

## Classification of Messages

We have talked about technical things for a while, and I want to back away and think philosophically with you for a little bit. Think about some things with me for a while. Let us talk about what our preaching involves and how it can help people. Certain images come to mind if you think of the biblical images for what a preacher is and what a preacher does. What is a preacher biblically? In the Bible, a preacher looks like a shepherd or a watchman. We see the image of the farmer who goes out to his field to sow. An orator or a herald gives the good news or the warning. An equipper has words that enable others to do the work of ministry. A preacher is also seen as a captain of an army, one in charge of others, a teacher, or a servant. They are ambassadors for Christ as though God were making His appeal through us. There are other quite different images: a carrier of a live coal, one who sets fires, one who eats a scroll. A preacher is given something to eat that is taken in and is bitter. In that case the prophet gave a message of judgment to God's people. You eat the scroll so that you will say what has to be said even though it is bitter to your own stomach. That is a very interesting picture. Another image is of a stick, like Moses had. Moses' stick carried forward the authority and power of God. The staff that Moses took represented the authority of God in his hand, and it would occasionally speak what Moses needed to say by what it represented. We could multiply these images several times. I want you to think about them because of the questions we are going to discuss in this lesson. We should begin to see how diversified the biblical perception of preaching is. We should also see how sermons vary so that we can be well equipped for every preaching task.

Let us talk about the appropriateness of language. I can remember when I was a student here and Dr. Laird Harris, who is now the emeritus professor of Old Testament, spoke in chapel. He told us that his wife was dying of cancer. He said in his sermon, "Whatever my God ordains is right." I will never forget the way he said it. It was so tender and powerful at the same time. It was appropriate for his situation and for the content of what he was saying. Some of you have heard of Donald Grey Barnhouse, who was a long-time pastor of Tenth Presbyterian in Philadelphia. I listened to a sermon that he once preached against liberalism. This was a particular line in there: "They obscure the vast truth of the Scripture with their scrawny minds and their silly, finite thought, unaware of their pride." That was not very tender! But he had a right to speak that way. I can remember a famous Scottish preacher named Martin Allen. I will always remember the end of his sermon where he simply said, "What I want you to know more than anything else: the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." There was an electricity in how he said it. It was not tender, it was not bombastic or bold, but it seemed so appropriate for what he was saying. I want you to think about that appropriate language as you look at the various words in Scripture that are used for preaching.

There are many words associated with preaching throughout the Scriptures. Some of these we have already looked at: *parash*, *sekel*, *biyn*. There are various verbs to talk about what we are doing when we preach. *Parash* means to distinguish or be specific. It possibly means "to translate" in the Nehemiah passage. *Sekel* is to give the sense or meaning. *Biyn* means "to cause to understand" or "to separate out for use." That is somewhat different from the nouns that are

used, which often reflect the manner in which the message is being presented. *Nabiy* conveys the idea of “one who pours forth or announces under divine impulse.” You get the idea of someone pouring out the sermon or pouring out the truth. *Chozeh* is “one who glows or grows warm.” You have heard it said, “The preacher really warmed to his message today.” *Ra’ah* is “one who sees, particularly with special insight.” *Qoheleth* is “a caller or one who calls out.” The verbs that occur (*qara’*, *basar*, and *nataph*) become various forms of expression. *Qara’* means “to call out.” *Basar* means “to announce glad tidings.” The equivalent New Testament word of this is *euaggelizo*. *Nataph* simply means “to drip.” That is an interesting concept of what preaching might be: to drip words on people.

The New Testament words are *kerusso*, which means “to sing out or herald the Good News.” *Euaggelizo* means “to announce joyful news.” Those first two are often used with reference to the unchurched people. You find words that are more technical for those who are churchd. We looked at these before: *diermeneuo* and *dianoigo*. These convey the idea of unfolding or opening up meaning. *Dialegomai* means “to reason, discuss, or converse.” Paul reasoned in the synagogue that Jesus was the Christ. This has various other forms of explanation that are attached to preaching, like *paratithemi*, *logos*, or *rhema*. Other proclaiming words are *diaggello* and *kataggello*. There is a whole new category of proclaiming with great boldness with these: *parrhesiazomai*, *elegcho* and *epitimaio*. These are strong words; they even take the notion of rebuking. The next two are very different: *parakaleo* and *paramuthia*. We often associate paraclete with *parakaleo* when we refer to the Holy Spirit. He is the comforter and encourager. *Paramuthia* similarly means “to give comfort, cheer, or consolation.” *Epitimaio* means “rebuke”; *paramuthia* means “to give encouragement.” These are somewhat different than *martureo*, which simply means “to give a witness.” *Homologeio* means “to say the same thing, to agree with.” It is to agree with what the Scriptures say or to carry that message along. This is somewhat similar to *homileo*, which gives us our word homiletics. Curiously, it means “to converse, to talk with.” *Laleo* means to speak. *Didasko* and *epiluisis* are teaching words. *Apologia* is a word that means “to defend the truth.” *Metadidomi* means “to share.” Sometimes the Scriptures talk about sharing, to give across, and to share what I have with you.

The reason I want you to think about those various words is because preaching sometimes gets presented as only one thing. Earlier in this course I asked you, “When you think of preaching, what voice do you hear in your ear?” You may have a reflection of a circumstance or person who encapsulates “preaching.” I want you to begin to think of the richness and variety of expression of preaching. The Lord is filling up our tool bags with the vast wealth of the way as well as the content of what Scripture addresses. He says it is all for us to use. Paul says at times to Timothy that he should “rebuke with great authority” those who oppose. Other times he will say to encourage those who are downtrodden. Which is the right thing to do? That is the wrong question. They are both right.

Let us think about the voice we use in preaching. Preaching does not always sound like Mr. Rogers, nor does it always sound like Jonathan Edwards. But how do you make choices, and how do you decide what voice to talk in? Your voice will be governed as you consider your listeners. You need to think about what their circumstances are and what they are dealing with.

Are they in rebellion right now or are they in grief? You also need to consider the message itself, particularly what the text is saying. The text itself may be very tender or very strong. You need to be faithful to the meaning of the text. Who you are and what you are like will also determine your voice. If you are going to say this in a way that conveys deep meaning for you, it will have to be reflective of your own personality. Consider how God made you. If a person like you were to express this deeply, what would it sound like? Finally, you need to consider the situation and circumstances around you. All of those things need to be taken into account as you preach.

In addition to our voice, we will make choices of the type of sermon that we use. In this course we are building expository messages as a foundation. But we have never said that is the only type of sermon. Let me give you a quick list of other types of sermons. The first other type are topical messages. The key feature of a topical message is that it gets only its topic from the text, not its developmental features. The subject is divided and treated according to its nature rather than the text's nature. For instance, "Today I want to talk about the history of our church as it deals with charismatic gifts." That material is not going to be in the text. There may be biblical information that deals with it, but the nature of the topic governs what I am saying in that case. "What does the world say is the cause of poverty? What does the Bible say is the cause of poverty?" Part of that will come from the text. Part of it may have to come from secular sources. The types of subjects that lend themselves to topical treatment are things like moral or societal ills. Chief doctrines or practices of the church are built on many texts. If I want to explain to you my church's view of infant baptism, I probably am not going to go to one text. I feel like I will have to support that through a number of texts. It will probably be a topical message built from different sources—more than one text. Topical messages are often an essay approach. The danger of a topical message is that it might become a lecture. The chief problem is that opinion may rule rather than the text.

Another form of messages is textual messages. The key feature of a textual message is that it gets its topic and its main points from the text. The subpoints are not from the text, though. Development will be from elsewhere. Textual messages have an advantage over topical messages in that they can be very topical but appear more anchored in Scripture. You can at least get the main ideas out of the text, if not the development. The types of subjects that lend themselves to this treatment are passages that relate subjects in distinct but undeveloped form. "All this is of the world: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. This is of the world and not of God." This talks about materialism, sensualism, and egotism. I may develop this in other places, though. I may go through the life of David and show where materialism led to sensualism, which led to egotism. That passage out of the New Testament does not really explain altogether what those terms mean in the passage. It assumes you know what the terms mean from other places. You have distinctions that are not developed. That might lead to a textual message. The danger of this type of message is that you might do a lot of ice-berg. You might begin importing ideas on the text that are not there. It is another form of opinion ruling.

In this course, we are going to do expository messages. They have the distinction of getting their topic, main points, and subpoints from the text. You can substantiate further a subpoint from other texts, but first you show the ideas from the main text. That locks us down and makes sure

that we say what this text says. That is the chief characteristic of this type of sermon. It keeps answering the question, "What does this text say?" The advantage of expository messages is that people can see where you get the information. That means you develop the biblical education of the people to whom you speak. They see it in the text. If you do consecutive preaching, you are forced to deal with subjects you might not naturally deal with yourself. Opinion no longer rules; the text rules. The text sets the agenda more than my opinion. If the text sets the agenda, not only do I have subjects that I might not think of, but I also have authority that I might not have personally. "This is what God says." I can say that authoritatively at times about very sensitive subjects because it is not my authority. It may not even be my agenda. If I just roll through the text, I may be able to talk about very sensitive subjects without pointing the finger at people.

So with expository preaching you have greater variety and greater authority. You develop an educated congregation. The Bible sets the agenda and gives you the authority that you need. The danger of expository preaching is that it is boring for many in this culture. Many people today do not connect with expository preaching, particularly its stereotype. We said exposition includes explanation, illustration, and application. Even for people in the church at times, expository sermons are caricatured as having no illustration or application. It is just information thrown at them. In this course, we want to keep the pieces together. We want to speak with the authority of God's Word. We want to speak about subjects more than just what is in our brains and what our interests are. We want to let God's Word set the agenda. Even as we let God's Word set the agenda, we want to make sure that I still exegese the people as well as the text. I need to speak to their necessities and their capacities. It is not just enough to speak to the necessities. How do I speak well enough so that they can hear and hear what they need to hear?

You have heard all of those aspects of what God allows you to do. You can be a herald, an encourager, or a rebuker. One of the old ideas is that a preacher was a physician of souls. The physician sometimes says, "You either take your blood pressure medicine or you will die and leave your children fatherless." He or she can be very bold. On the other hand, a physician of souls might say, "We cannot fix it here. The Lord can, but we cannot. Whatever happens, you are in His hands." When you are a physician of souls, you are one who gives the diagnosis of the people as well as the text. You speak God's truth for their care in the voice necessary for that time. God gives you that right and that authority.