady is the problem which needs to be solved.

4. _____

This is the purpose of the text. Generally, after completing his text study, identifying specific Law and Gospel, seeing the malady, the pastor will write down his *propositional statement*. In 10 to 15 words he states what he is going to accomplish in the sermon. When that is done, it is time to begin outlining.

5. _____

If Law and Gospel has been proclaimed faithfully, the believer is filled with relief, joy, and awe at the greatness of God's love. His heart now aches to respond, to reciprocate God's love. And so the pastor gives application.

Man's conscience is not a good guide for how to show love to God. The conscience has been flawed since the fall into sin. Thus, we need the Word to show us the way. And just as there is specific Law and Gospel in each text, there is specific application. Some texts might call for a change in certain behavior. Some might encourage us to think differently about things. Some will simply call us to live our lives with a different attitude: more joy, more thanksgiving, more peace. Applications can thus be action, thought, or attitude based. Or they can be all of the above! It simply depends on the text.

- Let's practice this. Below you have a sermon text. Work through the following steps:
 - 1st. Read through each passage. Circle L if you think it is primarily Law and G if you think it is primarily Gospel. You can circle both or you can circle neither.
 - 2nd. Draw lines "weighting" the passages. The longer the line, the more time and emphasis it would get if you were writing the sermon.
 - 3rd. Determine the malady. What does this text warn against?
 - 4th. Determine the aim. In 10 to 15 words, what do you want to accomplish in this sermon?
 - 5th. List some applications that you could make from this text to help people live a life of love.

		Mark 5:35-41 Fifth Sunday After Pentecost (B)	<i>How important is the verse?</i>						
			<i>not very</i>				<i>vital</i>		
L	G	³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."							
L	G	³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.							
L	G	³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.							
L	G	^{38a} Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.							
L	G	^{38b} The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"							
L	G	³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.							
L	G	⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"							
L	G	⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"							

Malady:

Aim:

Applications:

- How can understanding that process help you be a better listener and get more out of the sermon?
- Some sermons are more *justification* oriented. That is, they focus on your salvation, won for you by Jesus Christ. They will contain much Law and Gospel, and not as much application. Some sermons are more *sanctification* oriented. They talk primarily about the good work Christ is trying to do in you and through you. They will contain a lot of application. But explain why *every* sermon will contain aspects of justification *and* sanctification. Why is it *impossible* to preach one without the other?
- There is a great emphasis in this day and age on sermons being *practical*. That is, the sermon changes your behavior for the better, enabling you to live a more productive, blessed life. Do you agree with that emphasis? What is good about it? What danger, if any, is there to it?

Part 3: The form of a sermon

The Word works *supernaturally*. It enables people to believe unbelievable things. However, the Word also works *psychologically*. It is perceived through the senses like anything else. Thus, the Word must be presented in a way that makes use of logic and reason.

The following are various types of reasoning. Which one(s) is used gives the sermon its shape.

- A) _____ reasoning — Moves from a general rule to the specifics.

This is true... in this way... and in this way.

This is the classic example for a sermon. During the course of the introduction, a theme is stated. Perhaps, subparts of the theme are stated too. Thus, throughout the sermon, the pastor explains some specific ways the general theme is true.

- B) _____ reasoning — Moves from the specifics to a derived general rule.

If this... and this... thus this.

The introduction for this sermon commonly contains a question. Perhaps the theme is even stated as a question. The pastor then leads the people through the text to help find answers to that question, which, when put together, lead to one main conclusion.

- C) _____ reasoning — Compares one thing to another.

Here is the prevailing view... but here is the promise of the Gospel.

This type of sermon is well used when the text calls us to change the way we think about something. The pastor needs to first of all show both the merits and the detriments of the prevailing view. Then he shows the superiority of the way the Gospel views whatever is being discussed.

- D) _____ reasoning — Removes all bad options first.

Not this... or this... or this... but this.

This type of reasoning is best used in a sermon where a universal malady is going to be discussed. The pastor wants to talk about all the ways people try and deal with that problem. For example, to cope with the concept of death, people joke about it. They try and prevent it. They paint it in a falsely optimistic light. But there is ultimately only one way we can cope with death.

E) _____ reasoning — Uses an example to make the point.

Let me tell you a true story... Here is what it means for us.

This sermon might not really have an introduction. The pastor simply launches into a retelling of the text, giving it texture and emotion. At the end of the story, he draws some conclusions. He then demonstrates how there is “nothing new under the sun,” explaining how that story plays out today again and again. This works well with sermon texts that are themselves epic stories.

F) _____ reasoning — Relates truths to novel situations.

Let me tell you a hypothetical story... Here is what it means for us.

Obviously, this is very similar to exemplar reasoning. The difference is that the comparison is only hypothetical. For example, in 1 Corinthians 9 Paul compares living a Christian life to training for a race or boxing match. Or take Jesus’ parables: “The kingdom of heaven *is like*...” Those would be good texts to use this type of reasoning.

- Agree or Disagree: A pastor should find out what type of reasoning works best for him and stick with it.
- What do you think determines which approach the pastor will take?
- Divide up into groups and look again at the text on page 5 of this lesson. As a group decide which approach you would take. Why did you choose the approach you did? Sketch out a brief outline of your sermon. What would your introduction be about?

Talk about it

- The Lutheran confessions say: "Nothing attaches people to the church as does good preaching" (*Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV, 51*). Do you agree or disagree? Give the reason for your answer.
- Based on our study would you define “good preaching” now the same way you did on page 1 of this lesson? If your definition has changed, explain how and why.
- “The impact of preaching does not rest on the shoulders of the preacher alone. There is also responsibility for the listeners.” Do you agree with that? What are some things listeners can do to get the most out of preaching?

Summary and final thoughts

The illustrations for the types of reasoning come from Thomas G. Long’s *The Witness of Preaching, Second Edition*.

Sermon Critique form

Regarding the sermon you just heard, indicate whether you agree or disagree with these statements. Circle 1 if you strongly agree, 2 if you agree, 3 if you're uncertain, 4 if you disagree, 5 if you strongly disagree.

1. My interest was maintained.	1 2 3 4 5
2. The sermon was integrated into the service of worship, fitting well with a theme of the day, the other lessons, the hymns, etc.	1 2 3 4 5
3. I was inspired. For the sermon touched not only my intellect, but also my emotions.	1 2 3 4 5
4. The scripture text was expounded. I now understand that portion of Scripture better.	1 2 3 4 5
5. The preacher used cliché, not only telling me things I already know, but saying those things in a way I've already heard them.	1 2 3 4 5
6. The sermon was too long.	1 2 3 4 5
7. I did not understand the sermon well. It seemed to "jump around" a bit rather than having a logical flow to it.	1 2 3 4 5
8. The sermon demonstrated the seriousness of sin, convicted me of it, and led me to repentance.	1 2 3 4 5
9. The preacher referred to notes too often.	1 2 3 4 5
10. The preacher sounded like he loved us.	1 2 3 4 5
11. The sermon spoke to some of my personal needs.	1 2 3 4 5
12. The sermon did not sufficiently emphasize the greatness of Christ. He was not central to the message of the sermon.	1 2 3 4 5
13. The sermon made me eager to serve God more than I'm already serving him.	1 2 3 4 5
14. The preacher spoke down to us, sounding as though he were morally superior.	1 2 3 4 5
15. The sermon had a forceful conclusion.	1 2 3 4 5
16. The sermon will have little to no effect on my day-to-day life this week.	1 2 3 4 5
17. The sermon comforted me.	1 2 3 4 5

18. What are the one or two key things, if any, that you learned from this sermon?

19. What are some things you liked or disliked about *the delivery* of the sermon?

20. Any final thoughts or suggestions?

Sex: male _____ female _____
Age: under 20 _____ 20-29 _____ 30-39 _____
40-49 _____ 50-59 _____ over 59 _____