

Expositional Preaching

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The Biblical Background for Expositional Preaching

The Biblical Primacy of Exposition

God's Word gives clear primacy to exposition.

- Many preachers and pastors today question whether the Bible really gives us any reason to think that expositional preaching is the best way to preach.
- But the prophetic nature of preaching and the performative nature of God's Word reveal exposition to be best suited to unleashing the power of the text.

Exposition is primary because preaching is prophetic.

- To say that preaching is prophetic is *not* to say that it is either predictive or ecstatic utterance - preachers are ambassadors, not prognosticators; and their source of revelation is God's mediated *written* word, not His immediate verbal word. It is rather to say that preaching is about receiving God's word and communicating it to God's people in a way that is faithful to God's intention.
- Preaching is prophetic because it conveys God's Word to God's people. Exposition best handles the prophetic nature of preaching because the expositional sermon is unique for taking the point of the passage as the point of the message. It is therefore the best way to remain faithful to the content and intent of God's Word in any given text.

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A Positive Example: [Nehemiah 8:7-8](#)

- *...the Levites explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book, from the Law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading ([Nehemiah 8:7-8](#)).*
- The **content** of their preaching is God's revelation, not their own ideas. So their preaching is prophetic - they receive God's word and give it to the people.
- The **method** of their preaching is to explain the meaning and significance of a portion of God's Word to God's people. This is the heart of expositional preaching.

- The **effect** of their preaching is that the people understand and obey. This is the goal of expositional preaching - that the people hear and heed the Word of God.

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A Negative Example: [Jeremiah 23:16, 18, 21-22](#)

- *Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord. But who has stood in the counsel of the Lord, that he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened? I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds" ([Jer. 23:16, 18, 21-22](#)).*
- The **content** of their preaching is from their own imagination. Speaking primarily from our own anecdotes and illustrations displeases God. Expositional preaching disciplines us to constrain our words to the parameters of God's Word.
- The **method** of their preaching involves a refusal to stand in God's council to hear and obey His word. An expositor's first task is to stand in God's counsel by bowing under God's Word.
- The **effect** of their preaching fails to turn God's people back to God's ways, but rather lead them into futility. An expositor's goal is to speak God's Word to God's people so that they will walk in God's ways.

The Biblical Primacy of Exposition

Exposition is primary because God's Word is performative.

- God's Word performs what it prescribes. It is its own power for accomplishing itself. If this is so, then exposition is primary because it best unleashes the performative intention of God's Word on the lives and hearts of God's people.
- When God speaks, His very word actually creates the reality that it commands. Six times in [Genesis 1](#) we read: *God said and it was so* ([1:6, 9, 11, 14, 24, 29-30](#)).
- *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my **word** that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will **accomplish** what I desire and **achieve** the purpose for which I sent it* ([Isa 55:10-12](#)).
- Look up the following verses. What is God's Word doing, or able to do? [John 17:17](#); [Acts 12:24](#); [19:20](#); [1Thess 2:13](#); [Heb 4:12](#); [James 1:18, 21](#); [1Peter 1:23-25](#).

The Word at Work

The Two Primary Functions the Word Performs in the Church

- The Word of God is God's chosen instrument for **giving life to His people**.
 - **Gen 1** - God creates the world and everything in it by His Word.
 - **Gen 12:1-4** - God initiates the covenant with Abraham by His Word.
 - **Ezek 37** - God gives life to His people's dead bones by His Word.
 - **John 1** - God's incarnate Word, Jesus, brings life.
 - **Rom 10:17** - "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word."
- The Word of God is God's chosen instrument for **giving holiness to His people**.
 - **2 Chron 34** - the rediscovery of God's word brings national recovery.
 - **John 17:17** - *Sanctify them by your truth; your word is truth.*
 - **Eph 5:25-26** - Christ cleanses the Church by the Word.

Implications of the Performative Power of God's Word for the preacher

- God's Word is the conduit of God's power that accomplishes God's purpose. The power is not in the preacher himself, his stories, his illustrations, or his technique. The power is in God's Word - the message preached.
- This means that if the Christian preacher is to preach with real Spiritual power, he must discern what God has said in His Word, and then be faithful to say it. In other words, the point of the text should be the point of the sermon.
- This also means that as preachers, we are striving not to say something new, but rather to re-speak God's speech. We are to discover and then make His point, not our own.
- So the Word of God accomplishes the purposes of God among the people of God. And if our preaching is to be used of God to effect sanctifying change in people's lives, the point of the text must be the point of our sermons.

See for Yourself

Read **Ezek 37:1-14**.

- How do the bones in Ezekiel's vision come to life (**vv7-8, 10**)?
- What do the bones represent (**v11**)?

- What is Ezekiel's divinely commissioned role in the revitalization of God's people (vv4, 9)?

Read Nehemiah 8.

- What did Ezra read, and to whom did he read it (vv2-3)?
- What was the preaching method of the Levites (v8)?
- How is this method similar to the definition of expositional preaching given above?
- What were the reactions of the people to this preaching (vv9, 12)?
- Why did they react this way (v12)?