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TRAINING PREACHERS IN SACRED RHETORIC COMMONLY
ASSOCIATED WITH AFRICAN-AMERICAN PREACHING
AT CORNERSTONE BAPTIST CHURCH IN
WILMINGTON, NORTH, CAROLINA

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To my wife, Lisa, and our four children Jacob, Josiah, Ellie June, and Judah.
You have patiently waited and consistently encouraged me through the entire process.
I could not have asked for a more supportive family, and I trust this labor is not in vain.
May none of us tire from growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His Word.

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PREFACE

This project began when a dear friend asked a compelling question about preaching. Weeks later a passing comment was made in a lecture at a pastor's conference by a former professor, Dr. William Varner, regarding the nature of preaching in the book of Hebrews. These two moments sparked a curiosity that resulted in this project, and I am forever grateful.

I am thankful for my family and their sacrifice through the years, as well as my church family encouraged me in preaching for more than seventeen years. Their love for the Word of God and preaching has made my job more fulfilling than they could ever know. I am thankful to the long list of living preachers who I have been blessed to sit under and learn from throughout the years. I am thankful for the dear friends that walked this path with me, both in the classroom and making it all happen. I recognize that I only have what I have been given and I have been given so much I don't deserve. May this work serve as a small measure of gratitude for all these blessings.

Thanks be to God.

Daniel Gillespie

Wilmington, North Carolina

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Preaching is vital to the health of the church. But just how important is it? God Himself commanded it, modeled it, and warned against not doing it well. He uses preaching to save, sanctify, and strengthen His children. For this reason, Cornerstone Baptist Church is committed to the training and deploying of preachers for the progress of the gospel and the good of the church.

Context

Cornerstone Baptist Church Wilmington was established in 1995, in Wilmington, North Carolina. Wilmington is a growing city on the southeastern coast of the state. It is the home of the University of North Carolina Wilmington, and is one of the fastest growing cities in North Carolina. Known for its historic downtown and beautiful beaches, Wilmington is flooded with new residents and tourists alike.

Cornerstone was started on the north side of town and attendance grew to nearly two hundred people per Sunday, before experiencing difficult times and a church split. In 2006, Cornerstone was down to thirty people and considered closing the doors for good, but God was gracious and allowed the church to continue. The church grew slowly for a few years and even experienced another division in 2010, that resulted in half the congregation leaving. Since 2010, slow growth has continued again and the people who remained were faithful to serve and to disciple. Currently, Cornerstone averages around two hundred people on a Sunday morning and has approximately one hundred members on the rolls. The church is filled with children and adults of all ages. The people at Cornerstone have always valued and expected biblical preaching. Their love for the Word preached is a key contributor to the current health of the body. The one

exhortation I was given when I first began pastoring this body was, “just preach the Bible.”

Cornerstone is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, and directly supports two of the convention’s seminaries. Within that larger body, Cornerstone also works with the Pillar Network to plant and revitalize churches with particular distinctives. Along with being kingdom minded and having elder polity, the network puts a heavy emphasis on expositional preaching. This core tenant of the network resonates with Cornerstones understanding of the New Testament and the importance and primacy of preaching.

Cornerstone has a large contingency of young men who are serious about the Scriptures and who have the desire to teach. Given this stewardship of teachers, the leadership of the church feels compelled to provide them with the training necessary to equip them to teach in the church’s context or elsewhere when God moves them. Even now, some have opportunities to fill the pulpit in other local Baptist churches from the Cornerstone’s connection with the local Baptist network as well as more organic partnerships. Cornerstone has core classes and one-on-one discipleship, as well as annual conferences that the young men participate in to deepen their understanding and prepare them for ministry.

The leadership of the church instructs in theology, exegesis, apologetics, counseling, and even church history, but one area that has been absent in most formal instruction is homiletics. This project served as a class for men to become better equipped in public preaching. Studying rhetoric complements the exegetical and theological training well and provides a behind the scenes look at sermon preparation and delivery. Many of these men would have immediate opportunity to employ what they learned, and interaction, discussion, and training will go long past the six weeks for the course. However, this intensive instruction proved invaluable to furthering the growth of these young teachers.

For most of these men, this project was their first formal instruction in homiletics and preaching, but most have sat under and listened to years of expositional preaching. A few of these men previously studied homiletics and the concept of sacred rhetoric, but none have studied from the perspective of African American preaching. This area of rhetoric should build a broader appreciation for preaching and enable students to add effective elements of this rhetoric to their expositions.

This project intended to equip men to serve not just at Cornerstone but in churches that may be planted or need help in revitalization, and to be able to teach and preach in churches in the future. The church at large needs faithful men capable of handling the Word of God, and this class is intended to help.

Rationale

For years I have been drawn to the topic of preaching. Before my time at Cornerstone, I directed a major international pastors' conference where thousands of men gathered to be encouraged and equipped in preaching and other pastoral ministries. I have spent time with and learned directly from some of the most respected preachers of our day. I also directed a finishing school for preachers called the Expositor's Institute, where I sat with a dozen men for a weeklong intensive as they learned from some of the best to ever stand in the pulpit.

These opportunities, along with my growing experience as a senior pastor who preaches multiple times a week, forced me to consider what is good and faithful preaching. Several streams of thought began to influence my thinking. I noticed that many men of similar background, and with similar theological training, tended toward overly academic and sometimes dry preaching. I also noticed as I preached through Hebrews, which is considered by most scholars to be a sermon rather than a letter, that it was anything but dry.

As I was considering sacred rhetoric and the deficiency in today's pulpit, a specific type of rhetoric seemed to stand out. African American preaching appeared to

uniquely exude elements of rhetoric absent in many churches. Ernst Wendland explains,

Rhythm, cadence and sound of words as well as the ability to paint a picture in the minds of the hearers are very important to an African American sermon. The black preachers careful search for the precise words and phrases are continuing evidence of the importance of rhetoric and the modest circumstances that originally gave in a place of primacy in the black sermon.¹

I observed, in the pastor's conference world, that it was the African American men who were expected to "really preach." I also noticed how I had higher expectations for the delivery of sermons from black preachers than I did from white preachers. The final piece that pushed me was the rhetoric I noticed as I preached through the book Hebrews. Hebrews has many qualities that resemble African American preaching. Speaking about Hebrews, Will Varner explains, "The closest example of this rhetorical device that I can think is the practice of many African American preachers and some southern evangelists."²

All these factors piqued my curiosity about black preaching. What is unique about the African American sermon and is it possible that its rhetoric could improve biblical exposition in general? I want to be the best preacher I can be and be faithful to the expectations God has for his messengers.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train preachers in sacred rhetoric commonly associated with African American preaching for the improvement of biblical exposition in the context of Wilmington, North Carolina.

Goals

The men at Cornerstone Baptist Church desire to honor God in their preaching, and in so doing are eager to learn what God expects from a faithful preacher. With so many

¹ Ernst R. Wendland, *Preaching That Grabs the Heart: A Rhetorical-Stylistic Study of the Chichewa Revival Sermons of Shadrack Wame* (Blantyre, Malawi: Christian Literature, 2000), 115.

² Will Varner, "Gospel according to Hebrews" (seminar session 4, Shepherds Conference, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA, March 8, 2010), <https://www.gracechurch.org/sermons/5236>.

different examples of preaching on any given Sunday and throughout history, it is important for the man of God to be able to parse what God-honoring preaching is. Through the three goals, this project aimed to support the purpose.

1. The first goal was to assess what the men know about sacred rhetoric in general and African American rhetoric in specific.
2. The second goal was to develop a curriculum in the use of sacred rhetoric.
3. The third goal was to increase understanding by teaching the curriculum.

A specific research methodology was created to measure the successful completion of the three goals. This methodology is described in the following section.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of the three goals. The first goal was to assess what the men know about sacred rhetoric in general and African American rhetoric in specific. This goal was measured by a pre- and post-course survey to gauge the students' level of understanding and individual perspectives on sacred rhetoric.³ The group was comprised of eight men who preach semi-regularly or hope to preach on a more regular basis.

The second goal was to develop a curriculum in the use of sacred rhetoric. The curriculum was based on the study of sacred rhetoric in the Scripture, in the men of Scripture, church history and modern-day Christian preaching. This goal was considered successfully met when the course was evaluated, approved, and subsequently implemented in the training at Cornerstone.

The third goal was to increase understanding by teaching the curriculum. Students learned to define sacred rhetoric, engage objections to sacred rhetoric, and study examples of sacred rhetoric in the Scriptures, church history, and modern Christian preaching. This goal was considered successfully met when the pre- and post-surveys

³ See appendix 2. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

were compared and the students' knowledge of and appreciation of sacred rhetoric dramatically increased. Each student's ability to define terms associated with rhetoric increased over 25 percent, and their ability to recognize and evaluate sacred rhetoric in different preaching cultures rose dramatically as well. Lastly, the increased ability to defend the importance of sacred rhetoric and to explain the strength of the rhetoric commonly found in African American preaching was evident in their final survey answers.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Rhetoric: Rhetoric is all about persuasion. Whether taking Plato's definition: "enchanting the soul," or Aristotle's "faculty of discovering in any particular case all the available means of persuasion," or Cicero's simple "speech designed to persuade," the common denominator among all expressions is the ability to move men and women...to persuade.⁴

Many have studied rhetoric using Aristotle's triangle of logos, ethos and pathos, where logos refers to appeals of reason, ethos appeals to the writer's character and pathos appeals to the emotion and passions of the audience. While this breakdown is effective in many contexts, and if time and space permitted could be employed in this discussion, this project will define rhetoric simply as the art of speaking or writing effectively and persuasively.

Sacred rhetoric. For the sake of this project, *sacred rhetoric* is used to describe rhetorical efforts and devices used in the context of preaching that are holy and honorable. This would not include rhetoric in and around the church that is abused, self-centered, or in any way contradictory to biblical preaching.⁵

⁴ Edward P.J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (New York, NY: Oxford, 1965), 542.

⁵ Robert L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric* (Lexington, KY: Alacrity, 2010), 7.

Expositional preaching. *Expositional preaching* is the proclamation of the Word of God that is faithful and true to the text from which its wisdom and power are gleaned. This definition does not limit the length of text or rule out topical preaching per se. It would not include any preaching that distorts or distracts from the text or that does not center its message on the truth of God's Word.

Two limitations applied to this project. First was the ability of the surveys to rightly assess what has been learned. To mitigate against this limitation, questions were posed in such a way as to isolate what was learned and what perspectives changed. Second is that the effectiveness of the class was limited by the amount of interest in preaching improvement. To mitigate this limitation, only men who had a desire to preach were invited to the class.

Two delimitations were placed on this project. First, only participants in the six-week class were assessed. Second, the project was confined to six weeks, including preparing and teaching the six-week course, as well as analyzing the concluding surveys.

Conclusion

Preaching is essential in the church. God designed it to be the primary means of communicating truth to His people. With this weighty task, the church has a lofty responsibility to train up and put forth the best preachers she can. Sacred rhetoric in particular has fallen on hard times in the church and is in need of a recovery. Training preachers in the area of sacred rhetoric at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Wilmington, North Carolina is the aim of this project. Chapter 2 will focus on the biblical and theological basis for sacred rhetoric including biblical rhetoric that is seen in typical African American preaching and Chapter 3 will focus on the typical devices employed by African American preachers.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL DEFENSE
OF SACRED RHETORIC AND THE
BENEFITS OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN RHETORIC

If rhetoric is the art of speaking or writing effectively, sacred rhetoric would imply a godly or God-centered usage of such speech or writing. Some argue that there is no such thing as sacred rhetoric and all such use of eloquence or art in communicating God's truth is spurious and sinful. If one wanted to examine that claim and determine the nature or existence of sacred rhetoric, then it would make sense to begin with the Scripture itself. If there is such a thing as sacred rhetoric, then it would make sense to find it in God's Word. God revealed Himself to the world in words. What kind of words? What kind of speech?

Before looking at individual examples of rhetoric found in the pages and people of Scripture, it should be noted that rhetorical and literary devices are ubiquitous in God's Word. Every book and every genre utilizes these tools of communication.¹

Robert Smith Jr. describes God's Word as anything but bland or ordinary:

The Bible is vivid and diverse in its doctrinal expression. Unfortunately, as preachers and teachers of doctrine, we often make the Scriptures a portrait of predictable sameness. The Bible is a tapestry composed of inextricable, intertwining, and intersecting strands of surprising, dramatic, and unpredictable events interwoven in the fabric of God's written revelation to humankind.²

This divine drama is unveiled not in bland and technical prose, but in story, saga, and song; truth but artful truth. One would be hard pressed to find a page of Scripture that

¹ Robert Smith Jr., *Doctrine That Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 57.

² Smith, *Doctrine That Dances*, 57.

does not employ rhetoric in its divine revelation. Scripture is teeming with imagery, metaphor, alliteration, parallelism and more. The Psalms and Proverbs would be unrecognizable and hardly memorable if stripped of their rhetorical ways. For example, consider Psalm 19 1, 7-10:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork... The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The rules of Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; Sweeter also than the honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Almost every proverb employs parallelism and other poetic devices to indelibly etch the truth on the mind and heart of the hearer. One should notice the parallelism and imagery in Proverbs 18:6-7: “A fool’s lips walk into a fight, and his mouth invites a beating. a fool’s mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul.” Though, it is not the poetic passages alone that services rhetoric in meaningful ways. The rhetorical questions found in Isaiah and Job are some of the most powerful and convicting words in the Old Testament. Isaiah writes,

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains and scales and the hills and the balance? Who has measured the spirit of the Lord, or what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult and who made him understand? Who taught him in the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? (Isa 40:12-14)

Similarly, Job reads,

Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and a thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, thus far shall you come and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed? Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to note its place, that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth and the wicked be shaken out of it? . . . Can you hunt the prey for the lion or satisfy the appetite of the Young Lions, when they Crouch in their dens or lie in wait in their thicket? (Job 38:8-13, 39-40)

It seems impossible, therefore, to rule out a righteous use of rhetoric. The revelation of God is indeed perfect, and if this perfect Word drips with rhetoric, then it necessitates that rhetoric is not only acceptable in some situations, but appropriate. The Word of God

cannot be improved upon, so God chose rhetoric to best reveal Himself.

The question before the preacher, however, is not does Scripture use rhetoric, but should the preacher of Scripture use rhetoric in his preaching? Does God's use of rhetoric in His Word sanction the preacher of the Word to do so as well? To answer this question, and to see what the Bible says about sacred rhetoric in the sacred desk, three passages will be discussed.

First, in Matthew 5, one finds the most famous sermon preached in history, by the only perfect preacher. Examining how Jesus preaches should be essential to establishing a biblical view on rhetoric in the pulpit. The second text will be the entire book of Hebrews. Individual examples of rhetoric throughout the letter will be examined as well as features of rhetoric woven into the entire message designed to bring cohesion and a dynamic build. Since Hebrews is most likely a transcription of a sermon rather than a letter, it serves as a great model for those called to preach God's Word. Lastly, Paul's words to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 must be considered as some point to this text as an objection to sacred rhetoric. In these chapters, Paul describes his own preaching and strongly condemns certain rhetoric the church may hear. Any study of this topic would be incomplete without engaging Paul's words in this text in full.

Matthew 5-7: Jesus Preaches the Sermon on the Mount

The use of rhetoric in the sacred scriptures is undeniable, but what about the men who preach? Does one find the same approach from those who proclaim God's Word as those who penned it? The men in Scripture who preach the Word do so with a resolved rhetoric. They are resolved to preach the Word, regardless of the preferences of the people, while rhetorically crafting their words to woo hearts and awaken minds.

There are many preachers in the Bible, from Moses and the prophets to Paul and the apostles and all in between, and any preacher would do well to learn what he can from these sermons, but there is but one perfect preacher. In light of His position as the only perfect preacher, it is puzzling how little has been written on the manner in which

Jesus preached. Mike Abendroth laments, “Jesus the preacher needs close examination and investigation so that Christian preachers see his greatness and yearn to preach like him. It seems obvious, yet modern Christian publishing effectively ignores the concept of preaching as Jesus preached.”³ Abendroth is not alone in his observation and regrets that the words of Jesus are rarely examined for rhetoric and style. While scholars are not found directly rejecting the idea of preaching like Jesus, the overwhelming void in preaching material studying His ways may reflect a concern with fallen men trying to preach like our Savior. The apostle Paul’s speeches in Acts, for example, are frequently studied in light of their rhetoric, but Jesus’s preaching garners far less attention. Edwin C. Dargan shares in this frustration: “In the vast literature in which every aspect of life and work of Jesus has been presented it is remarkable that, comparatively, so little appears on the subject of this volume . . . the preaching of Jesus, as preaching, finds illuminating and helpful discussion; but the study is incidental and limited not exclusive and elaborate.”⁴ Thomas Watson would argue that this is no small oversight as Jesus should be the first one looks to in preaching. The famous Puritan writer and preacher wrote, speaking of Jesus,

He alone was the Prince of Preachers. He alone is the best of expositors . . . the one in whom there is a combination of virtues; A constellation of beauties, the one in whose lips there was not only sweet as a honeycomb, but his very words did drop as honeycomb. His words were an oracle, his works were a miracle, His life was a pattern, His death was a sacrifice, and it was He, that blessed Man, who went up into the mountain and sat down and spake unto his disciples.⁵

The life of Christ is a worthy study for all who follow Him, but let no one miss the attention given to his words. Abendroth writes,

Look how the Gospel of Matthew stresses the primacy of Christ’s preaching. It is both interesting and unusual. Matthew employed a unique style of writing to show

³ Mike Abendroth, *Jesus Christ: The Prince of Preachers Learning from the Teaching Ministry of Jesus* (Leominster, UK: Day One, 2008), 15.

⁴ Edwin C. Dargan, *A History of Preaching*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 98.

⁵ Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes: An Exposition of Matthew 5:1-12* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014), 23.

Christ's teaching as climactic and central. He highlighted Jesus's preaching by concluding each of the five preaching/teaching sections with "when Jesus had finished these words" (or something very similar). Matthew's intention was to demonstrate that his narrative sections were often introductory to the main event, which was Jesus's teaching.⁶

Jesus is indeed the preacher of preachers and merits all teachers' undivided attention. While the words of Jesus are worthy of serious study when it comes to persuasive speech, it seems most appropriate to examine an actual sermon of Jesus. It is fitting to examine how Jesus spoke, but even more relevant to examine how he preached. No one knows how many messages Jesus preached, but it can be assumed far more than are recorded in Scripture. After all, the apostle John says, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). Among those "other things" no doubt were many sermons, but Scripture only records a few.

Jesus's most famous sermon recorded in Scripture is found in Matthew 5-7 and is regularly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. On a well-known hillside or "mountain" in the vicinity of Capernaum, Jesus spoke to his followers. William Hendrickson imagines the scene: "Perhaps we are permitted to picture the scene in this way, that the 12 formed a circle immediately around the savior; farther down stood a large company of other disciples; Beyond these the great multitude of other interested and inquisitive listeners."⁷ Like most preachers today, Jesus had a crowd gathered around to listen to what he had to say. The overall organization of the sermon reveals purposeful planning. Charles Quarles writes, "The Sermon on the Mount bears evidence of a carefully planned structure."⁸

The most noticeable rhetorical device Jesus employs in the Sermon on the

⁶ Abendroth, *Jesus Christ*, 25.

⁷ William Hendrickson, *Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 34.

⁸ Charles Quarles, *Matthew*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B & H, 2017), 49.

Mount is also the first. Jesus uses conduplication, or anaphora to be more precise—the repetition of the first word or group of words in a phrase.⁹ “Blessed”¹⁰ starts each of the first nine statements in the sermon, which alone provides a rhythm and cadence while also making clear the purpose of the section. He marries this method with another strategy known as mesodiplosis, which repeats a word or group of words in the middle of successive clauses or sentences. “For theirs” or “for they” is also in all nine initial statements. This rhythmic pattern may be missed due to familiarity with the text, but the power in its poetic frame is unmatched.

Repetition and conduplication provide the two tracks used to create the overarching device of parallelism that is so powerful in this sermon and what caused the initial section to garner its name, the Beatitudes. This is not the only place “beatitudes” are used in Scripture. R. T. France writes, “They are based on a common form of expression in the poetical books of the Old Testament (e.g. Ps. 1:1; 32:1-2; 40:4; 119:1-2; 128:1), but nowhere in the Old Testament or other Jewish literature is there so long and carefully constructed a series as here. (Eccl. 25:7-9 is the nearest parallel, but it does not match the formal structure of this passage).”¹¹ Surely most evangelical scholars would concede that the content of the beatitudes is incredible, earth shattering, and life shaping, but it is the rhetoric of those words that make it memorable. The truth itself is worthy to be treasured, but the rhetoric forms the chest by which the hearer could carry it home.

As mentioned, parallelism is ubiquitous in Scripture and Jesus is no stranger to this trusty tool. From “my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt 11:30) to “woe to you

⁹ Joe Carter and John Coleman, *How to Argue Like Jesus: Learning Persuasion from History's Greatest Communicator* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 33.

¹⁰ This is an unfortunate translation. Perhaps better to translate it as “happy,” “fortunate,” or “enviable.” R. T. France writes, “‘Happy’ is better than ‘blessed,’ but only if used not of a mental state but of a condition of life. ‘Fortunate’ or ‘well off’ is less ambiguous. It is not a psychological description, but a recommendation.” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 112.

¹¹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 112.

full now, for you shall be hungry and woe to you who laugh now for you shall mourn and weep” (Luke 6:25), Jesus does not hesitate to enlist the power of parallelism. Though, nowhere is it seen more clearly or relentlessly than in the Sermon on the Mount. Line after parallel line builds to present an overwhelming picture of the blessed life on one hand and the impossible life on the other, which Jesus masterfully led to the preposterous statement, “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:13-22). Jesus used rhetoric repeatedly in this message to drive home the truth of man’s inability and man’s desperate dependence upon God.

Not only did Jesus understand the power of a cadence, but he understood the force applied when that cadence shifts. Another rhetorical choice was used in verse 11 as Jesus made a subtle swing from the third person to the second person while maintaining the anaphorism “blessed.” David Daube explains, “In Hebrew poetry, the final line in a series often varies the repetition.”¹² This shift grabs the listeners ears and arrests their attention. It is true artistry to know precisely how long to allow the cadence to go and when to alter it for most effect. Not only does the shift from third to second person alter the sound and grab the ear, but now direct address forces the hearer to look Jesus in the eyes. Joe Carter and John Coleman state, “Even before his hearers realize what has happened, Jesus has drawn them in and made the sermon about them.”¹³

Direct address can be a powerful tool in the hands of a preacher to make preaching personal. It can be an overbearing tool as well. The preacher must be careful not to overuse direct address, and certainly not at the exclusion of first-person plural and even the third person.¹⁴ However, direct address brings an urgency and a personal connection in the sermon. Jesus is certainly not afraid of direct address; in fact, he uses it frequently

¹² David Daube, “Three Questions of Form in Matthew V,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1944): 23; David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: University of London, 1956), 196-201.

¹³ Carter and Coleman, *How to Argue Like Jesus*, 34.

¹⁴ Carter and Coleman, *How to Argue Like Jesus*, 35.

to both encourage his disciples and to warn those who stand opposed.

One could argue that preaching without any direct address is incomplete preaching, and that to faithfully fulfill the task, the preacher must turn to the audience both in direct address and in imperative mood to make the appeal personal. John Carrick observes,

It is, however, vital to understand that although Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative, it does not end with one period certainly, the indicative mood in Christianity enjoys a preponderance; Does not, however enjoy an exclusive. Christianity is not altogether in the indicative mood. Indeed, although there is a primacy and a priority about the indicative mood and preaching, there is actually an incompleteness and an insufficiency about the indicative mood considered in isolation. The indicative needs to be complemented and supplemented by the imperative; Proclamation needs to be complemented and supplemented by appeal.¹⁵

Jesus was a master at personal communication. With no fear of man, He spoke truth in love directly to the ones who needed it.

Epiplexis is another rhetorical device used in the Sermon on the Mount. Carrick notes the multiple times Jesus asked “questions in order to chide, to express grief, or to inveigh.”¹⁶ This is but one type of rhetorical question Jesus uses and which is found frequently in the pages of Scripture. Rhetorical questions in general have a particular force to them. Mark Forsyth notes, “There is something immensely powerful about forcing somebody to answer a question when you both know the answer already. Teachers do it. Policeman do it.”¹⁷ The preacher should not miss the value of well-placed questions. They not only can disarm defensive audiences at times, but they can also lead audiences to the answer, giving a sense of discovery and driving home the conclusion all the more.

Jesus also modeled the art of storytelling. Carter and Coleman observe, “Christ rarely delivered straight lectures. He used imagery; And at the heart of his stories were a

¹⁵ John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 83.

¹⁶ Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 40.

¹⁷ Mark Forsyth, *The Elements of Eloquence: Secrets of the Perfect Turn of Phrase* (New York: Berkley, 2013), 81.

few techniques, primarily metaphor and simile, that enlivened his language, excited his listeners, and allowed generations of audiences to more closely connect with his teachings.”¹⁸ When discussing the communication of Jesus, one can hardly begin without the topic of parables being introduced. Rightfully so, Jesus spoke often in parables, and depending on how narrow or wide the definition, scholars have argued that Jesus taught between 30 and 100 parables recorded in Scripture.¹⁹ One of the reasons it is difficult to determine the number is that Jesus also regularly employed metaphors and extended metaphors in his preaching, which is the case in the Sermon on the Mount. Whether false prophets as “wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matt 7:15) or rusty treasures (Matt 6:19-20), people as trees who “bear good fruit” (Matt 7:15), or faith as a foundation of rock or stone (Matt 7:24-27), Jesus knew how to speak in vivid and imaged language. While the parables of Jesus often grab significant attention, the pithy tales in the Sermon on the Mount pack quite the punch. When Jesus describes the birds in the air (Matt 6:26) and their lack of farming, and yet their lack of worry, he has placed an image that will be hard forgotten and will be refreshed every time the hearer sees a bird with a worm in his mouth.²⁰

As the sermon comes to an end, Jesus weds imagery with another common Jewish rhetorical device in presenting contrasting choices. Abendroth writes,

As Jesus concludes the sermon on the mount, he confronts his listeners with four warnings, each of which contains contrasts (two ways, 7:13-14; two trees, vv.15-20; two professions, vv.21-23; and two foundations, vv. 24-27). Such contrasts are common in Jewish literature and are indicative of Jesus’s preaching style that obliges the listener to choose one or the other.²¹

¹⁸ Carter and Coleman, *How to Argue Like Jesus*, 88.

¹⁹ Craig Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables: From Responsible Interpretation to Powerful Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 14.

²⁰ France, *Matthew*, 144.

²¹ Abendroth, *Jesus Christ*, 132.

Craig Blomberg confirms, “There are only two possible responses to Jesus’ preaching—obedience or rejection.”²² Jesus preached for a verdict and his rhetoric brought that moment to bear on the hearer. Abendroth adds, “Jesus preached for a decision, an ultimatum. His preaching left no room for bystanders to critique his style or method of preaching. His audiences were too busy trying to keep their heads above water as the high-powered words of the savior flooded them with confrontation.”²³ Preaching powerfully and memorably requires wording and planning that often shock and stick. They shock the hearer in their apathy and lethargy, but they also help stick to the hearer who is so prone to forget. J. S. Exell calls preachers to follow Jesus’s pattern of preaching:

Some hearers have bad memories like leaking vessels; all the precious wine of holy doctrine poured in, runs out presently. Ministers cannot find a truth so fast as others can lose it. I. How many truths have they been robbed of which might have been so many death-bed cordials! (2) If the Word preached slides so fast out of the memory, ministers had need go oftener up the preaching mount, that at least some truth may abide. II. The ears of many hearers are stopped with cares of the world, that the Word preached will not enter. (1) If a man be in a mill, though you speak never so loud to him, he doth not hear you for the noise of the mill. (2) We preach to men about matters of salvation, but the mill of worldly business makes such a noise that they cannot hear. (3) Therefore, ministers need often ascend the mount, and lift up their voices like a trumpet, that the deaf ear may hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches. III. Others have a stone in their hearts. Ministers must, if possible, pierce the heart of stone. When the earth is sun-scorched, it is so hard and crusted together that a shower of rain will not soften it; there must be shower after shower before it will be moist or fertile. So the hardened heart oft needs precept upon precept. Our doctrine must distil as dew, &c. (Deut. 32:2). They that are teachers shall shine—not as lamps or tapers, but as stars; not as planets, but fixed stars in the firmament of glory forever.²⁴

Jesus did not merely communicate truth, but he did so in such a way as to press that truth upon the hearts of the hearer and to demand a verdict. Jesus’s carefully crafted messages still echo in today’s literature and culture because they are memorable, and they are memorable in large part to the rhetoric in which they were deployed. Jesus is truly the prince of preachers. There is no preacher more worthy of study and emulation. Though, if

²² Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, Holman Concise Bible Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 1998), 409.

²³ Abendroth, *Jesus Christ*, 130.

²⁴ J. S. Exell, *Matthew*, The Biblical Illustrator (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952), 43.

preachers want to preach like Jesus, and they should, then they must be willing to learn the skill of speech, art of eloquence, and the power of a carefully worded phrase.

Hebrews: The Sermon

Just because Scripture as a whole uses rhetoric and the Son of God clearly models it, it cannot be assumed that fallen preachers should as well. One should look elsewhere to confirm the righteous use of rhetoric by sons of Adam. There are many records of preaching in the Bible, from Peter at Pentecost to Paul in Athens, but one lengthy sermon enables a more thorough analysis and larger sample size: the book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews is almost universally accepted as a first-century sermon rather than a letter. Andreas Köstenberger explains,

In addition, words of “speaking” and “hearing” replace the more customary terminology of “writing” and “reading,” again suggesting that the letter adapts a series of oral messages. The author’s closing remark, “I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation” (13:22), confirms this, since in the only other NT instance of “word of exhortation,” Acts 13:15, the phrase refers to Paul’s oral address in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch. The cumulative evidence, therefore, points to the fact that the letter originated in a series of oral messages—sermons—that were later compiled and sent in the form of a letter, complete with an elaborate literary preface or introduction (1:1-4) and an epistolary conclusion (chap. 13).²⁵

Peter O’Brien agrees that the text should be understood as a homily rather than a letter and explains how it actually helps draw the audience in closer than a letter might:

The oral character of Hebrews as a homily, which recent scholarship has rightly stressed, suggests that the author is skillfully conveying the impression that he is present with the assembly and actually delivering his sermon to them. He carefully avoids any reference to writing or reading at least until the postscript, which might emphasize the distance that separates him from the congregation. By stressing the actions of speaking and listening which are appropriate to persons in conversation, our author is able to establish a sense of presence with his audience. When it was first read to the congregation, Hebrews was meant to be heard as a discourse rather than seen as a text, experienced as a whole in its unfolding. But the author has written it down so that it is a text. Presumably Hebrews was read aloud again and again, and studied as a text in the community to which it was addressed.²⁶

²⁵ Andreas Köstenberger, *Handbook on Hebrews through Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 23.

²⁶ Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 21. In full transparency, after this project began, Peter O’Brien was found to be

If Hebrews is in fact a sermon more than a letter, then what better place to learn biblical preaching than a lengthy example from the lips of an early church preacher inspired by the Holy Spirit. The extent of lessons available from this sermon far exceed the scope of this chapter. Hebrews utilizes more than twenty direct quotes from the Old Testament while pointing to the New Covenant and establishing it as the better covenant.²⁷ It serves as an incredible theology of continuity and discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New, and is instrumental in establishing the New Covenant Christians' relationship to the law.²⁸ Hebrews also puts on display the most thorough theology of Christ's preeminence, and the fulfillment of God's promises serve as an encouragement to the Christian reader.

However, another feature of this sermon is worthy of attention: the preacher's rhetoric. The preacher of Hebrews valued sacred rhetoric and employed it extensively in the proclamation of his message. From hortatory subjunctives, to alliterations, to parallelism and repetition, the preacher aims to persuade the hearer to embrace the message of God. Some explain Hebrews as an exposition of Psalm 110 and Habakkuk 2:14.²⁹ If this is true, then it serves as a splendid example of an expository sermon adorned with a long list of rhetorical devices. Ben Witherington writes, "Hebrews is one long act of persuasion that involves comparison, enthymeme, repetition, amplification, catch words and a toggling between exposition of texts (that provides the inartificial proofs or witnesses to the truths that the audience is being reminded of) and application

guilty of plagiarism. See Wm. B. Eerdmans, "Eerdmans Statement on Three New Testament Commentaries," August 15, 2016, <https://www.eerdmans.com/Pages/Item/59043/Commentary-Statement.aspx>.

²⁷ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 37.

²⁸ Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2007), 22.

²⁹ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 21.

or parenthesis.”³⁰ This sermon is filled with beauty and powerful language, as

J. S. Exell expresses,

We are attracted and riveted by the majestic and sabbatic style of this Epistle. Nowhere in the New Testament writings do we meet language of such euphony and rhythm. A peculiar solemnity and anticipation of eternity breathe in these pages. The glow and flow of language, the stateliness and fulness of diction, are but an external manifestation of the marvelous depth and glory of spiritual truth, into which the apostolic author is eager to lead his brethren.³¹

The rhetoric begins in the very first verse. Five of the first twelve words of the first verse of Hebrews begins with the same letter. Marcus Dods describes the first verse: “In sonorous and dignified terms the writer abruptly makes his first great affirmation. . . . Alliteration is characteristic of the author.”³² If articles and prepositions are removed, five of the seven words in the first verse of Hebrews sound the same at the start. Köstenberger explains,

While the book of Hebrews ends like a letter—with exhortations to obey the leaders of the church and to pray for Paul, as well as a closing benediction and final greetings (13:7-25)—the book doesn’t start out like a letter. The epistles written by Paul, for example, typically follow the format, “Paul, an apostle, to [name of church or individual], grace and peace” (or a similar greeting; cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 1:1-3). By contrast, Hebrews begins more like an oral message, a sermon. In fact, while this is lost in English translation, the preface of Hebrews shows signs of careful rhetorical design, such as a pattern of alliteration in verse 1, which features as many as five words starting with the Greek letter pi (English “p”).³³

The rhetoric in this sermon is not merely decorative but enhances the crucial semantic content of the message. This rhetoric, Witherington argues, is essential to match the significance of the material: “It was a rhetorical must that weighty matters not be treated in an offhand manner more trifling things be invested with too much dignity.”³⁴

³⁰ Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*, 44.

³¹ J. S. Exell, *Hebrews*, *The Biblical Illustrator* (London: James Nisbet, 1956), xiii.

³² Marcus Dods, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol. 4 ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 247.

³³ Köstenberger, *Handbook on Hebrews through Revelation*, 89.

³⁴ Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*, 46.

While alliteration is prevalent throughout Hebrews (1:8; 1:14; 5:14; 7:3; 9:10; etc.), it is far from the only rhetorical device used. In chapter 2, the author also plays with the hearers' ear using paronomasia.³⁵ He uses the verbal cognate ἀκούω three times in the tight window of four verses. The word play becomes lost in translation, but perhaps could be understood if the three instances were translated, “the things heard,” “the things unheard” or a refusal to hear, and the “those having heard.”³⁶ This creates the powerful question: will his listeners hear?

Another word play is in the quotation of Psalm 22 found in Hebrews 2:12 where two words are juxtaposed to a third word. There appears to be no special emphasis, the author is merely making the line more pleasant to hear and thus more easily embraced and remembered. Another play on words is used in 3:12-13, where the preacher creates an almost chiasmic structure beginning with παρακαλεῖτε and ending with καλεῖται.³⁷ There is no doubt the preacher of Hebrews cares not only for what words mean, but how they sound.

One of the most intriguing devices in this particular sermon is the use of parallelism that creates a cadence in spoken word. Unlike the rigid word order rules in English needed to identify the usage of a word in a sentence, Greek and other inflected languages have the flexibility to move words for different reasons. Naturally, the subject garners attention in most phrases or sentences, and inflected languages that have the subject built into the verb allow for immediate emphasis if the subject is explicitly stated as well. A further means for changing the emphasis is to move the explicit subject from in front of the verb to somewhere else. While this may hold true in a sermon, the movement of words in a sentence also affords the preacher the ability to create rhythm, rhyme, and cadence. In the Hebrews sermon, nine of the ten times Jesus is named without

³⁵ *Paronomasia* is a play on words or a pun.

³⁶ Dods, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 250.

³⁷ Dods, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 251.

any additional reference (no Lord Jesus or Jesus Christ), it is placed at the end of the sentence or clause. “Jesus,” even when used as the subject or the direct object of the clause, is held to the final word. Will Varner observes,

Now there’s a second way in which the preacher effectively presses his argument. . . . he mentions Jesus by his personal name ten times but the way in which he does it is obscured by most of the English translation because the English penchant is to put the direct object right after the verb, but the writer of Hebrews he can do that in Greek but when you don’t do it and you shift it to the end of the sentence or the clause, there may be something going on here. He piles up the titles and activities of Jesus first and then concludes by mentioning his name. This rhetorical device which is called in Latin climactico or climax, builds anticipation on the part of the reader until the climax arrives. And an effective preacher will know how to do this: build and build and build to a climax. . . . It is a very powerful rhetorical device.³⁸

While translators vary in their decisions on the English word order, it should not be missed that the original order is not accidental or inconsequential. The preacher intentionally organizes his speech in a way that Jesus is indelibly etched in the hearers ears. Men and women in the church will often joke that the Sunday school answer is “Jesus” no matter what the question, but the preacher of Hebrews is essentially doing the same. He could have communicated this truth with simple, expected language, but it would lack the power and memory of this rhetorical device.

This rhetorical structure not only draws attention to Jesus, who is in fact the central figure in the sermon and the central theological theme, but it also creates a cadence and a building of anticipation within the audience. Varner continues,

Most of the time the English translations put the direct object Jesus earlier in the sentence but in the nine of the ten times in the Greek he’s at the end. . . . The sentence build stop climax and then that climax is announced Jesus and nine of the ten occurrences he mentions Jesus by that name alone including our two exemplar texts listen to them this way: “fix your thoughts on the apostle and high priest of our confession . . . Jesus. Fix our eyes on the author and finisher of the faith . . . Jesus.” The parallel structure of these commands becomes even more evident by delaying the name of Jesus until the end thus building anticipation until the rhetorical climax arrives: Jesus. That is very powerful when you hear it.³⁹

³⁸ Will Varner, “Gospel according to Hebrews” (seminar session 4, Shepherds Conference, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA, March 8, 2010), <https://www.gracechurch.org/sermons/5236>.

³⁹ Varner, “Gospel according to Hebrews.”

Notice in the following layout the location of Jesus and the Greek Ἰησοῦς.

4. Hebrews 3:1

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider **Jesus**, the apostle and high priest of our confession,

Ὅθεν, ἀδελφοὶ ἅγιοι, κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι, κατανοήσατε τὸν ἀπόστολον καὶ ἀρχιερέα τῆς ὁμολογίας ἡμῶν **Ἰησοῦν**,

5. Hebrews 4:14

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, **Jesus**

Ἔχοντες οὖν ἀρχιερέα μέγαν διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς,

6. Hebrews 6:20

where **Jesus** has gone as a forerunner on our behalf

ὅπου πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσῆλθεν **Ἰησοῦς**

7. Hebrews 7:22

This makes **Jesus** the guarantor of a better covenant.

κατὰ τοσοῦτο κρεῖττονος διαθήκης γέγονεν ἕγγυος **Ἰησοῦς**.

8. Hebrews 10:19

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of **Jesus**,

Ἔχοντες οὖν, ἀδελφοί, παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ αἵματι **Ἰησοῦ**,

9. Hebrews 12:2

looking to **Jesus**, the founder and perfecter of our faith,

ἀφορῶντες εἰς τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν **Ἰησοῦν**,

10. Hebrews 12:24

and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

καὶ διαθήκης νέας μεσίτη Ἰησοῦ, καὶ αἵματι ῥαντισμοῦ κρεῖττον λαλοῦντι παρὰ τὸν Ἄβελ.

This rhetoric not only creates a memorable text but grows when preached. This type of cadence, repetition, and build reminds the hearer of a particular style of rhetoric. The sound of African American preaching. Varner notices this connection as well: “The closest example of this rhetorical device that I can think is the practice of many African

American preachers and some southern evangelists.”⁴⁰ Varner then goes on to highlight this tactic in one of the most well-known African American sermons by S. M. Lockridge. He shows how Lockridge, like the preacher in Hebrews, creates a cadence and an anticipation that almost has the congregation finishing the sentence for him.⁴¹

The preacher of Hebrews went to great lengths to create a message that would not only present the truth but persuade the hearer. In a time where the church was facing persecution and preaching was a serious matter, this preacher gave a message that some have called the “most sonorous piece of Greek in the whole New Testament.”⁴²

Making the text melodic did not minimize the truth but it put it on grand display and helped etch it into the heart of the hearer. All preachers should consider the example of this text and the persuasive power of sacred rhetoric.

First Corinthians 1 and 2: Paul Did Not Use “Persuasive Words”

While Scripture is filled with rhetoric, from the Psalms to the Sermon on the Mount, and preachers in Scripture used rhetoric regularly, one passage of Scripture has given preachers pause when it comes to employing eloquence in the sacred desk. That text is found in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, where he uses phrases to describe his own preaching: “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (1:17). See also 1 Corinthians 2:4, which reads,

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of

⁴⁰ Varner, “Gospel according to Hebrews.”

⁴¹ Varner, “Gospel according to Hebrews.”

⁴² William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, *The New Daily Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 4.

power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (NASB)

It certainly can appear at first read that the apostle Paul is anti-rhetoric. He appears to advocate for a plain and dispassionate discourse, but do Paul's words to Corinth call for a rejection of all rhetoric? Does he mean for the preacher to put aside all art and affectation? Is the faithful man of God to abstain from persuasion and simply present the text? Carrick notices the apparent contradiction:

It may be objected that the same apostle who speaks of persuading men also appears to distance himself with the whole concept of rhetoric. . . . In other words, the apostle himself appears to posit an antithesis between rhetoric and the spirit of God. This objection carries with it sufficient *prima fascia* plausibility and has gathered sufficient momentum.⁴³

However, a careful examination, along with a more accurate understanding of the cultural context in which Paul wrote, drives the reader to at least consider a different conclusion.

As one studies this passage, the first observation is the uniqueness of the words. Paul writes these words to the Corinthians and not to other churches in other towns. These words of warning or contrasting approaches are conspicuously absent in his other letters. This does not necessarily prove that he spoke differently in other towns or that lessons learned in Corinth are not designed to be learned by all, but it should at least be noted that Paul does not echo these concerns to Ephesus, Galatia, Colossae, or Philippi. Simon Kistemaker writes,

Paul openly declares that he did not come to Corinth with a message delivered in sublime eloquence and wisdom. His debates with erudite Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens had been to no avail, and in Corinth he had preached the gospel neither as an orator nor a philosopher. Instead, Paul had brought the message of salvation in simple terms that everyone in his audience could understand. This approach was unusual in Hellenistic setting, where skillful orators were admired.⁴⁴

While one might argue that Paul's plan in Corinth is not prescriptive for all preaching, especially if he did not always follow the same pattern, it is fitting and necessary to engage

⁴³ Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 3.

⁴⁴ Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 72.

with Paul’s words regarding rhetoric in this text. What exactly was Paul avoiding in Corinth and why?

Carrick argues that Paul was describing “the spurious and unworthy art which is here rejected, was that of the Greek Sophists—a system of mere tricks of logic and diction, prompted by vanity and falsehood, and misguided by a depraved taste. It was the pretentious rhetoric so scathed by the sarcasm and reasoning of Socrates in the *Gorgias*.”⁴⁵

D. A Carson agrees,

It has been persuasively argued that Paul is alluding to the sophists of his day. Many intellectual movements greatly prized rhetoric. Philosophers were as widely praised for their oratory as for their content. But the sophists brought these ideals to new heights. Following fairly rigid, and somewhat artificial conventions, these public speakers were praised and followed (and gained paying students!) in proportion to their ability to declaim in public assembly, to choose a theme and expiate on it with telling power, and to speak convincingly and movingly in legal, religious, business, and political context. They enjoyed such widespread influence in the Mediterranean world, not least in Corinth, that public speakers who either could not meet their standards, or who for any reason chose not to, were viewed as seriously inferior.⁴⁶

Paul wrote in a specific context. Just as Paul acknowledged different strengths and different weaknesses in the letters he wrote to different cities, so too does he acknowledge different threats. In Corinth, the church faced an onslaught of orators that found their speech as their end and their glory as their goal. Paul is not decrying all eloquence, but the empty eloquence that flooded the streets of first century Corinth.

Kistemaker adds,

The nouns eloquence and wisdom described the verbal skills and the mental acumen of the speaker. The two expressions refer to the words that come from the speaker’s lips and the thoughts that formulate words into sentences period of course, Paul often demonstrates in his epistle that he possesses both eloquence and wisdom. In this context, Paul refers not to a deficiency in his own abilities but to the excesses of Greek orders and philosophers. He refuses to adopt their practices instead he plainly preaches the message of Christ’s cross.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 4.

⁴⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 34.

⁴⁷ Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 73.

Carson describes part of the difficulty understanding Paul's context: "It is difficult for us at the end of the 20th century to appreciate how influential this allegiance to rhetoric was."⁴⁸ Since the wave of technology has brought video and imagery to the palm of our hands, oratorical skill has become less prized and less pursued. In a world without YouTube or Instagram, it was words that went viral, and the master of those words could wield powerful influence and gain a massive following.⁴⁹

More could be said about the cultural context and the appeal of the sophists, but the student of Scripture must still engage with Paul's words. Paul may write in context, but even in a given context, Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was bound to write what is true. Therefore, one must ask exactly what is Paul advocating or calling preachers to avoid in this particular passage?

When Paul uses the adjective "persuasive" in verse 4, he uses a word not found elsewhere in all of Greek literature. Whether Paul coined the word or borrowed a usage is unknown, and it adds difficulty to the interpretation of this text. Most English translations choose the word "persuasive," but the KJV uses "enticing," the ESV uses "plausible." Even more perplexing is the positive use of this word "persuasive" in other parts of the New Testament. Luke describes Paul's ministry using the same word *πειθω* : "He reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4). Even more enigmatic is Paul's own usage of the same Greek word in his second letter to Corinth: "Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others." (2 Cor 5:11).

Lest one simply concede that Paul is mercurial or inconsistent, the reader should dig more deeply into exactly what the apostle Paul is endeavoring to say. The law of non-contradiction states that propositions cannot be both true and not true in the same sense at the same time.⁵⁰ If Paul is seen as persuasive and self identifies as a persuader,

⁴⁸ Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 34.

⁴⁹ Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 35.

⁵⁰ Canon Logic, *Intermediate Logic: Teachers Edition*, 3rd ed. (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2014), 18.

then clearly what he means by persuasive words in 2:4 must be in a different sense or a different time.

One could argue that Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 2:4 are then limited to the specific time of his writing and not intended for the overarching philosophy of ministry, but it would not be convincing. First Corinthians 1 and 2, while written in a given context, certainly appear as general statements on preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, if Paul is not advocating persuasion in a "different time" then it must be in a "different sense." The apostle Paul must be using the word persuasive in a different sense in 1 Corinthians than he does in 2 Corinthians and different than Luke's usage in Acts. In what sense is Paul persuasive and in what sense is he not?

One way to examine the speech that Paul condemns is by looking at what he commends. Paul's lack of persuasive words did not mean he did not speak at all or that his words were purposefully bland or powerless. Instead, Paul tells the characteristics of his message, and it is interesting that the opposite of persuasive is not presented. Paul does not replace persuasive speech with dull or monotonous words. Instead, he describes his preaching as cross-centered and Christ laden. Paul speaks more about the content and goal of His preaching than style in which he preached it. Gary Millar and Phil Campbell explain,

Paul urges us to make it impossible for people to dismiss us as hucksters by concentrating on the open statement of the truth. He says, no tricks! But the opposite of practicing cunning or tampering with the truth is not being faithful but dull. Rather, it is being so truth driven that we wouldn't dream of twisting the message to suit our own ends or trying to manipulate either the message or the people to promote our own agenda. But that doesn't exclude trying to present the truth in a way that maximizes its impact. Paul's exhortation to state the truth openly and plainly, properly understood, should drive us to explain the text in a way that connects with the people at a deep level—or to put it slightly differently, to preach in a way that changes people's hearts.⁵¹

⁵¹ Gary Millar and Phil Campbell. *Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God's Word and Keep People Awake* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias, 2013), 28.

The watershed is not words but worship. Who is in the spotlight when faithful preaching occurs? The apostle Paul echoes the words of John the Baptist: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). John Piper summarizes the distinction when he writes,

So let your use of words be governed by this double criteria: self-humiliation and Christ-exaltation. If we put these two criteria in front of all our efforts to make an impact through word selection and word arrangement and word delivery that is, if we put them in front of our attempts at eloquence we will be guarded from the misuse of eloquence that Paul rejected.⁵²

Robert L. Dabney agrees that the heart of the matter is not the language used, but the aim of the language when he describes godly eloquence and says it must have its “purpose of propagating in the soul of volition morally excellent.”⁵³ He goes on to add, “Artifices of persuasion, skillfully used to cause one to will amiss, have no more claim to be true eloquence, because they are similar to the means of the proper art, than evil volitions have to be considered virtuous energy, because they are also exercises of man’s spontaneity.”⁵⁴

George Whitfield was known for his expressive preaching and engaging rhetoric, drawing tens of thousands if not more to open fields in the Eighteenth century. Arnold Dallimore writes, “Yet it would be very misleading to assume that there was anything of a mere performance in Whitfield’s preaching. On the contrary, it was the utter lack of anything artificial, and its burning sincerity which were its most noticeable qualities. His delivery was simply the outflow of that spiritual passion which inflamed his whole life.”⁵⁵

⁵² John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 148.

⁵³ Robert L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric: A Course of Lectures on Preaching* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979), 10

⁵⁴ Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 11.

⁵⁵ Arnold Dallimore. *George Whitfield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 1:116.

Eloquence with evil, or self-centered interest, should not be considered eloquence at all. Carson explains, “These verses do not prohibit diligent preparation, passion, clear articulation, and persuasive presentation. Rather, they warn against any method that leads people to say, ‘What a marvelous preacher!’ Rather than, ‘What a marvelous Savior!’”⁵⁶

This misplaced attention is precisely what Paul warns will happen if men marvel at words more than the message: “Not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross Christ be emptied of its power”(1 Cor 1:17). Anthony Thiselton explains what it mean for the cross to be emptied of its power:

If everything rests on human cleverness, sophistication, or achievement, the cross of Christ no longer functions as that which subverts and cuts across all human distinctions of race, class, gender, and status to make room for divine grace alone and sheer unconditional gift. The connection between rhetoric and social class gives this the sharpest possible point. Neither Paul nor apollo is a status indicator of eloquence. The Corinthians, or many of them, were hungry for status. But to treat the gospel of the cross of Christ as a vehicle for promoting self esteem, self fulfillment, and self assertion turns it upside down and empties it up all that it offers and demands.⁵⁷

Paul is passionate about the cross of Christ receiving all the attention. Any rhetoric or reason that draws the spotlight empties the cross and elevates the man. Paul wanted to remind Corinth that his words were different. Not that they were dull, but they were aimed at another, namely Jesus. Carrick adds,

While the apostle disclaimed this, surely he did not preach without any method! He adopted an appropriate one of his own. If you say that it was honest, as opposed to deceitfulness of the Greeks; That it was simple, as opposed to the ambitious complexity of the Greeks; that it was modest, as opposed to the ostentation; that it was disinterested, as contrasted with their overweening selfishness, I ascent, and I add that these are the things which made Saint Paul’s a true rhetoric. Let us then adopt the ascertaining of his method as the object of our search. Let us make our sacred rhetoric just his, so far as it was primarily taught him by the Holy Spirit, and taught him next by his high culture and pure devotion.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 35.

⁵⁷ Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 222.

⁵⁸ Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 4.

Clearly, Paul went to great lengths to remind the Corinthian church that his own words were not empty or merely eloquent, but they were the foolish, yet life giving words of a crucified Messiah. This focus separated him from the well-spoken charlatans who garnered glory for themselves. Paul was adamant that preachers do not receive glory, but God alone deserves our attention and adoration. Therefore, even though Paul is not dismissing or discouraging sacred rhetoric, the preacher would do well to regularly take these words to heart and use them to guard against any pride that begins to build or any foolish notion that ultimate power of preaching is found in the preacher himself. Os Guinness states it well: “But even when our efforts are serviceable, our role is always humble and all too often inadequate and somewhat ridiculous. Christian advocates who understand their calling should never be too big for their boots. The task is not about us. It’s all about him, and he may be trusted to do what matters.”⁵⁹

The job of the preacher is to impress the hearer, not with himself, but with the Creator, Sustainer and Savior of the World. The key to impressive preaching is not the one speaking, but the one spoken about. This is Paul’s caution to the Corinthian church—that they would not be drawn to empty eloquence but would cling to the cross of Christ in preaching and ministry.

Conclusion

After analyzing two seminal sermons in the New Testament and engaging the text most commonly presented as an objection, it is concluded that Scripture both supports and models sacred rhetoric. While condemning shallow and self-centered preaching, Scripture expects the preacher to labor well in presenting and persuading the message so that men may be moved to respond. The preacher, like all Christians, lives in tension. He is to labor long and worship well. He plants, digs, waters, and toils, and it is

⁵⁹ Os Guinness *Fools Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 60.

God who gives the increase. The preacher is to be a master of words so he can employ those words to exalt his Master.

Scripture consistently models this mysterious mixture of God's work and man's. From the beauty of the Psalms, to the imagery of Jesus, to the cadence of the preacher of Hebrews, rhetoric is not at all at odds with the divine and sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. God uses the meager means of man, masters of rhetoric and all, to accomplish His supernatural works.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL
DEFENSE OF SACRED RHETORIC AND
THE BENEFITS OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN RHETORIC

Few aspects of Christian ministry have caused more confusion, seen more neglect, or fostered more abuse than the concept of rhetoric in preaching. Yet, perhaps nothing is more critical to a healthy ministry than a biblically balanced pulpit. The proclamation of the Word of God is foundational to the church, the individuals in the body, and the evangelization of the world. Therefore, a right understanding of preaching is essential for the health and growth of the church. Both the message and method of preaching must be faithful. To better understand this responsibility, this chapter will examine the obligatory role of the preacher as a herald, the need for a sacred rhetoric in addition to faithful transmission and explore a preaching culture that offers a compelling example.

The Preacher a Herald, Nothing Less

A faithful preacher of the Word of God must begin with what the Word of God calls a preacher to do. Nothing could be clearer when it comes to the fundamental force of preaching: “Preach the Word” (2 Tim 4:2). The first and foremost responsibility of a preacher is that of a herald. Robert L. Dabney writes,

The preacher is a Herald. His work is heralding the King’s message. Once, the apostles call themselves Christ’s ambassadors; but of old, ambassadors were no other than heralds. Now the herald does not invent his message; he merely transmits and explains it. It is not his to criticize its wisdom or fitness; this belongs to his sovereign alone. . . . These are the words of God’s commission to an ancient

preacher: “Arise; go on to Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.”¹

God has revealed Himself in the Scriptures and has given the preacher the message he wants him to proclaim. H. B. Charles states,

The term Paul used in 2 Timothy 4:2 where he charges Timothy to “preach the word,” was originally a political term, not a religious. He referred to the function of a herald if the king had a message to get out, he couldn’t just call a press conference and have all the news media published or broadcast his remarks. He would dispatch his herald to deliver his message to his people. When the herald arrived at a city he would cry out against his message in a grave formal and authoritative voice. When he spoke, the people did well to listen and to take heed period to ignore the herald’s message was to reject the King’s authority. And the herald would be careful to proclaim the King’s message with clarity and accuracy. And this represent the King’s message was just as dangerous as rejecting it.²

There should no ambiguity when it comes to the preacher’s message. But that message may not always be welcome. Scripture is faithful to warn the preacher that the message of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, is foolishness to those who hear apart from the working of the Spirit in the hearer’s heart. This means that on a natural level, the preacher is called to herald a message that cannot and will not be heard, no matter the manner, style, or skill. At one level, the preacher is powerless. Nevertheless, he is called to preach “in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2).

As the apostle Paul predicted, the responsibility to preach the Word has come under assault throughout church history and is under attack today. Instead of proclaiming the King’s message, men often resort to “tickling the ears” of those in the pews (2 Tim 4:3-4). In many times and in many places, faithful, biblical preaching has been few and far between. Often under the guise or gullible intent of evangelism, preachers have scratched itching ears with teaching that is not from Scripture. The herald has gone rogue, and the king is unhappy.

¹ Robert L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric: A Course of Lectures on Preaching* (Lexington, KY: Alacrity, 2010), 11-12.

² H. B. Charles Jr., *On Preaching: Personal and Pastoral Insights for the Preparation and Practice of Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 15.

But God, being rich in mercy, always builds and protects his church and has maintained a stream of faithful doctrinal preaching throughout the ages. In recent years there has been a renewed excitement in the area of expositional preaching, which has brought with it a growing appreciation for theology in the church.³ More and more men are taking the pulpit seriously and finding their responsibility biblically. Exegesis and theology are being prized and taking their rightful place in seminaries and behind the sacred desk.

Amid this glorious and providential appreciation of preaching, however, the church must be careful to remind the preacher that, though he can never be less than a herald—never short-change or subtract from the message—he is also more than a herald. Not more in the sense that he has liberty to add to or take away from the message, as he is still duty bound to the given Word, but a preacher is not *just* a herald.

The Preacher, a Herald but More

Where a herald is often not vested in the people to whom he is speaking, a shepherd always is. Whether speaking to a group largely within the fold or proclaiming the good news in hopes of lost sheep hearing his master's voice in the message, the shepherd is intimately invested in the response of the hearer. A herald does not automatically share the heart of the apostle Paul when he says, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom 9:3), but a shepherd does (1 Pet 5:1-11). Jonah was ultimately faithful to the task, but not to the heart behind it (Jonah 4:1-2). He did not care for those in Nineveh, in fact he resented them. Jonah proclaimed the king's message but hated the king's men. The duty of a preacher is not merely to avoid the bitterness of Jonah, but to embrace the urgency, and appeal of Paul.

³ The heavy interest in biblical preaching can be seen in the large attendance and content of a few major pastors' conferences around the country. Shepherds' Conference, Together for the Gospel, and Ligonier Ministries have all experienced overflow capacity. The topics and breakouts often promote biblical preaching.

John Stott notes, “The Herald does not just preach good news, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. No. The proclamation issues an appeal. The Herald expects a response. The Christian ambassador, who has announced the reconciliation which God has achieved through Christ, beseeches men to be reconciled to God.”⁴ This distinction is critical; for just as the title of *herald* binds the preacher to a message not his own, and implies that the message be clear, consistent, and in perfect accord with the intent of the Holy Spirit, the title of *shepherd* carries responsibilities in the pulpit as well. Beyond the requirements of a herald, a faithful shepherd is to love the sheep, feed the sheep and plead with the sheep to follow the master’s voice. The herald must be committed to faithful proclamation, but the shepherd must also compel with love and affection. Or more succinctly, the herald is concerned with the message; the shepherd is concerned with the message and the man who hears it.

To what lengths should this concern affect preaching? Should a preacher endeavor to persuade, to plead, to appeal in his sermons? Persuasion is a controversial topic among preachers today.⁵ Is it a legitimate pursuit or is it necessarily corrupt? Adam Dooley notes, “Many envision persuasion negatively as coaxing, inducing, tempting, bulldozing, threatening, or enticing, secular theorists and homilicians”⁶ Robert Smith Jr. expresses the concern well:

There can be little doubt but that the concept of rhetoric has fallen on hard times. In the political sphere, for instance, it is not uncommon to hear some statement such as the following: “I think people are tired of all the rhetoric! They just want to see some action taken” . . . The very fact that the concept of rhetoric is set in antithesis here to the concept of action demonstrates that the term rhetoric has, in the course of time, acquired a connotation that is depreciatory and pejorative. The clear implication of the term rhetoric in such a statement is that of language which is extravagant, bombastic, and insincere. . . . There can be no doubt but that this more modern

⁴ John R. Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 35.

⁵ Duane Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), 248.

⁶ Adam B. Dooley, “Utilizing Biblical Persuasion Techniques in Preaching without Being Manipulative” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006), 37.

connotation of the term has brought them a cloud of suspicion upon its more traditional denotation.⁷

However, this concern about rhetoric is heightened when preachers are only spoken of as heralds. Duane Litfin explains,

The herald was one who carried the message of another. It was not the herald's task to persuade, but to announce. . . . If he fulfilled his role faithfully, this message remained fixed and unchanged, not a variable at all but a constant. It was the proclaimer's function to be sure that all heard and understood. As a herald, his efforts are neither results-driven nor audience-driven; they are assignment driven, obedience-driven (1 Cor. 4:2). Far from being an ever-malleable *dependent variable*, the herald's message was set for him by another. It was required to be not a *variable* at all, but rather a constant—he had been given a message by the one he represented and it was his assignment to deliver it accurately and clearly to the designated audiences. And the results? Instead of an *independent variable*, set by the herald, the results turn out to be the equation's *dependent variable*. The herald could not maneuver rhetorically to achieve some particular effect. It was his fate to deliver his message and then watch the chips fall where they may.⁸

Here, Litfin is on the mark: if a preacher's task is merely that of a herald, if such is the sum of his responsibilities, then the call for persuasion and rhetoric would be unnecessary and arguably unhelpful. But such is not the case. A biblical preacher is more than a herald. Certainly, he is not less than a herald and any modification to the content of the King's message must be universally rejected, but unlike the herald in Litfin's example, the preacher is also a fellow sinner, loving shepherd, and jealous lover of mankind. He is invested in the one who receives the message as well. His hearers are not an audience, but a flock, a household, and a bride. When a preacher is also a shepherd, he does all he can to help feed the sheep because he cares for them. He pleads, prays, and persuades with all he has.⁹

Some will argue that persuasion is the job of the Holy Spirit and calling a preacher to persuade is asking him to do what only the Holy Spirit can. In a theoretical or theological vacuum, such a question appears legitimate and perhaps even difficult, but

⁷ Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 8.

⁸ Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 248.

⁹ John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 153.

when incorporated into a biblical philosophy ministry that understands the complexities and tensions of God's work and man's, the question is less troubling. Of course, Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate source of conviction and persuasion and, like the wind, the preacher knows not where or when it will blow. However, as with evangelism and prayer, the ultimate work of the Holy Spirit does not preclude or even diminish the role of man. Man prays and God answers. Man evangelizes and God draws. Man persuades with all the sweetness and sweat he can muster and yet it is the Holy Spirit that moves in the heart of the hearer. Os Guinness compares the preacher to Balaam's ass: "But even when our efforts are serviceable, our role is always humble and all too often inadequate and somewhat ridiculous. Christian advocates who understand their calling should never be too big for their boots."¹⁰ One could argue the preacher is always inadequate and yet God chooses to use man's efforts, persuasion and all, to accomplish His purposes. There is, in the end, no more discord between persuasion and the Holy Spirit than there is prayer and the Holy Spirit. Stott notes,

Naturally, there are many factors which inhibit preachers from making this appeal. There is a kind of hyper Calvinism, which regards the call to response and faith as an attempt to usurp the prerogatives of the Holy Spirit. Of course, we agree that man is blind, dead and bound; that repentance and faith are the gifts of God; and that men are unable to turn from their sins to Christ without the prevenient grace of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul taught these truths. But this should not stop us from beseeching men to be reconciled to God, for the apostle Paul did this also. Other preachers have a great horror of emotionalism. So have I, if this means artificial stirring of the emotions by rhetorical tricks or other devices. But we should not fear genuine emotion. If we can preach Christ crucified and remain altogether unmoved, we must have a hard heart indeed. More to be feared than emotion is called professionalism, the dry, detached utterance of a lecture which has neither heart nor soul in it. Do man's peril and Christ's salvation mean so little to us that we feel no one's rise within us as we think about them?¹¹

¹⁰ Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 60.

¹¹ Stott, *The Preachers Portrait*, 57.

While the Bible certainly warns against man-centered manipulation, the call to persuade is unmistakable, as Paul describes his own ministry: “We persuade men” (2 Cor 5:11).

John Carrick writes,

Thus, it is clearly the preacher’s duty to persuade men concerning the truth of Christianity. Moreover, the fact that the preacher is to undertake this sacred and solemn task in absolute dependence upon the Spirit of God does not mean that he is entitled to sit loose to those means which God himself has ordained with regard to the preaching of the Word of God.¹²

The faithful biblical preacher is to be concerned with not only what he says, but how he says it. He should strive to present the message in a compelling and clear manner. Preaching should never be tedious or wearisome, because the Scripture is certainly not.

Renowned nineteenth-century preacher, D. Martyn Lloyd Jones does not hold back when he writes,

The preacher must never be dull, and he must never be boring...there is something radically wrong with dull and boring preachers. How can a man be dull when he is handling such themes? I would say that a “dull preacher” is a contradiction in terms; if he is dull he is not a preacher. He may stand in a pulpit and talk, but he is certainly not a preacher.¹³

The criticism did not end in Jones’s day, as T. David Gordon explains, “In my opinion, less than thirty percent of those who are ordained to the Christian ministry can preach an even mediocre sermon.”¹⁴

Others have observed the same deficiency. Even the title of Gary Millar and Phil Campbell’s book on preaching implies a problem of boring preaching. *Saving Eutychus* is a reference to the man in Acts 20 who fell asleep during the apostle Paul’s message and fell out of a second story window and died. This is a playful reference as no one believes that Paul was a boring preacher or that the point of Acts 20 is lively

¹² John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 3.

¹³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 87.

¹⁴ T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can’t Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 11.

communication, but these two men are convinced the church needs more compelling preaching.¹⁵

Charles Spurgeon explains why such preaching is necessary:

We need the earnest, candid, wakeful, continued attention of all those who are in the congregation. If men's minds are wandering far away they cannot receive the truth, and it is much the same if they are inactive. Sin cannot be taken out of men, as Eve was taken out of the side of Adam, while they are fast asleep. They must be awake, understanding what we are saying and feeling its force, or else we may as well go to sleep too. There are preachers who care very little whether they are attended to or not, so long as they can hold on through the allotted time it is a very small importance to them whether the people here for eternity or here in vain: the sooner such ministers sleep in the churchyard and preach by the verse on the gravestones the better.¹⁶

There certainly are cultural and societal hurdles that add to the challenge of raising quality preachers. Gordon is convinced that modern society is fallow ground for the growth of good preachers:

I will suggest that societal changes that led to the concerns expressed in the 1960s to 1980s in educational circles—societal changes reflected in a decline in the ability to read (texts) and write—have led to the natural cultural consequence that people cannot preach expositively. Reading texts demand a very close and intentional reading. One cannot omit a single line of a given Shakespearean sonnet; Each of the 14 lines plays a crucial role. Those who are accustomed to reading such texts read each line for what it contributes to the whole and how it does so. But those not accustomed to reading guys closely just look for what they judge to be the important words, and the concepts to which they ostensibly point, and then they give a lecture on that concept—ordinarily without making any effort to explain the passage as a whole, to demonstrate how each clause contributes to some basic overall unity.¹⁷

Gordon is not wrong to see a correlation between the lack of reading and the lack of compelling preaching, but this is not the only problem and perhaps not even the main one. African American preachers have excelled for generations with a much lower literacy rate and much lower rate of higher education. In fact, as discussed later in this chapter, in some ways the absence of reading and writing has increased the black rhetoric rather than diminish it.

¹⁵ Gary Millar and Phil Campbell, *Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God's Word and Keep People Awake* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias, 2014).

¹⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 127.

¹⁷ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 15.

The reality is that too many preachers and trainers of preachers have pushed only for a herald and have cautioned against rhetoric in the pulpit. Out of fear of abuse, critical weapons of war have been laid aside and the preacher climbs the steps under armed. Carrick notes,

In this context it is vital to remember the ancient, well attested principle that the abuse of a thing does not invalidate the proper use of it; The fact that there is such a thing as a spurious rhetoric does not mean that there is no such thing as sacred rhetoric. The preacher must always remember that the spirit of God uses and honors means that the careful and deliberate use of proper means is not unspiritual or invalid.¹⁸

The preacher is more than a herald. He is not less, and the message from the King cannot be changed, but it must be presented in a way that is fitting. Peter would call this the shepherd's voice (1 Pet 5:1-11), wavering on the truth but always pleading with the tender toughness of one who is invested in the hearer. The shepherd preacher must strive to be the most persuasive and most compelling communicators they can.

The Preacher, a Herald Who Hums

Evans Crawford writes in his book *The Hum* that “preaching is an oral event, as a sonic experience with musical qualities.”¹⁹ If the preacher is to persuade and if the message should be delivered in the most helpful ways, where does the preacher look to find such a model? What makes for good sacred rhetoric? What exactly does persuasive preaching entail? The black church may be the answer. Black preaching may or may not have its weaknesses, but boring preaching is one criticism that has been never laid on the black church in general. Acknowledging broad generalizations and certain exceptions, the white church has much to learn about rhetoric from its black brothers and sisters. Smith gives a helpful criticism of academic preaching that too often flows from the pulpit of the white church:

¹⁸ Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 4.

¹⁹ Evans E. Crawford, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 17.

There is a spirit of insipid intellectualism that is pervading the atmosphere of the church. It is antithetical to freedom of expression in preaching, teaching, and worship. This temperament is liturgically bland and flavorless; it lacks the seasoning of the spirit of God. Preachers who enter the sanctuary with an insipid attitude toward communicating the Word of God present it in a boring manner. Intellect is significant and must not be left in the vestibule of the church as the preacher prepares to deliver a message from the Lord. While the mind must always be cultivated, the church must be aware of the insipid intellectualism that lacks joy and explodes the Spirit. There is the prolonged idea in preaching that we simply speak to people from the neck up. These people feel that to be expressive and enthusiastic is to stand on the edge of contrivance, calling attention to oneself.²⁰

This is one of the dangers of seminary training. The Scriptures teach that knowledge can “puff up” (1 Cor 8:1), but it also can create a divide between teacher and student. If the preacher is not careful, his preaching can become academic instead of pastoral. He is now a mere instructor and no longer a shepherd. With greater access to theological training throughout the years, this is perhaps more a danger in the white church than in the black church.²¹ I once had a white member in my largely white local church hand me a CD with a message from an older African American preacher and he said, “I know he appears to miss the point of the passage [exegetically], but why isn’t there more preaching like this [homiletically]?” The truth is, the black church has preserved a powerful rhetoric that has largely evaporated from the white pulpit. While there are many examples of effective rhetoric, for the remainder of this chapter, special consideration will be given to the African American pulpit. This is not a comprehensive examination of black preaching or the black church and it will pull from some broad generalizations. The theology and ecclesiology of the black church are not within the scope of this study, but only the sacred rhetoric commonly found in African American pulpits. To glean the most from their preaching, the history and actual rhetorical devices of black pulpits need to be examined.

²⁰ Robert Smith Jr., *Doctrines That Dance: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 103.

²¹ Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998), 37.

History

Why is there such a divide in preaching in the first place? Why do black preachers typically preach with a different style than white preachers, and from where did this distinction come? These questions deserve more time than this chapter affords, but a quick discussion is warranted. The culture of the African American church was largely formed by three main tributaries: prior African culture; the consequences and culture of slavery, and George Whitfield. Thabiti Anyabwile remarks.

Prior to 1816 the independent African American church and the evangelical at large were heavily influenced by the preaching of George Whitfield. Whitfield would have been widely regarded among slaves, among African Americans for that passion in preaching, his plainness in preaching . . . that God given urgency . . . that stream of reformed evangelicalism.²²

George Whitfield was renowned for his preaching and his preaching was an oral event. Arnold Dallimore explains, “When asked on one occasion whether he would permit the printing of his sermons, he is alleged to have replied in this way: ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’”²³ Even Benjamin Franklin marveled at his remarkable eloquence: “Every accent, every emphasis, every modulation of voice, was so perfectly well turned and well placed, that, without being interested in the subject, one could not help but being pleased with the discourse; A pleasure of much the same kind with that received from an excellent piece of music.”²⁴

Whitfield’s style and oral rhetoric in preaching also enabled him to engage with the black men, women, and children²⁵ who had little to no education. Dallimore

²² Thabiti Anyabwile, interview by author, Washington, DC, September 19, 2014.

²³ Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 44.

²⁴ Benjamin Franklin, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, vol 1 (London: Colburn, 1818), 87, quoted in Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitfield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival* 2 vols., (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 1:116.

²⁵ To be clear, Whitfield had an inconsistent and troubled position on slavery. While he adamantly wrote against the abuses in “Letter to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina,” he also argued for the use of and purchased slaves for his South Carolina plantation designed to raise funds for his orphanage in Bethesda, Georgia. Whitfield, like all men, was not perfect, and his own

notes, “His ability to simplify divine truth and to present the narratives of the scriptures and the message of the gospel with vivid clarity - rendered him particularly suited to such a ministry. In turn, the negroes found an unusual interest in his preaching and many of them testified that God used it in bringing his grace to their hearts.”²⁶

It is not within the scope of this chapter to examine the African culture prior to coming to America, but the influence on black preaching is undeniable. It is also almost impossible to overstate the impact slavery had on black preaching. Obviously, slavery impacted almost every aspect of life, but certainly drove the African American worship experience. Anyabwile writes,

Independent concerns of black communities like plain exhorters, the hush harbors . . . the secret churches . . . along with the easy comparison between African Americans and the Israelites . . . a concern early on for what does God have to say to the oppressed. . . . There is no way to credibly preach without giving people something to deal with suffering, theodicy.²⁷

Certainly, this suffering affected the immediate preaching to those in the midst of pain and injustice. It brought urgency and forced an eternal focus. However, this tragic history also affected preaching for generations to come because of the economic and social challenges it brought for the black preacher. Most black preachers had little to no occasion for formal training and most of them could not read or write. Christianity was exploding numerically in the early nineteenth century, with Baptist membership doubling and Methodism growing even faster. The black evangelical community was a huge part of that growth as black Methodists saw their numbers double between 1800 and 1815. Yet in the midst of booming congregations, the black pastor still found limitations when it came to formal training.²⁸

preaching stands as an indictment on some of his actions. That being said, Whitfield was a significant proponent for the training and usefulness in ministry of the African American soul.

²⁶ Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitfield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival* 2 vols., (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 1:500.

²⁷ Anyabwile, interview.

²⁸ Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 37.

The lack of opportunity and emphasis on formal training during and after slavery shaped much of African American culture into an oral community. Singing, storytelling, and preaching burst forth from the daily grind of life, not through pages or lectures of some distant professor. Carl Ellis states,

A survey of African American history reveals that like the children of Israel, we have had a 400-year collective trauma from which we have yet to fully recover. And like the children of Israel we have sojourned in a philosophical wilderness as our thinking has developed. The big question we face is, has God been guiding us toward a promised land?²⁹

One can almost hear the same burden in Martin Luther King Jr.'s words:

We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. I won't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go to the mountaintop and I've looked over you know seeing the promise of. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land. So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.³⁰

In a sense, from the very outset, poverty and oppression empowered an already oral community into a sonorous force. This is also why cultures that share more closely in preaching and in music have invariably shared in similar sufferings. Poverty and a lack of educational options also led to an oral emphasis in southern country preaching. Southern gospel music also often overlaps black and white culture and shares a significant interest in the life that is to come. Black preaching, therefore, comes from a culture that is verbal more than written. Anyabwile adds, "Preaching started to gain a bigger following because of the rhythm and pathos . . . the musicality of it. . . . Its about as musical as it can get . . . life just springing up in song and in rhetoric . . . refrains become the chorus."³¹ Seminaries and churches alike would do well to recognize the benefits of such cultural distinctions in

²⁹ Carl F. Ellis Jr., *Free at Last? The Gospel in the African-American Experience* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 46.

³⁰ Martin Luther King Jr., *While We Can't Wait* (New York: Mentor, 1963), 9.

³¹ Anyabwile, interview.

preaching and perhaps look to incorporate more diversity into the homiletics being taught.

One of the positives that comes from limited educational access is the necessity to train men within the church. Instead of farming off the formation of the next generation of preachers, the black church raised them itself. This led to black preaching being more caught than taught. The African American church sees the raising of preaching as a job for the church. Too often, white churches abdicate much of their duties to seminaries or other smaller churches to train up their pastors. This is seen in both the lack of attention given to training preachers within the church and to the process of looking outside the church to fill vacancies that arise. Cleophus Larue explains,

The black church believes that teaching people to preach is fundamentally an ecclesiastical act and thus by its very nature a pedagogical function that the church cannot relegate to the Academy alone. If indeed the Scriptures belong to the church and the church cannot abdicate its responsibility in the guidance of those who will explicate those scriptures in the name of the church. That blacks continue to learn to preach by listening to those whom they admire and respect that are, for the most part, accomplished preachers who have received their appropriation of the church going public dash as a theological act of the highest order. That the black church continues to call and promote those who have been trained to preach in this manner is, I believe, its way of saying that it will have a determining voice and a controlling hand in the formation of those who advance through its ranks. For the most part whites and mainline and high church congregations are declared fit to preach once they have successfully completed the degree requirements of a bona fide theological institution and passed the basic exams required by the particular judicatories. Many are not even eligible to be considered for the top positions in churches until their part of the education has been successfully completed. Thus they come to their charges, for the most part, with very little preaching experience.³²

Seminaries certainly offer a significant assistance to churches who do not have men skilled in the specific areas of theology, biblical languages, and hermeneutics, but the more the church can own of the raising of preachers, the closer the church will be to Paul's instructions in 2 Timothy 2:2 and the healthier the church universal will be.

³² Cleophus J. Larue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox, 2011), 28.

Rhetorical Devices

While African American preachers did not invent or patent the rhetorical devices for which they are commonly known, black pulpits have been most likely to maintain some of the beneficial tools in the preacher's box. Ernst Wendland writes,

Rhythm, cadence and sound of words as well as the ability to paint a picture in the minds of the hearers are very important to an African American sermon. The black preachers careful search for the precise words and phrases are continuing evidence of the importance of rhetoric and the modest circumstances that originally gave in a place of primacy in the black sermon.³³

Voddie Baucham agrees. In an interview in 2014, Baucham said, "Repetition, description, imagery, sound patterns and emotive language. Add parallelism and the rule of three and you have much of the effectiveness of black rhetoric."³⁴

The first device and incredibly powerful set of tools is parallelism and repetition. These devices create a rhythm and cadence that can form the heartbeat of a sermon that builds to impress the message into the hearts of the hearers. Like Psalms 19 and 119, and Proverbs 1:15-16, black preaching uses parallelism to emphasize and to memorize. The point is not only made more powerfully, but also remembered far longer.

Parallelism and repetition used in this way creates a compelling cadence, especially when read aloud or preached. This cadence is often a runway for song or for "whooping"³⁵ as a beat is created and a refrain is established. Like a good song, well-structured sections of a sermon can build and captivate an audience and free them from the distractions around them so that they can focus intently on the preached message. S. M. Lockridge offers a great example of the use of parallelism to create cadence and build. His sermons "That's My King" and "It's Friday, But Sunday's Comin'" are incredibly

³³ Ernst R. Wendland, *Preaching that Grabs the Heart: A Rhetorical-Stylistic Study of the Chichewa Revival Sermons of Shadrack Wame* (Blantyre, Malawi: Christian Literature, 2000), 115.

³⁴ Voddie Baucham, interviewed with author, Houston, October 12, 2014.

³⁵ Larue, *I Believe I'll Testify*, 28.

powerful, largely due to the relentless and dynamic build of attribute after attribute. In “That’s My King,” the repetition and parallelism is all about Christ so that there is one unmistakable take away: Jesus is wonderful. In the second sermon, the build is actually on the darkness of Friday. Each and every phrase builds on the evil and despair of Friday and the only thing positive in the entire sermon is the line, “But Sunday’s a comin.”³⁶ This repetition teaches one remarkable lesson that no measure of darkness or evil will ever prevail, because Sunday did come, and Sunday will come again.

Not only does parallelism bring power to preaching, so too does simple repetition. Not mere repetition, but simple repetition. Wendland states,

This is not mere repetition, the aimless reproduction of words uttered to avoid silence and to fill out the space of a discourse or to give the speaker an opportunity to think of what to say next. Rather, such repetition is always meaningful in the sense that it is motivated according to some specific rhetorical purpose, beginning with the subject at hand. . . . The reiterated term or lexical set may be contiguous (found right after or in the immediate vicinity of its base) or it may be removed, that is, located at some distance from the expression that it is repeating. The reiterated items may be thematic in the sense that they are related semantically to the main instruction, implication, or injunction of the sermon, or they may be topical, that is, pertaining only to the particular subject or issue at hand, whether this be part of a story, example, illustration, explanation, or description of some kind. The set or sequence of repeated items may be arranged in parallel (corresponding) or chiasmic (transposed) fashion. Furthermore, the set may be constructed in the form of a climax, where the most graphic, shocking, revealing, or important items occur at or near the end, or it may merely constitute an illustrative listing that is intended to highlight in its entirety, as a whole, some point that the preacher has already made or wants to introduce.³⁷

A subordinate but significant device in cadence is found in the “pause” of preaching. Rhythm and cadence build from what is said, while pausing builds from the silence. Pausing intentionally in the middle of a message, especially a pregnant pause, has a powerful effect on the hearer. For skillful speakers, the pause in a sermon is much more than a break in delivery. Crawford Evans explains,

³⁶ S. M. Lockridge, “It’s Friday—But Sunday’s a Comin’,” The Gospel Coalition, April 18, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/its-fridaybut-sundays-comin/>.

³⁷ Wendland, *Preaching that Grabs the Heart*, 118.

This emphasis on preaching as an oral event, as a sonic experience with musical qualities is reflected in my belief that preaching is holiness and timing. This distinction between time and timing is preserved among musicians who say “anyone can beat time,” but gifted conductors have a sense for the timing of phrases rest, or for what I call here the pause . . . it is not a “dead silence” but a live silence. It is a silence that organizes time that invites us to think of time not as something past but as something plotted.³⁸

Repetition and parallelism are certainly one of the preachers most faithful tools. This feature is found prominently in the book of Hebrews. This is particularly compelling when one realizes that Hebrews is much more of a sermon than a letter.³⁹ This “word of exhortation” (Heb 13:22) is a prime example of biblical preaching and is replete with repetition and parallelism. One conspicuous example is found when the preacher builds a cadence with the name of Jesus at the end of the phrases (Heb 6:20; 7:22; 10:19; 12:2).⁴⁰ As he nears the end of the sermon, one could expect the hearers to anticipate and shout “Jesus” before the preacher does, which is no better example of building to the appropriate point. Hebrews is not about the preacher, it is about Jesus and the sermon leaves no room for anything else.

A second device is in the sound of alliteration and rhyme. The paired sounds of speech, whether at the beginning of a word or the end, is an effective tool to capture the ear and tune it to the truth being broadcast. Again, this sermon we call Hebrews sets the pace as alliteration floods the very first verse. While white preaching often relegates alliteration to the outline of the sermon, black preaching weaves the sounds of alliteration and rhyme masterfully through the entirety of the message. These sounds that fit the ear add to what Evans Crawford calls “homiletical musicality”⁴¹

A third sacred rhetoric endemic to black preaching is word pictures and

³⁸ Crawford, *The Hum*, 31.

³⁹ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 37.

⁴⁰ Will Varner, “Gospel according to Hebrews” (seminar session 4, Shepherds Conference, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA, March 8, 2010), <https://www.gracechurch.org/sermons/5236>.

⁴¹ Crawford, *The Hum*, 16.

imagery. African American culture is known for its story telling and imagery. Whether pithy metaphors or more lengthy stories, black preachers carry the legacy of Jesus preaching in the picture they paint with their words. Crawford states, “There is much storytelling at work in the Black approach to the Bible,”⁴²

Martin Luther King’s famous message “I Have a Dream” is laced with pictures his hearers can vividly imagine. He speaks of “mountains of despair” and “stones of hope.” And he depicts “little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.” This imagery takes topics and concepts and makes them real. Gardner Taylor describes the art of imagery in black preaching:

I used to hear the old black preachers in my earliest years expatiate loftily and soar to magnificent heights of eloquence on this very notion. They would say in their picturesque way, they have great voices now rolling like thunder, now whispering like the sighing of the wind in the trees: “God might have found so many other ways to spread the gospel of the love of God. He might have written his love and his and the rising sun so that men looking upward could have read the message, ‘God so loved the world.’ He might have made the ocean sing and nightingales to chant it. Neither of those, not even angels, could ever preach and say, however, ‘I’ve been redeemed.’ So this is a gospel for sinners saved by grace and only saved sinners can preach.”⁴³

Response

Not only is the preaching in the black church stereotypically different from the white church, so too is the hearing. African American congregations engage verbally and often emphatically with the preacher. The sermon in the black church is not a performance, it is a dance. Smith explains,

Phillip Brook’s classic definition of preaching embodies the purpose of the preacher as a doxological dancer: “preaching is the communication of truth by man to men.” It is actualized in a vertical homiletic ping pong dynamic. The preacher serves the sermon to the congregation, and the congregation serves the sermon back to the preacher. This exchange may be in the form of nonverbal feedback and verbal talk back, known as call and response in the African American preaching experience.⁴⁴

⁴² Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 20.

⁴³ Gardner C. Taylor, *How Shall They Preach* (Elgin, IL: Progressive Baptist, 1977), 45.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Doctrines That Dance*, 108.

Often engagement is voluntary and unsolicited, but on occasion the preacher uses questions to engage the body more directly. Wendland writes,

Rhetorical questions are not normally intended to elicit any information, as in the case of a real query. Rather, they usually have the purpose of emphasizing some type of assertion or response that should be obvious in the context of discourse in which it occurs. This device gives the audience an opportunity as it were to express this knowledge for themselves, often vocally, instead of having the speaker tell them directly. Frequently there is some additional attitude, implication, or emotion that is also conveyed, or connotated, by the interrogative form, e.g., “Now is there anyone here who at any time has kneeled down and prayed a prayer like this? Is there anyone?” . . . “My brothers, what is it that fools us into [thinking that] we need not number the days of our life?” (with reference to Ps 39:4, the point of this obvious appeal to pathos being that they should definitely be engaged in such spiritual reckoning).⁴⁵

If a preacher is more than herald and is invested in the response of his audience, then his preaching will endeavor to engage the audience and read their response. The black church makes this much easier. H. B. Charles Jr. references that early on his preaching he could tell if his sermon was connecting or not by the response of one faithful elderly woman in his church. When he was preaching well, she would say, “Help us Lord,” and when he was struggling to connect she would say aloud, “Help him Lord.”⁴⁶

Feedback in the black church not only enables a preacher to gauge his audiences’ understanding and reception of what he is preaching, but it also serves as an encouragement to the preacher. Smith describes this feedback as essential in preaching:

The preacher serves the sermon to the congregation, and the congregation serves the sermon back to the preacher. This exchange may be in the form of nonverbal “feel back” and verbal “talk back,” known as “call and response” in the African American preaching experience. Information and inspiration are inextricably intertwined. The twofold witness in preaching produces exuberance in the hearer, who responds to it with exultation and joy and fulfills the goal of all preaching and exalting and giving glory to God!⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Wendland, *Preaching that Grabs the Heart*, 124.

⁴⁶ H. B. Charles Jr., “Panel Q and A” (personal notes taken from Unite Conference, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC, October 3, 2022).

⁴⁷ Smith, *Doctrines That Dance*, 108.

The quiet and sometimes sterile setting of white preaching makes it difficult for the preacher to do anything but lecture. White churches could learn from their black brothers and sisters in how black congregations encourage their preachers in the pulpit.

Conclusion

Preaching is essential in the church, and it is paramount the pastor gets it right. First, he must get rightly understand the text and then rightly transmit the message to the people. He must preach with the clarity and conviction of a herald and the heart of a shepherd, never bending on the content of the King's message but bending all he can to persuade the hearer to embrace the message and to love the King.

The goal is not for preachers to mimic other good preachers, but for them to find their own most effective voice. Phillips Brooks famously said that preaching is "truth through personality"⁴⁸ and that personality must be his own. He also writes,

When preachers adopt other deliveries and voices in the Sunday pulpit, a time will come when they will forget who they are supposed to be and which preaching voice is to be heard on that Sunday. Preachers must find their own voice and delivery style so they can be maximally used in the uniqueness of their own personality through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹

The preacher must also understand that apart from the work of the Spirit, his labor is in vain. R. C. Sproul states, "I know enough theology to know it does not matter how gifted I may be. It does not have any power. You may fascinate people. You may interest people. People may respond to your preaching, but it won't penetrate into their souls unless the Spirit accompanies it."⁵⁰ Like many areas of theology, in preaching there lies the tension of man's efforts and divine accomplishment. God used David's skill with the sling (1 Sam 17:49), but the victory is the Lord's. God will use sacred rhetoric, but the power, honor, and glory all goes to Him. Preachers should strive with all that is

⁴⁸ Phillips Brooks, *The Joy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 26.

⁴⁹ Smith, *Doctrines that Dance*, 116.

⁵⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1986), 31.

within them to persuade men and women to come to Christ and be conformed to Christ, and then they should pillow their head, trusting in the supernatural power of His Word and His Spirit to accomplish the task.⁵¹

⁵¹ This project only scratches the surface of African American preaching. For more helpful resources consider the works of James E. Massey, Kenyata Gilbert and Marvin Mickle.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Having laid the foundation for sacred rhetoric in the first three chapters, and having discussed the benefits of African American rhetoric in particular, this chapter will describe the development and deployment of the six-class course on sacred rhetoric. This course intended to equip men who preach or have a desire to preach in the local church in and around Wilmington, North Carolina. Some of these men have regular opportunities and some have preached many times, but other students had little experience in preaching but hope to have occasions in the future. The hope is to have men better equipped for preaching ministry and more versed in rhetoric for use in the local church for years to come. The class was held at Cornerstone Baptist Church but was open to those outside the church.

Pre-Project Phase

The first task prior to implementing the class was to coordinate schedules of men who showed interest and to find a time that would best serve them. The class was scheduled for Sunday afternoons from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. before evening activities. I anticipated a group of eight to ten men, and chose to meet in the outer pastoral office. The location accommodated the number of students and was small enough to create an intimate environment. A dry erase board and a television had recently been added to the room which would serve instruction well. The men could sit around a large conference table while looking toward the front of the classroom, which allowed for engaging conversation between the students during the class.

After the time and location were chosen, the class was promoted through e-mail. Other invitations occurred by word of mouth, but the desired nature of the class

precluded mass invitations outside of the church. The course was designed to scale and multiply in the future, both at Cornerstone and beyond. Eight men committed to come to the six-class course and the first class was set for December 4. The classes would be held for two weeks before Christmas, and two weeks after Christmas with two classes being an extended double sessions, allowing for six class sessions in total. Childcare was arranged for one of the men who pastors at a church across town.

In preparation for the course, surveys were created and handouts containing the transcripts of sermons the men would listen to and critique. These were printed and distributed as hard copies to each of the men when they attended the class. The curriculum was based on the knowledge gained from the “Foundations of Teaching” course at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, along with seventeen years of experience preaching and teaching in the local church. The curriculum was reviewed by my advisor and implemented at Cornerstone Baptist in Wilmington, NC.

Six-Class Project Implementation Phase

Eight men from the area registered for the class and all eight showed up for the first week. There was a wide range of education and experience in the area of preaching within the class. Three men had Bible college degrees and the remaining five had some seminary-level training. Three of the men had MDivs and one of them had a ThM and was working on his PhD in systematic theology. All but one of the men had preached multiple times, and three of the men had weekly teaching responsibilities either in a local church or as a military chaplain. Six of the seven men have preached in the pulpit at Cornerstone Baptist Church where the class was being held. Seven of the men were of Cornerstone Baptist Church and the eighth was a former member who was sent out to pastor another church on the other side of town. This section describes the six classes that took place as part of the implementation of this project.

Class 1

All eight men attended the first class. The class opened in prayer and then participants began by completing the survey.¹ As the men took the survey, some asked questions about terminology. The questions revealed the importance of parsing and defining words clearly. After ten minutes, the men turned in their surveys and instruction began.

The discussion began with the opening question: What is preaching? Perhaps the most controversial, or at least, most complicated question seemed to be, what is the difference between preaching and teaching? This was an entertaining exercise. As soon as one student thought they had a clear definition, another student would press the logic and the definition would falter or at least be less clear. The consensus was that there is a difference between preaching and teaching, and one can recognize when it is happening, but cannot exactly describe the difference.

We then moved into the Scriptures as I asked them to find passages to inform our understanding of preaching. This too was enlightening as men referenced some Scriptures that were not in the notes and brought interesting insight into the conversation. We examined passages directed at the preacher (1 Pet 5; 2 Tim 4), passages that recorded someone preaching (Matt 5; Acts 2; 26), and passages that talked about the role of a shepherd in the life of a church (Eph 4; 1 Pet 5).

I then asked the students, what is the most common moniker of the preacher in faithful, biblical, evangelical circles. The answer was “herald,” so we spent considerable time talking about why—what attributes of a herald are needed in the church and in what ways does it anchor the biblical preacher. I asked, what does it mean to be less than a herald and what texts obligate the preacher to be one. I then started a discussion by asking questions regarding the nature of the preacher’s task and how it relates but is not

¹ See appendix 1.

exhausted by the title of herald. We discussed the difference in Jeremiah and Jonah—were both heralds?

Homework was assigned to think through the difference in preaching and teaching and to find examples of rhetoric throughout the Scriptures. The men were dismissed after a closing prayer, but the conversation around preaching continued even after class was finished.

Class 2

The second week of class was productive. All but one of the men were able to participate, making a total of seven men in attendance. After an opening prayer, the class began with a review of week 1 and revisited the topic of the preacher as a herald. The class was asked to remember and reiterate in what ways the preacher is to be more than a herald and what metaphor might best describe his task. The common metaphor of the shepherd was presented as a better all-around descriptive. Unlike the herald, who may or may not be invested in those to whom he speaks, the shepherd cares intimately about the sheep. Shepherds find themselves pleading with, praying for, and giving all they can to persuade the hearer.

After the review, the class was asked to reference places in Scripture where rhetoric and literary devices are found. We walked through many of the Psalms (19; 119; 139) and Proverbs (1; 5; 18) as well as narrative and prophetic texts. We found consistent use of parallelism, alliteration, chiasm, and more. We found it almost impossible to read a psalm or proverb and not be confronted with multiple rhetorical devices used by the Holy Spirit in giving us His Word. We also marveled at the imagery found in James and the parallelism found in Paul's comparison of Adam and Jesus in Romans 5. The sheer volume of rhetoric in Scripture impressed the men. Many of the men have spent a great deal of time in the Word but have not spent time specifically examining the rhetorical devices found throughout.

The discussion then turned to the actual preachers and sermons within Scripture and the devices they employed. From Moses to Nathan to John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles, we looked at text after text highlighting different features of rhetoric. Jesus “I am” statements are powerful metaphors. His use of repetition and parallelism in the Sermon on the Mount made it memorable and weighty to say the least. Stephen’s storytelling and Peter’s parallelism are but a few examples of the scores of effective choices the preachers in Scripture made in communicating the message of God to the world.

One sermon on which we spent considerable time was Hebrews. We briefly examined the reasoning supporting the view of Hebrews as a sermon instead of a letter and then began looking at the aspects of this great message. After a brief stint highlighting alliteration, the students’ attention was turned to the usage of word order rhetorically throughout Hebrews. One particular method placed “Jesus” as the last word in a phrase nine different times (Heb 2:9; 3:1; 4:14; 6:20; 7:22; 10:19; 12:2, 24), producing a rhythm and a cadence that is powerfully rhetoric.² This example has been used by other scholars in comparison with African American preaching and rural country preaching.³ Students then were asked to discuss potential reasons for these rhetorical features in certain cultures and how they might compare to the first century Christian.

The class closed by looking at the most common objection to sacred rhetoric, which is found in 1 Corinthians 1-2. We examined Paul’s words and discussed the context of first century Corinth. Is Paul really combatting the Sophists, and if so, what is the major problem Paul is addressing? We noticed that the answer to secular eloquence was not an absence of eloquence but the presence of the cross. Preaching the message of a crucified

² See appendix 2.

³ Will Varner, “Gospel according to Hebrews” (seminar session 4, Shepherds Conference, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA, March 8, 2010).

messiah is utterly foolish and forces a humility on the preacher antithetical to the pride and praise sought by the Sophists.

One student quickly observed that even in his rebuke of unrestrained rhetoric, Paul uses a structure one can only describe as rhetorical. The key to keeping rhetoric sacred then is to maintain the cross and the glory of Christ at the center of all preaching. Those who hear the message are not to be impressed with the preacher, but the message; not impressed with the man of God, but the God of men.

After some scheduling changes were announced the class concluded.

Class 3

With several weeks off due to the Christmas break, the first part of class was a heavy review to get the men's minds back on the topic at hand and to remember what was already covered. We reviewed the fundamental call of a pastor to "preach the Word" and how the preacher cannot be less than a herald, but then we were reminded that he surely must be more than a herald as well. The students recalled what texts would call the preacher to be a more than a herald and we turned to 1 Peter 5, John 10 and 21, and Acts 20, among others.

We then reviewed, if a pastor is to care about the sheep and to plead and persuade, what text might give us pause? So, we turned again to 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 and discussed the exegetically and philosophically of what Paul was saying. We then dove into some practical distinctions between ungodly manipulation and sacred persuasion.

As the review came to an end, we started to examine different types of rhetorical devices and list them on the board. We added some less familiar ones (like litotes) and looked for places in Scripture where they are used (Luke 1:37; Acts 21:39).

Bringing the class to a close, we listened to the end of S. M. Lockridge's sermon "That's My King."⁴ Each student had a copy of the words in front of them and

⁴ See appendix 3.

they made notes of the rhetoric as we listened. After the sermon was over, we discussed what devices were used and what effect they had. The point was made that all the rhetoric was aimed to drive home one major point: Jesus is wonderful. This is in keeping with many of the well-known and helpful preaching books and articles that argue for one main point of a sermon, the “sermonic arrow.”⁵ I referred the class to an illustration regularly used by R. L. Dabney, where he describes this central theme needed in each message. Jim Carrick summarizes it:

He illustrates this quality by comparing it to the metal beak of an ancient warship. The beak of the ancient warship was placed at the forefront of the ship and was so designed that, as it bore down upon the adversaries vessel, it did so with all the concentrated force of the weight and the momentum of the entire ship. Thus the adversary was overwhelmed.⁶

The discussion that followed proved to be meaningful and robust. As we turned back to the review of the sermon, several students mentioned that the message managed to contain so much theological organization in what, on the surface, appears to be such a simple structure. It was also mentioned how worshipful it remained even while listening for rhetoric.

Class 4

Week began where week 3 left off. The class listened to and reviewed two more sermons. First, we listened to another of S. M. Lockridge’s excerpts, “It’s Friday but Sunday’s a Comin.”⁷ Again, the students were given the transcript to follow along and take notes as they listened. Most in the class had heard the message before but a few had not. The similarity of singular focus was noticed again, as well as the relentless parallelism that created his famous cadence. Observations were made about the power in

⁵ Phillip D. Jensen and Paul Grimmond, *The Archer and the Arrow: Preaching the Very Words of God* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias, 2010), 85.

⁶ John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 150.

⁷ See appendix 4.

the break in cadence as well. Several men expressed how moving it was when Lockridge slowed down or paused all together. The thrust of the message was still one, with all focus and all build onto the evil and despair of Friday.

The class discussed how this sermon, and its style in particular, prepared the congregation for the despair and evil faced in this world, and how their hope need not be dissuaded simply because Friday is bad. One of the men asked, “Why didn’t he tell us anything about Sunday?” This question transitioned the conversation into discussing the rhetorical strategy of leaving the audience to finish the work. They filled in what happened on Sunday. It was an unspoken but understood answer for the darkness of this world. We talked about how “Sunday’s Comin’” looks back at the cross, but then without any effort also points people to the final “Sunday” when the Lord returns and fixes all that is wrong with Friday.

The second message was Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream speech.”⁸ Certainly a different context than the sermons we previously listened to, but this speech is still a gold mine of African American rhetoric. There are many reasons for its impact on American history, but its rhetoric is certainly one of them. King listened to and learned from some of the greatest black preachers in the country.

There was a great deal of discussion around King’s imagery and how vivid he made his arguments. The use of mountains and valleys and even the reference to “little black boys and girls” and “little white boy and girls” brought concepts to light that too often stay behind the judge’s desk or in the college library. The men said this rhetorical choice personalized the message and made it less sterile. His language took the message from political to personal, from the courthouse to the porch.

Homework was assigned to listen to five more sermons that were sent home. A full-length sermon by S. M. Lockridge, two sermons by H. B. Charles, one by Robert

⁸ See appendix 5.

Smith Jr., and Jonathan Edwards most famous sermon.⁹ They were to listen to them and come prepared to talk about how they compare and contrast, and what lessons can be learned from them. The two sermons by H. B. Charles were in two different contexts and the students were to evaluate them individually and then in relation to one another. One sermon was at a conference at Dallas Theological Seminary with an unfamiliar and largely white audience. The second sermon was one from his own church, with a largely black congregation.

Class 5

Once again attendance was encouraging as all eight men made it out for the final class. Due to scheduling restraints the fifth and sixth classes were held together in a longer afternoon session. Engagement was again high, and the men all listened to the sermons for homework that were assigned.

The class began by analyzing the sermons that were assigned. We started with H. B. Charles's messages and discussed his rhetoric and how it changed with the two environments in which he preached. One sermon was from a conference at Dallas Theological Seminary while the other was a sermon at his home church of Shiloh Metropolitan Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida. The students agreed that the contrast was stark. This led to great dialogue and discussion about the nature and cause of such a contrast. How much of the contrast was planned by Charles and how much was dictated by the different response of the audience. Not only was the audience a "home" audience versus a strange one, but one audience was largely white and the other largely black.

We discussed at length that just as black preaching is generally different from white preaching in certain respects, so too is the black congregation typically different from its white counterpart. Black congregations are known for their verbal and emotional feedback, which can serve as fuel on a preacher's fire. White churches on the other hand,

⁹ See appendix 7.

tend to be less expressive and may mute the typical enthusiasm of certain preachers with the minimalistic outward response.

Another distinction was the overall passion and volume difference in the two messages. It was agreed that there was actually more, or greater, dynamics in the seminary message, which on the surface was surprising. After a good discussion it was noted that the “home” crowd was accustomed to the intensity of Charles’s preaching and could withstand and embrace the enthusiasm for longer periods of time, while the seminary crowd was given more frequent relief as he slowed down and was softer spoken. Both messages were faithful, biblical expositions of Scripture, but there remained a clear divide in delivery.

One student stated that he wished he would have listened to Charles’s church sermon last instead of first. He also added, “He convinced me that highly rhetorical and enthusiastic preaching can be done with depth and reverence.” “He won me over,” another stated. An incredibly insightful comment was made about the difference between instruction and discipleship. It was argued that the seminary message felt more instructional, and the church sermon felt more like discipleship. We discussed the difficulty of creating a connection with strangers in a one stop setting compared to the connections made with one’s own flock. This would certainly impact the nature of the discipleship from the pulpit. It was noted that such distinctions must be considered later as we discussed implementation of sacred rhetoric in their own preaching.

After discussing Charles’s sermons, we discussed the message given by Lockridge.¹⁰ The informal and slow introduction led to a discussion of guest preaching. The students were informed that it is typical in the black church for visiting speakers to spend a healthy amount of time informally addressing the audience, building a rapport, and connecting. This introduction assists in moving the message away from mere instruction, but into shepherding and discipleship. This style of introduction helps the

¹⁰ See appendix 5.

preacher understand what type of feedback, if any, he will receive from the audience before he really begins. Students could view it as a warming up before a big game. Lockridge's sermon was also a great example of the build so common to African American preaching and created a lively discussion as to the power it brings to preaching and how it allows the preacher to build the main point of the sermon and drive that point home in the end.

Lastly, the sermon by Robert Smith Jr.¹¹ was analyzed and the discussion was helpful. While sharing many of the rhetorical devices of the other preachers, it was noted that Smith differed in that he seemed to layer one amazing, word-smithed line on top of another. This was helpful in building an appreciation for the text and for the God behind the text, but several students found the sermon more difficult to follow.

The men did marvel at the memory of Smith and his ability to not only preach without notes, but to preach without the text in front of him. Smith knew the text so well that he could exegetically and expositionally walk through the section of Romans 8, quoting each verse before he discussed it. This freedom allowed for greater engagement with the audience and greater rhetorical freedom in general. The class then discussed the sheer rhetorical force of Scripture and how critical that is for the preacher.

One of the questions for implementation in their own preaching arose from this, however: how is a preacher to know the text that well if he is preaching on a weekly basis consecutively through a section or book of the Bible? The idea of a memorizing the passage or the portion of the passage of a "sugar stick" sermon where the preacher has an inordinate amount of time allotted to the message seems manageable, but to internalize so much Scripture on a weekly basis seems unachievable. This did prove convicting, however, as the men reflected on the modern challenges of distractions and wasted time.

¹¹ Robert Smith Jr., "The Glory of the Groan" (sermon, Beeson Divinity School, September 11, 2007), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_2EIdxyWwQ.

An unintended but welcome application flowed from this as the men committed themselves to more time internalizing and memorizing the Word in their preparation for preaching.

All three preachers forced the conversation: What is the preacher's voice? In a previous class we discussed preaching within one's personality. Yet these men seemed to stretch their personality in the pulpit; they preached differently than they speak. The conversation was robust as different ideas and thoughts about being fake and thoughts on how preaching is different. One student asked if we would expect a singer to sing his way through normal conversation, and if not, perhaps the preacher is allowed a different timbre and tone in his preaching than in his conversing. This branched out into a question in general: how exaggerated can a preacher's expression be in the pulpit without being a fraud? Other examples of exaggerated expression were highlighted. It was determined that if preachers could elevate their enthusiasm or expression over a ballgame or some other event could, then it would be reasonable for a similar increase, if not more, in the pulpit.

Class 6

The final class time was largely given to what was learned and how to implement what was taught in the class. Before we discussed positive steps to increasing sacred rhetoric in the students preaching, we discussed again the dangers of rhetoric and how to guard against what Paul prohibits in his first letter to the Corinthian church. The common denominator as we discussed warnings was who was in view. The preacher's goal is not to impress people with himself, but with God and His Word. The pulpit should never be a platform for man, but as John the Baptist so beautifully (and rhetorically) said "may we decrease to that he may increase" (John 3:30). Pride and self-centeredness lie waiting at the steps of the stage and the preacher would do well to recognize it and take active steps to battle against such a temptation.¹²

¹² John Piper, *Expository Exultation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 44.

Some of the practical steps to guard against such self-exaltation are, first, memorize 1 Corinthians 4:7¹³ and realize that all anyone has is a gift. Education, experience, and innate ability are all gifts from God. Even a puritan work ethic is a gift and should be no reason to boast. If a man is a natural communicator, has an incredible education, or has wonderful voice, it is all a gift. If these things are all given, then the preacher should humbly step aside from the spotlight and gladly introduce his audience to the giver of all good gifts, the source of salvation, and true satisfaction in this world.

Second, preachers should pray that humility and gratitude would flow through their veins with every opportunity to speak. It is a privilege and high calling to proclaim God's Word to His people and men should be humbled by it. Third, men should praise other preachers publicly so that people can be freed from the comparison or competition that so wickedly rises among followings.

Last, the preacher should preach about the foolishness of preaching and how God chose "not many mighty."¹⁴ He should highlight the power of God and the strength of the Word every chance he gets. With these warning steps in place, the class was able to create a list of tactical steps to build a sacred rhetoric in their own preaching.

Then, a guided discussion began as the men started a list they could finish on their own as they continue to learn the sacred art of preaching. First, the preacher must pray. The preacher should pray for his preparation, for his delivery, and for the sermon's reception. He must live in the biblical tensions he tells his people to embrace. God is sovereign and alone has the power to change hearts, and yet he calls preachers to persuade and shape men.

Second, the preacher should read. This cannot be expressed enough. Starting with the Scriptures, preachers should read. Scripture, which certainly carries additional

¹³ First Cor 4:7 says, "For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?"

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 45.

benefits to preaching beyond rhetoric, contains some of the richest and most helpful devices the preacher could deploy. Regularly reading through Scripture in various genres will hone a preacher's ability to communicate in manifold ways. Beyond the Bible, the preacher should read deeply and widely. From books on preaching to historical biographies to entertaining fiction, the more a man of God reads, the better preacher he will be. A mentor once said to me, "Interesting people make interesting preachers, and if you want to be interesting, read."¹⁵ Not only do readers pick up insight, but illustrations and imagery are fruits as well. Jonathan Edwards is famous for his eclectic reading and curious mind. The fruit of this in preaching is the imagery he regularly implored from the world of science. Even the incidental benefits of increased vocabulary and contagious rhetoric are profound.

Similar to reading, listening to great preaching helps shape a preacher's sermons indirectly. Like much of the black preaching from generations previous, good preaching is often more caught than taught. Preachers should listen to how various men from various backgrounds preach similar texts and then listen to similar men preach different texts; then, he will find his rhetorical quiver grow.¹⁶

A fifth step in this move to more meaningful preaching is the continued study of rhetoric in specific.¹⁷ Preachers should become well acquainted with their language and the literary devices available to them. They should not be afraid to engage with secular study of rhetoric and public speaking. The worldview may be wrong, but the observations and assessments of rhetoric can prove beneficial. Even writing poetry or lyrics for songs

¹⁵ Rick Holland was a pastor on staff at Grace Community Church in Los Angeles, and he gave me this advice.

¹⁶ Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 76.

¹⁷ John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 3.

can be a means for preachers to practice with the language in a manner that may stretch and strengthen their overall communication skills.

Another necessary step to bettering preaching is for the preacher to understand his personality. He must understand his enthusiastic highs and lows and use all he can while still being himself.¹⁸ This takes time to develop and it can take years before a preacher truly feel comfortable enough to challenge his dynamic range.¹⁹ It may be a cause for concern if the preacher's excitement over secular matters exceeds his zeal over eternal things. There is no script or ideal volume, no frequency or righteous range, but preachers should be keenly aware of what God has given them to best persuade men and women from the pulpit.

Any preacher endeavoring to apply the principles should be slow to make any changes in his delivery. This is not so much a step as it is a caution to be careful regarding sudden or significant changes that can be distracting to those who hear, and distraction is one of the results the preacher will most want to avoid. Subtle changes can be made right away, however. For example, alliteration and parallelism can be added in small measures to create a cadence or a more memorable phrase. Imagery and pace are also subtle spices the preacher can use with discretion to make messages more impactful.²⁰

A seventh and incredibly profitable step to growth in sacred rhetoric is the use of friendly feedback. In today's world, it is easy to pass along sermons for others to hear or even watch, and the preacher would be remiss not to take advantage. Men who are willing to be critiqued are men who are ready to grow. It takes humility and a measure of thick skin to ask for and receive feedback on preaching. It may take several attempts to

¹⁸ Robert Smith Jr., *Doctrine That Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 58.

¹⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 88.

²⁰ John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, rev. ed. (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930), 89.

dissuade the idea that the preacher is fishing for compliments and that actual criticism is welcome.

Last, the preacher should set reasonable expectations for improvement. All servants of God are called to improve, and one's preaching should become noticeably better with age, but each individual preacher has unique limitations that will restrict the extent and speed of growth.²¹ The preacher's congregation may encourage or inhibit growth and should be taken into consideration as he sets expectations. The number of times and the nature of the preaching (consecutive, topical, isolated) will also dictate some of the different difficulties with implementing the rhetoric from this class.

The last portion of the class was given to retaking the initial survey and discussions about what was learned and what questions remained. All eight men took the survey again and their responses were encouraging and enlightening. Some of the highlights of those responses will be engaged in chapter 5 as part of the project's evaluation.

²¹ First Tim 4:14-15 reads, "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress."

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This final chapter will evaluate the ministry project by assessing the purpose and goals and examining strengths and weaknesses. This chapter will also provide suggestions for improvement as well as tips on implementing the material into biblical preaching. I will also include participant and personal reflections from the project. Overall, the project was personally challenging and rewarding. Everyone involved with the project was reminded of the importance and responsibility of faithfully preaching God's Word for the equipping of God's people for the promotion of God's kingdom throughout this world.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train preachers in sacred rhetoric commonly associated with African American preaching for the improvement of biblical exposition in the context of Wilmington, North Carolina. Eight men from the area attended the course. Interest in the subject was high, and the purpose of the project seemed to meet a need in many of the men in attendance and others that had expressed interest but were unable to attend. I was encouraged by so many men desiring to grow in their knowledge and ability in preaching. From the novice to the more experienced preacher, the desire to excel was on display and certainly is positive as the church looks to better equip the community in Christ. Like minded churches in the area are growing and reproducing through church planting and revitalization. Having a growing stable of eager and equipped men to teach and preach God's Word is exciting as the church looks toward the future.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

This project had three stated goals that aligned with and supported the project's purpose. Those goals will be evaluated in this section.

Goal 1: Assess Knowledge of Sacred Rhetoric

The first goal was to assess what the men know about sacred rhetoric in general and African American rhetoric in specific. This goal was met with a pre-course survey and an initial discussion on the topic of sacred rhetoric and biblical preaching. The survey questions included the defining of key terms and questions measuring the students' exposure to different styles of rhetoric and preaching. The survey included essay questions to help better grasp the understanding and perspective each student brought to the class. This goal was not only met in the survey and the discussion but the conversation sparked was incredibly helpful and set the stage perfectly for the rest of the course. All students participated in the pre-course survey and discussion, and all participated in the follow up survey and discussion at the end of the course as well.

The initial discussion revealed a wide range of familiarity, or lack thereof, within the topic of rhetoric and preaching. Some men had taken seminary level courses on homiletics and some had no formal training in preaching. But even with the more trained men there were disparate views and comfortability when it came to sacred rhetoric. None of the men in the class had spent significant time considering rhetoric from an African American tradition or how that tradition might positively or negatively affect biblical preaching. That being said, the overall level of understanding with homiletics and preaching was high and served to expedite the discussion and allow the class to truly focus in on rhetoric and African American rhetoric in specific. It was incredibly helpful to ascertain the level of understanding before the course began and allowed for a more specialized and impactful time together.

Goal 2: Develop Six-Class Curriculum

The second goal was to develop a curriculum in the use sacred rhetoric. This was designed around a six-class schedule for a small group of current and future preachers. The course was built around the biblical and theological motivations for sacred rhetoric as well as a particular look at what aspects of sacred rhetoric could be learned from the African American pulpit. This curriculum represents a culmination of my study for this doctorate. Dozens of books, hours in the biblical text, and many of the courses taken provided the foundation for the lectures in this six-week course. I also drew from a past experience where I oversaw the logistics of a “finishing school” for preachers, called the Expositor’s Institute. This was a week-long intensive for ten men taught by John MacArthur and Steve Lawson. I was privileged to sit in on the course, and I observed how some of the most experienced preachers taught other preachers about preaching. What I learned in from that course was instrumental as the curriculum was being formed. Knowing what to include and what to leave out was the most challenging effort in writing such a relatively short course. Decisions had to be made as to depth of discussion on different topics based on the finite amount of time the participants were in the six classes. The course material was altered slightly after the initial survey and discussion, allowing for more specific instruction and a deeper dive into rhetoric and more basic aspects of preaching were left behind.

As with most initial runs through a course, there are items to change and improvements to be made, but overall the curriculum served its purpose and provided the structure and guidance necessary for equipping the young men in attendance. With little difficulty, this curriculum could be repeated in other contexts and with other teachers. The feedback from the students would also be taken into consideration as to impact and improvements. The goal of creating an effective curriculum to teach sacred rhetoric was achieved.

Goal 3: Increase Understanding of Sacred Rhetoric through Instruction in the Class

The third goal was to increase understanding by teaching this curriculum. This goal was met as students gathered each week for instruction and discussion. Attendance for this course was exceptionally high as there was only one absence among the eight men for all six classes. The consistency of attendance allowed for efficient discussion and compelling interaction between the students. The remarkable amount of formal Christian education in the room and the unity of thought on basic philosophy of ministry in the pulpit and discipleship made fertile ground for deep dialogue. The participation level was also remarkably high and made for an enjoyable and highly profitable time of instruction. In fact, the greatest challenge of the class was trying to fit in all the curriculum while addressing significant and helpful questions and comments that were raised during the course.

Once again, the pre-class survey and discussion enabled the course to be tweaked to best fit the needs and understanding of the participants. At the conclusion of the six classes, a post-course survey was given, and it pointed to an increase in understanding and a greater commitment to excellence and fidelity in biblical preaching. It was clear from the final survey and follow up e-mail that the basic aim to increase the knowledge and appetite for sacred rhetoric was achieved and that an appreciation grew for that rhetoric commonly found in black churches. The knowledge of sacred rhetoric vocabulary grew by more than 30 percent and the ability to recognize and evaluate sacred rhetoric when used in Scripture or preaching increased dramatically. Students were also able to recognize general distinctions between the use of rhetoric in the white and black church.

Strengths of the Project

This project exceeded the lofty expectations held before the class began. The class was well attended with eight men who were highly interested in the topic. Out of all six courses, only one student missed one class. This high attendance only enhanced

engagement, which was incredibly rich. One of the strengths of this project was in some measure outside of my control—it was a success in large part because of the men who attended. All eight men were engaged and curious. They brought germane questions and added helpful insights when appropriate. The curriculum certainly encouraged and enabled the rich discussions and should be maintained when the course is taught again.

The logistics of the class worked well. The location, timing, and meeting space all fit the needs of the class and offered little resistance to instruction. Even the survey served as a strong catalyst for instruction, as the men regularly referred back to some of the questions or definitions from the first day.

Another similar strength of the class was the relatively uniform philosophy of ministry and philosophy of preaching. The lack of diversity in this area actually served to expedite and enhance instruction time. While this cannot always be controlled, it could be considered in the future that this class would follow a prerequisite class on basic philosophy of preaching.

Yet another strength of the course was the time taken to listen to, analyze, and discuss certain African American sermons. This gave uniform examples to discuss and evaluate among the men. Several men said this particular portion of the curriculum was the most compelling and most convincing. While it was helpful to read Jonathan Edwards or Martin Luther King Jr., to actually see and hear from H. B. Charles, S. M. Lockridge, and Robert Smith Jr., faithful, biblical preaching presented with careful and artistic rhetoric, put theory into practice right before their eyes.

A final strength of the course was the common preaching that seven of the eight men heard during the class. Not that the preaching was strong, but that the same one teaching the class was preaching before the men each Sunday. This provided almost two months of fresh examples to analyze as these men were working the course.

Overall, this project received strong reviews and there was an almost universal appeal for more. The men are eager to put into practice what they learned and to continue to study this topic on their own.

Weaknesses of the Project

No work of man is perfect, and this project is an example. Some of the weaknesses could have been avoided and some of them can be chalked up to a first time run through. The first and most glaring weakness of this project was its length. The amount of material left on the cutting room floor and the helpful tangents that were not pursued beg for at least two or three more class sessions. This is assuming the same make up of students again in the future. Should the next class not be as versed in preaching as this one, even more time would be necessary to reinforce the foundation of faithful biblical preaching. All things considered, an eight- to ten-course class would not have been overkill for such a topic as this. All the men left wanting more. This is not to say that the class was unhelpful or felt amputated in any way, but that the subject was compelling and the conversations robust. Another four to eight hours of classroom time would be welcomed. As a result of the relatively short class, multiple topics were underdeveloped. This history of African American oral tradition and preaching was only briefly explored. Examples in church history of men who used rhetoric well outside of the black church were not thoroughly examined. A few men were mentioned but there was much more to discuss with Chrysostom, Spurgeon, Whitefield, and more.

There also was not enough time in the course to adequately discuss the implementation of sacred rhetoric in the students' pulpit. This is one of the greater regrets as it felt as though men were given some weapons but not sure how to use them. They realized they could be helpful but could also be dangerous if used inappropriately or inordinately. I could see their reserved excitement and several of the men even mentioned it as they left the final class. Convinced of the need for more rhetoric and the obvious benefits of what was learned, the men did not feel as confident in their ability to put these

tools to use as I hoped they would. More time to discuss how to gradually and gracefully make changes to preaching would have been invaluable.

A second weakness to the class was a lack of individualized instruction. Each of the men in the class have preached or intend to preach in the near future, yet the class did not have any opportunity to offer feedback on the students' individual preaching. They did not have the occasion to immediately apply what they were learning in the classroom. This is a challenge in some respects because preaching requires an audience and an opportunity, and without the class becoming a preaching lab, it would be difficult to have the men all preach during the weeks the course was offered. Perhaps with enough lead time and depending on the size and make up of the class, students could look for opportunities around or during the calendar of the class. Another option might be to offer feedback on past recorded messages in light of the curriculum.

A third weakness was the result of the high level of engagement of the students. Many of the lectures did not follow the exact path of the lesson plan, due to important questions and rich discussion. I was surprised at how engaged and interactive the students were. I am certainly grateful for their participation and would not trade it for a quiet class, but I was not as prepared to reign in and guide the discussion to be as efficient as possible. This is magnified in connection with the first weakness and the shortage of time.

Ways to Improve the Project

First, I believe the course needs to be longer. More class time would allow students to learn more from men in church history who were masters of sacred rhetoric. It would also give time to better equip the men for employing the devices in regular preaching ministry.

A second, but not unrelated, improvement could be made in the structure of the course, allowing for the unexpected but immensely helpful dialogue and questions that

arose. Pre-planning such times would prevent topics from being short-changed or left out all together.

Another improvement would be individualized feedback and instruction. This would require students to record and submit a recent sermon but could make the applications more personal and practical for the individual. Another idea would be to have the students write a sermon at the end of the course for examination. Obviously, this would not address certain rhetorical skill that can only be measured when spoken, but a large portion of rhetoric can be introduced with the pen. These two additions would create more practical and personal improvements and take the class from theoretical to actual.

Theological Reflections

This project was birthed from a curiosity and self-criticism. In the process of planning, preparing, and implementing the project, some expected and some unexpected theological impressions were made. I anticipated that the project would help fortify the call to biblical preaching found in 2 Timothy 4:2, and it surely did. Book after book in the research and planning phase reminded me that preachers have been given a message and it is our obligation to convey that message clearly and carefully to the sheep we lead. Preaching is important.

Other unexpected theological impressions were made as well. As I engaged the criticism of sacred rhetoric and the statements of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, I was reminded of the danger of self-centered manipulation and the foolishness of the message we preach. Rereading D. A. Carson's words on these two chapters was convicting and worshipful.¹ In fact, I do not believe one can adequately understand the biblical expectation of the preacher if he has not come to understand Paul's words to Corinth.

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1193), 19.

As John Piper says, all preaching must be for the exultation of Christ, not of the exultation of the preacher.² This is the key distinctive between godly persuasion and wicked manipulation. Paul wrote to distinguish himself from the orators of the day. His distinction was less tactical and more theological. The sophists' words were the meat of their message, while Paul put the crucified Christ on display. The answer to a rhetorical empty shell was not the absence of the shell nor the call to paint the shell a dull beige, but to open the shell and put the pearl on full display. Preaching is to be impressive because Jesus is worthy impression, the preacher is not.

The second theological prerequisite to faithful rhetoric is the embrace of biblical tension between God's sovereign work and His use of man. Much like prayer and evangelism, a biblical understanding of preaching must be grounded in the mysterious truth that God sovereignly uses man's insufficient efforts to bring about supernatural change. This study is always humbling and refreshing, and the project forced me to swim in these deep waters yet again. How preachers preach matters, and yet God gets the glory. This truth is a regular and welcome visitor at my door, teaching me to do my absolute best to persuade and to pillow my head knowing the Spirit changes hearts and causes growth.

With these two theological pillars in place, building a philosophy of sacred rhetoric was eye-opening and enjoyable. I am even more curious to study the way God uses rhetoric in the Scriptures now that the project is finished. The limited space and time did not allow me to do more than scratch the surface of the rhetoric running through almost every page of God's Word. The remainder of the project challenged my own preaching and the way I assess preaching in general. I am more compelled biblically and theologically to master the art of preaching and to shun empty, self-centered eloquence.

² John Piper, *Expository Exultation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 44.

Personal and Participant Reflections

Anytime a class is taught it can be beneficial to reflect personally on what was accomplished and to learn from the reflections of the students as well. The final survey assisted with participant reflections, but even more important was the conversations after the class.

Personal Reflections

When my family and I took the call to pastor Cornerstone Baptist Church on Easter Sunday 2006, I was charged by the leadership to “preach the Word and the rest will work itself out.” The church has stood by her hunger and appreciation for the Word for all these years and it has been one of the greatest contexts a preacher could have. The church was patient with a young 29-year-old cutting his teeth on week in and week out preaching and has served as a great encouragement to me in ministry. This encouragement has only caused my love for preaching to grow.

When the opportunity to further my education in ministry arose, I knew it had to be connected to the pulpit in some fashion. This doctorate taught me a great deal about the history and importance of preaching and this project taught me to love the art and beauty behind it. While I have miles to go in my growth as a preacher, this project enhanced my preaching, my love for the truth, and my love for the church far more than I expected.

Participant Reflections

Due to the short amount of time at the end of the course allotted to the post-course survey and the tendency of men to be short and direct, the feedback of the men was not expansive.

Even a follow up e-mail³ did not elicit lengthy essays or elaborate answers. However, the reflections given were weighty and revealing. Even the difference in how

³ See appendix 7.

they defined key terms from the beginning to the end of the course demonstrated a measure of growth and understanding. Some of the words were even left undefined in the initial survey but were defined by the end of the course.

One of the most consistent takeaways from the men was the expansion of the role of preacher in their minds from herald to something more. They all acknowledge and agreed that the preacher could not be less than a herald, but almost all of them mentioned the benefit of seeing him as more. “He is a shepherd who cares for his sheep,” one student wrote. Still another said, “He is invested in those he communicates with, he is not a disconnected messenger.”

Another common observation that connected with the concept of an “invested” shepherd is the description of African American preaching as “engaging.” More than half of the men used that very word in their description. If preachers are invested in the lives of their people, then their words indeed should be engaging.

Two responses to the follow up question, “How did your understanding of preaching change (if any) over the course of the class?” were immensely encouraging: “My understanding of preaching has changed in that I have a greater appreciation for the preacher and the skill required to preach well. I have a greater understanding of the benefit skillful rhetoric can offer when bringing the message of God’s word to bear on the lives of those listening.” And also, “Before the class, I believed the exclusive goal of the preacher was to communicate the true meaning of a particular text. Though I still think that is the primary goal, I think there is also an obligation to utilize rhetorical devices when appropriate order to better communicate those truths.”

Overall, the men were incredibly encouraging and expressed a great deal of gratitude for being invited to participate. Their excitement is infectious, and it was enjoyable to be a part of their discovery. I look forward to even more interaction and reflections as the men have opportunity to preach. In that sense, the class has not yet ended, and we will continue the discussion for years to come.

Conclusion

The project was successful in meeting the three goals and achieving its overarching purpose. While the sample size of students was only eight, the class was an overwhelming success.

This project solidified my commitment to the biblical text and grew my appreciation for the way God has communicated to His people. More classes on the importance of rhetoric and more instruction on how to develop it are needed in the church and in the seminaries that support the church. These men drank up this information with an almost insatiable thirst. All the men desire to be the most faithful, but also the most fruitful preachers they can be.

The fruit of this class will indeed be impossible to quantify as training preachers only multiplies exponentially. Some of these men may have regular pulpits in the future and some may only have occasional opportunities, but all eight men are now better equipped to communicate God's Word and to help train up more disciples. Paul words in 2 Timothy 2:2 make me smile as I think of these men passing down these very truths to the next generation, which they will in turn pass on down to the next. Cornerstone Baptist Church will also benefit in the immediate as seven of these men have opportunities to teach and to preach here and now. First Baptist Carolina Beach will also be blessed as one of the students will take his knowledge to the south side of town and work to train men there as well. This class could be repeated, adapted, and scaled with relative ease depending on the context. I look forward to the opportunity to teach it again.

In summary, I am more convinced than ever biblical preaching should carefully but consistently employ sacred rhetoric for the increased understanding and affection of God's Word. Preaching is central to the church and the mission of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry.

APPENDIX 1

INVITATION TO SIX WEEK PREACHING CLASS

Friends,

We have a special training opportunity for you this fall in the area of preaching. I will be teaching a six-week course on biblical preaching with a special look into African American rhetoric and its place in the pulpit. We would love to have you and any other men you think would benefit from such a course join us for this time.

There will be no cost and we will meet on six Sunday evenings in October and November from 5:45-7:00pm. You will be given a survey at the beginning and again at the end.

The dates will be:

November 27, December 4, December 11, December 18, January 8, January 15

We will meet at Cornerstone Baptist Church, 2730 Northchase Parkway SE. Please bring a notebook or laptop to take notes and

You can register at

<https://registrations.planningcenteronline.com/signups/1395181/details>

APPENDIX 2

PRE- AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY

The following survey was given before and after the six-week instruction. The questions evaluated how the class may have informed or influenced students' understanding of sacred rhetoric in general and African American sacred rhetoric in specific.

Cornerstone Baptist Church

Sacred Rhetoric and African American Preaching

BP612

2 credit hours

Please fill in:

Name: _____

Age: _____

Education level: _____

Years in ministry: _____

Number of times preaching: _____

Approximate number of African American sermons heard: _____

Please define the following terms:

1. Expository Preaching
2. Rhetoric
3. Sacred Rhetoric
4. Parallelism
5. Rhythm/cadence (in speaking)
6. Dynamics

Interview questions for the class:

1. Describe the difference between teaching and preaching.
2. How is the preacher a herald?
3. How is the preacher more than a herald? Or is he not?
4. What is Paul warning against in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2?
5. What are the dangers of rhetoric and how can a preacher avoid them?

6. How would you describe African American preaching?
7. What are some of the causes for these distinctives?
8. Why does rural southern preaching or “country” preaching share similarities with African American preaching?

APPENDIX 3

“THAT’S MY KING, DO YOU KNOW HIM?” BY S. M. LOCKRIDGE

“The Bible says my King is a seven-way king..
He’s the King of the Jews; that’s a racial king.

He’s the King of Israel; that’s a national King.. He’s the King of Righteousness.
He’s the King of the Ages..
He’s the King of Heaven.

He’s the King of Glory.
He’s the King of Kings, and He’s the Lord of Lords.

That’s my King. Well. I wonder, do you know Him? David said, “The Heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork. My King is a sovereign King. No means of measure can define His limitless love. No far seeing telescope can bring into visibility the coastline of His shoreless supply. No barrier can hinder Him from pouring out His blessings.

He’s enduringly strong. He’s entirely sincere. He’s eternally steadfast. He’s immortally graceful. He’s imperially powerful. He’s impartially merciful.

Do you know Him?
He’s the greatest phenomenon that ever crossed the horizon of this world. He’s God’s Son.
He’s a sinner’s Savior..
He’s the centerpiece of civilization.
He stands in the solitude of Himself.
He’s awesome.
He’s unique.
He’s unparalleled.
He’s unprecedented.
He’s the loftiest idea in literature.
He’s the highest personality in philosophy.
He’s the supreme problem in higher criticism.
He’s the fundamental doctrine of true theology.
He’s the cardinal necessity of spiritual religion.
He’s the miracle of the age.
He’s the superlative of everything good that you choose to call Him.
He’s the only one qualified to be an all sufficient Savior

I wonder if you know Him today?
He supplies strength for the weak.

He's available for the tempted and the tried. He sympathizes and He saves.
He strengthens and sustains.
He guards and He guides.

He heals the sick.

He cleanses lepers.
He forgives sinners.
He discharges debtors.
He delivers captives.
He defends the feeble.
He blesses the young.
He serves the unfortunate. He regards the aged.
He rewards the diligent.
And He beautifies the meek.

I wonder if you know Him? Well, my King is the King. He's the key to knowledge.

He's the wellspring to wisdom.
He's the doorway of deliverance. He's the pathway of peace.
He's the roadway of righteousness. He's the highway of holiness.

He's the gateway of glory

Do you know Him? Well.
His office is manifold.

His promise is sure.
His light is matchless.
His goodness is limitless.
His mercy is everlasting.
His love never changes.
His Word is enough.
His grace is sufficient.
His reign is righteous.
And His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

I wish I could describe Him to you, but He's indescribable.

.....

Well,

He's incomprehensible. He's invincible.
He's irresistible.

You can't get Him out of your mind.
You can't get Him off of your hand.
You can't out live Him,
And you can't live without Him.
The Pharisees couldn't stand Him, but they found out they couldn't stop Him. Pilate
couldn't find any fault in Him.

The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree. Herod couldn't kill Him.
Death couldn't handle Him,
And the grave couldn't hold Him.

• • • • •

Yea!, that's my King, that's my King. Father." Yours is the Kingdom and the Power and
the Glory Forever".and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever. How long is that? And when
you get through with all the forevers, then AMEN and AMEN!

APPENDIX 4

“IT’S FRIDAY, BUT SUNDAY’S A COMIN’”
BY S. M. LOCKRIDGE

It’s Friday
Jesus is praying
Peter’s a sleeping
Judas is betraying
But Sunday’s comin’

It’s Friday
Pilate’s struggling
The council is conspiring
The crowd is vilifying
They don’t even know
That Sunday’s comin’

It’s Friday
The disciples are running
Like sheep without a shepherd
Mary’s crying
Peter is denying
But they don’t know
That Sunday’s a comin’

It’s Friday
The Romans beat my Jesus
They robe him in scarlet
They crown him with thorns
But they don’t know
That Sunday’s comin’

It’s Friday
See Jesus walking to Calvary
His blood dripping
His body stumbling
And his spirit’s burdened
But you see, it’s only Friday
Sunday’s comin’

It's Friday
The world's winning
People are sinning
And evil's grinning

It's Friday
The soldiers nail my Savior's hands
To the cross
They nail my Savior's feet
To the cross
And then they raise him up
Next to criminals

It's Friday
But let me tell you something
Sunday's comin'

It's Friday
The disciples are questioning
What has happened to their King
And the Pharisees are celebrating
That their scheming
Has been achieved
But they don't know
It's only Friday
Sunday's comin'

It's Friday
He's hanging on the cross
Feeling forsaken by his Father
Left alone and dying
Can nobody save him?...Ooooh
It's Friday
But Sunday's comin'

It's Friday
The earth trembles
The sky grows dark
My King yields his spirit

It's Friday
Hope is lost
Death has won
Sin has conquered
and Satan's just a laughin'

It's Friday
Jesus is buried
A soldier stands guard
And a rock is rolled into place

But it's Friday
It is only Friday
Sunday is a comin'!

APPENDIX 5

“I HAVE A DREAM” BY MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But 100 years later, the Negro still is not free. There are those who are asking the devotees of Civil Rights: “When will you be satisfied?” We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating “For whites only.” No, no we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until “justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day, even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day “every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”

This is our hope, this is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of

brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. This will be the day. This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning:

My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died,
land of the pilgrim's pride, From every mountainside, let freedom ring!

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. National Archives and
Records Administration

So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring
from the mighty mountains of New York.
Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring
from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado.

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.
But not only that. Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring
from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.
Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.
From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every
village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that
day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants
and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

Free at last! Free at last!
Thank God Almighty, we are free at last.

APPENDIX 6

LIST OF SERMONS

- H. B. Charles- Trust God (Dallas Theological Seminary)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTfRpJDTyrw>
- H. B. Charles- Where Does Your Help Come From? (Shiloh Church)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NrEFEPBRBI>
- Jonathan Edwards- Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trH_fyKbuZ0
- S. M. Lockridge- That's My King
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BhI4JKACUs>
- S. M. Lockridge - Its Friday But Sunday's Comin
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QS2wPotScZY>
- Robert Smith Jr.- The Glory of the Groan
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_2EIdxyWwQ
- Robert Smith Jr.- Do You Know Him?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hF6XJKt9eyU>

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING PREACHERS IN SACRED RHETORIC COMMONLY ASSOCIATED WITH AFRICAN-AMERICAN PREACHING AT CORNERSTONE BAPTIST CHURCH IN WILMINGTON, NORTH, CAROLINA

Daniel Lee Gillespie, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Matthew D. Haste

The purpose of this project was to train preachers in sacred rhetoric commonly associated with African American preaching for the improvement of biblical exposition in the context of Wilmington, North Carolina. Chapter 1 introduces the ministry context of Cornerstone Baptist church along with the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodology, definitions, and delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 provides a biblical and theological foundation for sacred rhetoric and the strengths of that rhetoric in the African American church. Chapter 3 provides a practical and theoretical basis for sacred rhetoric and the commonalities with black preaching. Chapter 4 describes the development and implementation of the project. Chapter 5 provides evaluation of the project and its goals, suggestions for improvements, and further reflection.

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