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ABSTRACT

A BIBLICAL PREACHING STRATEGY FOR THE
MINISTERS OF THE SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CENTRAL DOMINICAN
CONFERENCE

by

Ramon Araujo C.

Chairman: Eduardo Ocampo

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

A Project Report

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A BIBLICAL PREACHING STRATEGY FOR THE MINISTERS OF THE
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CENTRAL DOMINICAN CONFERENCE

Name of researcher: Ramon Araujo C.

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Eduardo Ocampo, Ph.D.

Date completed: July 1987

Problem

The problem of preaching in the Central Dominican Conference seems to be one of sermon content. Weaknesses in hermeneutical principles as well as rules applied to the biblical sermon can be detected. Even when preachers quote the Bible and try to explain the message, the biblical text is not properly discussed or explained. This situation results in poor sermon content. To correct this anomaly, this study provides a guide on Biblical Preaching to help the minister produce a better sermon to feed the church.

Method

In order to investigate the content of sermons and the principles applied to preaching in the Central Dominican Conference, a request was sent to all ministers to submit a tape-recorded sermon which they had preached during a regular Sabbath service.

The sermons were carefully studied and analyzed according to the hermeneutical criteria and homiletical rules which emerged from the review of biblical and current literature.

Results

It was found that the Dominican preachers do not use the rules of interpretation properly to build the content of their sermons, thus reflecting poor biblical sermon content.

Conclusion

The result of this study has created an awareness in the body of ministers of the Central Dominican Conference about the importance of analyzing, explaining, and applying in their sermons what the Bible says.

By using the strategy recommended by this study, a follow-up workshop was conducted for the Dominican ministers in which it was found that eighteen of the twenty participants improved the content of their sermons. It can be theorized that the suggested sermon-writing techniques were proven to be helpful in improving the content of Biblical sermons.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A BIBLICAL PREACHING STRATEGY FOR THE
MINISTERS OF THE SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CENTRAL DOMINICAN
CONFERENCE

A Project Report
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

By
Ramon Araujo C.

July 1987

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MINISTERS OF THE SEVENTH-DAY
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DEDICATION

To my beloved wife Laurita, who has worked as hard as I have that this work could be done successfully. After God's help no other has identified so much with this research as she. May the Lord continue bestowing his blessings upon her.

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To God our heavenly Father, the Son our Redeemer, and to the Eternal Comforter be the glory and the honor for seeing this task through.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It has been commonly understood that preaching, as a means of transmitting God's message to men has two main objectives:

(1) to challenge the church to share with others the good news of salvation in Christ, and (2) to build up the faith of the believers through the teaching and explanation of the original and contemporary meaning of the Word of God.¹

In studying these two objectives, one can clearly see that the first one has played a primary role in the development of the church, particularly in countries where the influence of the Spanish culture predominates. In the words of one Adventist worker, in those places "evangelism is a kind of lifestyle for modern Adventists."

Outreach evangelistic preaching effectively and profitably contributes to the numerical growth of the church. However, once new converts are made, their spiritual needs demand a different sort of preaching. They need to be nurtured with the Word of God served as "solid food."

Throughout the years, Adventist preaching in the Dominican Republic has followed one pattern. Since some of the parishioners seem to welcome the type of non-demanding messages they receive,

¹James Crane, El Sermon Eficaz (El Paso, TX: Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, 1961), p. 78.

one might think that no improvement is needed. On the contrary! When a minister prepares himself to give a demanding and relevant biblical message, as Fant and Person¹ assert, the response is evident.

A biblical sermon is the product of both hermeneutical principles and principles of preaching. According to contemporary scholars like Miller² and Robinson,³ sermon construction according to these principles allows the audience to receive that which the Lord is eager to reveal to them through His word for the satisfaction of their needs.

The explanation, illustration, and application of the Word of God were the key elements in the formation and rapid growth of the NT early church (Acts 17:2-4). The content of the message reflected the salvific work of God in Christ. If that was the case in the past the proper use of tools to explain, illustrate, and apply the truth may generate the same results today.

In the present research, the preaching situation in the Central Dominican Conference is analyzed and evaluated according to contemporary concepts; the weaknesses--if any--in the principles of interpretation applied to preaching are identified; and a practical guide for preparing biblical sermons is proposed. In order to correct discovered weaknesses, I wish

¹Clyde E. Fant and W. M. Person, Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1971), p. 5.

²Donald Miller, The Way to Biblical Preaching (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 26.

³Haddon W. Robinson, Biblical Preaching (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 19.

to state in advance that this study employs only those hermeneutical principles and homiletical rules that are related to the biblical sermon.

Statement of the Problem

The greatest problem of preaching in the Central Dominican Conference seems to be one of sermon content. Weaknesses in hermeneutical principles applied to biblical sermons are detected.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was two-fold: (1) to investigate and analyze the content of sermons preached by ministers of the Central Dominican Conference as the basis for (2) providing them with principles of biblical hermeneutics and homiletical rules as they relate to biblical preaching.

Justification of the Project

There is a need in the Dominican Republic for more solid presentation of biblical truths in order that they may be applied in the lives of the members. The large amount of preaching required of the ministers makes the situation even more critical. It is therefore imperative that ministers receive adequate training in learning and applying sound biblical preaching principles in a continued education program involving retreats and workers meetings.

As far as I could ascertain, no attempt of this nature has been made in the past. This present project could be the beginning of further studies and explorations in behalf of the betterment of preaching in the Central Dominican Conference.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

In order to gather information as the basis for this study, a questionnaire was sent to forty ministers of the Central Dominican Conference. This number included ordained and unordained ministers ranging in experience from one to twenty-two years; some were administrators and departmental secretaries. The majority of the group (85 percent) have fewer than fifteen years working experience, 92 percent possess a college education, and 84 percent hold a B.A. in Theology. The whole group was used as the population for the questionnaire which consisted of nine questions to be answered with Yes, No, or Don't Know. Thirty-two persons (80 percent), an adequate response for this type of instrument, returned the questionnaire.

The following data were gathered from the questionnaire:

1. According to the response to the first question, twenty-eight ministers (87 percent) preach topical sermons on biblical truths; four said they do not.

2. The second question asked the respondents if they preached biblical sermons based on a passage of Scripture requiring an exploration of the passage, rather than based on a topic. Because of their academic skills, they were supposed to know what a biblical sermon was. Twenty-five persons (78 percent) answered No, and one did not know.

3. The ministers were asked if they preach so that the whole sermon is an exposition of the one passage of Scripture. Again, 78 percent said they do, four persons said they do not, one did not know and two did not respond.

4. To the question, "Do you study the passage of Scripture in its best translation so that you are quite sure you know what it says?" twenty-five respondents answered Yes, three answered No, and four did not know.

5. Twenty-seven ministers (84 percent) claimed they interpret the passage so that they themselves know what it means, three do not do it, and two did not know how to answer.

6. The sixth question asked whether the ministers interpret the passage in their sermon so the hearers know what it means. Twenty-four ministers (75 percent) gave positive answers while six answered in the negative, and two did not know.

7. Thirty ministers (93 percent) said they apply the truth of the passage so that the hearers understand what God would have them be or do, but two said they do not apply it.

8. Twenty-one preachers (66 percent) think that pastoral preaching should be textual (expository) as well as topical. However, six said they did not think so, and five did not know.

9. Thirty-two (100 percent) of the ministers would like a better understanding of how to preach expository sermons.

At the end of the questionnaire, comments or further questions were encouraged. Most did not reply, but some expressed their desire to improve their knowledge about preaching. One commented, "I cannot preach about a topic expounding one single verse." Another said, "I want to receive more instruction regarding this theme."

Evaluation and Analysis of the Questionnaire

It was stated above that preaching in the Central Dominican Conference needs improvement and that preachers need training in the proper use of biblical preaching principles.¹ This situation was not evident from the results of the questionnaire. Apparently, most of the pastors think they have no problem with biblical preaching. However, an analysis of the taped sermons reveal a lack of sound hermeneutics. Thus, one of the major problems could be the minister's lack of awareness of his situation. This further justifies the present research about preaching in the Central Dominican Conference.

Methodology of the Study

Procedure

In order to investigate the content and interpretation principles applied to preaching in the Central Dominican Conference, a request was sent to all ministers to submit a tape-recorded biblical sermon which they had preached during a regular Sabbath service. No specifications were given as to the type of biblical sermon to be used since the purpose of the study was to find out whether they apply the hermeneutical principles and homiletical rules in their preaching.

The sermons were carefully studied and analyzed according to the hermeneutical criteria which emerged from the review of biblical and current literature on biblical preaching, and the homiletical rules related to biblical sermons.

¹This has been my personal opinion as co-worker and Conference President.

Population

The population for this study consisted of the forty ministers and administrators presently working in the Central Dominican Conference. Due to the restraints of space and time, a sample of fifteen was randomly chosen by computer, with the assistance of the Statistical Computing Service of Andrews University.

Instrument

In order to discover how the principles of hermeneutics were being applied to preaching, criteria had to be chosen. These were selected from the Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics prepared by the Biblical Research Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists; with the addition of some specific homiletical principles related to the research.

Hermeneutical principles

The chosen hermeneutical principles are as follows:

1. All sermons must be based on the Bible.
2. Proper interpretation of biblical words and sentences: word or words being stressed in the sermon must be as carrying the idea that the original writer intended.
3. Context and historical background. An awareness of the author, the circumstances of writing, the time and place of writing, and the reason for writing is essential.

Homiletical principles

A passage chosen for the sermon can be considered appropriate if:

1. the passage has been explained and interpreted,

2. the passage has been applied to the specific needs of the people to whom the message has been addressed,
3. the history of salvation has played a prominent role in the content of the message, and
4. the message has used appropriate illustrations.

Limitations of the Study

This study, like many others of the same kind, has certain limitations. Rather than dealing with all aspects of homiletics as was the original intent, circumstances of space and time forced a delimitation to only those aspects which apply to the sound application of hermeneutical principles, and some relevant homiletical rules.

Only one sermon of each minister was analyzed, although it would have been more reliable to have more than one. In that case, this work would have been too lengthy.

Finally, although I traveled to the Dominican Republic to encourage and motivate the ministers to participate in the present study, I was not present in the actual preaching situations that were to be analyzed.

Organization of the Project/ Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. After the introductory chapter, the second one offers a review of related literature. The first part of the second chapter examines biblical literature for a clearer concept about preaching in the Old and New Testaments; the second part reviews current literature and the conclusions drawn from it.

In the third chapter I attempt to evaluate and analyze the preaching situation in the Central Dominican Conference by means of a brief historical background of the Seventh-day Adventist churches, and the taped sermons, along with the development of a guide for the preparation of expository sermons.

The strategy to be followed with the development of a guide for the preparation of expository sermons, to be used in a continuing education program for ministers, along with the recommendations, are presented in chapter four. Finally, there are the bibliography, the questionnaire and the appendices which include letters sent to the ministers, and the results of a workshop shared with the ministers in the Central Dominican Conference.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of clarity in this study, the following definitions are employed:

Exegesis. The word exegesis comes from the Greek word that means "to read out of." Applied to texts, it denotes "the reading out of the meaning." The noun could refer to "interpretation" or "explanation." The reading of a text or hearing of a statement to be understood and interpreted involves an exegesis.¹

Hermeneutics. Derived from the Greek word Hermeneutik, from Hermeneuo, "it is the science that teaches us the principles, laws, and methods of interpretation."² "Hermeneutics and exegesis

¹L. Berkhof, Principles of Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), p. 11.

²Ibid., p. 13.

are related to each other as theory and practice. The one is the science, the other, an art.¹

Kerygma. This term comes from the Greek word κηρυσσω, "to cry," "to lead out of," "to draw out of," "to proclaim after the manner of a herald." It means the proclamation of the salvific act of God in Christ for mankind.

Biblical Preaching. All preaching is biblical² preaching because "the Bible is the unique source and fountainhead of Christian preaching;³ because it "utilizes the whole Word of God and basically only the Word"⁴ and because God has manifested his Word through preaching."⁵ There are many sound definitions of Biblical Preaching. Some of them are presented by way of example:

1. Biblical preaching is not preaching about the Bible, but preaching the Bible. Expository preaching begins in the Bible and ends in the Bible and all that intervenes springs from the Bible. Secondary sources can be employed; illustrations gathered from human experience, science, or extra-Biblical material are used with the holy purpose of elucidating the portion of Scripture chosen whatever its length, and enforce its claims upon the hearers.⁶
2. Biblical preaching is preaching from a biblical text.⁷

¹James Bragas, How to Prepare Biblical Messages (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1983), pp. 21-55.

²Lloyd Perry, Manual for Biblical Preaching (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 7.

³Ibid.

⁴Faris Whitesell, The Art of Biblical Preaching (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), p. 16.

⁵Titus 1:3.

⁶Merill F. Unger, Principles of Expository Preaching (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), p. 33.

⁷John Knox, The Integrity of Preaching (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), p. 15.

3. All true preaching rests upon the basic affirmation: Thus says the Lord.¹
4. Biblical preaching is preaching with sound biblical support molded throughout the teachings and spirit of the Bible.²
5. All biblical preaching is contemporary dialogue.³
6. Preaching is a manifestation of the incarnated Word from the written word through the spoken word.⁴
7. Preaching from the Bible serves the dual purpose of instructing the people in the Scriptures through the very art of preaching and stimulating their own inquiry into the Bible as well.⁵

The definitions considered above insist that the biblical sermon must interpret the biblical passage chosen and translate its content to contemporary needs. Robinson⁶ and Koller⁷ believe that the expository sermon is the biblical sermon par excellence, and it is the one that best transmits and interprets what God has said in his Word to contemporary people.

Thus, for the purpose of this paper, Biblical Preaching is the persuasive proclamation that brings man and God face to face through the exegetical analysis, the interpretation in a contemporary context, and the application to the needs of the listeners of a biblical passage.

¹Charles Koller, Expository Preaching Without Notes (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), p. 15.

²Perry, p. 7.

³Franklyn Segler, Christian Worship (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), p. 128.

⁴W. E. Sangter, The Craft of Sermon Constructions (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951), p. 14.

⁵Whitesell, pp. 29-36.

⁶Robinson, pp. 18-20.

⁷Koller, p. 18.

Method of Biblical Preaching. "Biblical preaching is not confined to any single method of handling the Scriptures, but utilizes all of the standard homiletical procedures."¹ That means that no matter whether the message be textual, topical, or expository, if its approach to the subject is based on the Scriptures and if it gives biblical light on the contemporary setting, it is a good biblical preaching method.

¹Whitesell, p. 16.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to discover the characteristics of a biblical sermon by analyzing some samples from the Old and New Testament, as well as from the current literature on the theme. Those characteristics, in turn are used as the criteria for analyzing the sermons submitted to the researcher by Dominican preachers.

Preaching in the Old Testament

Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah preserves a series of sermons whose content can be studied. In this section, a general review of the most outstanding characteristics, common to all, is presented and one of these sermons is considered in particular.

Jeremiah proclaimed the need for a new heart (31:33), because corruption has its source in man's heart (17:9), but God is the only one who could produce such a change (24:7; 31:31-34). Other issues in the content of Jeremiah's messages are:

1. God--fountain of living waters (2:12); Lord of history (2:17); transcendent and immanent (23:23); a husband, according to (2:2).

2. Israel--the nation and the individual--God's elected people (33:24); choice wine (2:21); the beloved of God (11:5);

flock (13:17); whom he loved with everlasting love (31:3); a marriage relationship (2:2); sons (3:19, 22).

3. Sin and repentance--honesty (7:58); attitude toward God (2:22; 5:3); repentance (3:1-44).

4. The future hope--32:15; 29:10-14; 31:2-6; 15-22; 31-34.

5. The Messianic Hope--23:5, 6; 33:15, 16.¹

Use of scriptures

By taking a brief look at Jeremiah's addresses, one should be able to identify the way in which he used the scriptures. Henry Cazelles,² exploring Jeremiah's utterances, recognizes the prophet's abundant use of the Deuteronomic writings: "To rebel against Yahweh and not listen to his voice" (Deut 9:16, 23 and 40:3); "For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure wherewith the Lord was wroth against you. . . ." (Deut 9:19 and Jer 39:17); "The land which I swore to their fathers unto them" (Deut 10:11 and Jer 32:22); "The circumcision of the heart" (Deut 10:16 and Jer 9:25; 4:4); "Under every green tree" (Deut 12:2 and Jer 2:20); "And it shall be a ruin for ever" (Deut 13:17 and Jer 49:2); "The prophet who speaks what God has not commanded him to speak (Deut 18:20 and Jer 29:23); "Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt with mighty hand and outstretched arm, signs and wonders. . . ." (Deut 26:8, 9 and Jer 32:21-22).

In addition, Cazelles concludes by saying of the Jeremianic sermons, "When closely examined, these parallels (those pointed out

¹J. A. Thompson, The Book of Jeremiah (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980), pp. 107-112.

²Henri Cazelles, "Jeremiah and Deuteronomy," in A Prophet to the Nations, ed. Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacs (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), p. 92.

on page 14) should lead one to think that Jeremiah is dependent upon this law,"¹ probably talking about the Mosaic laws.²

Perhaps the abundant use of those biblical writings is explained by noting that at the time of Jeremiah's writings the Deuteronomic books which had been found in 621 B.C. and had given a great impulse to Josiah's reform were very popular.³ On the other hand, Feinberg gives credit to Jeremiah as a reverent student of Scriptures. Note his statement:

Unquestionably, Jeremiah was a reverent student of scriptures. Thus, he leans heavily on early portions of the Old Testament. . . . He was familiar with the Pentateuch, especially Deuteronomy. Some 66 passages from Deuteronomy find echo in Jeremiah's eighty-six references to the book.⁴

Thus, Jeremiah was not only familiar with the Deuteronomic compilation but was as evidenced by Jer 3:15 and Deut 24:1, 4 also acquainted with Moses' original writings. Note also that Jer 7:23-26 seems to be a literal quotation from Deut 5:33; 4:40. Here the prophet probably has in mind the giving of the ten commandments.⁵

¹Ibid., p. 96.

²Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1917), p. 414.

³Norman C. Habel, Commentary Jeremiah-Lamentations (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1968), p. 12.

⁴Charles Feinberg, Jeremiah, A Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1982), p. 12.

⁵Feinberg, p. 76.

The Temple Sermon (Jer 7:1; 10:25)

Apparently, this material contains three sermons¹ preached on three different occasions.² These occasions, in Jeremiah's case, probably all had to do with the religious feasts which gathered many people in the temple.³

The sermon is organized as follows: trust of the people in the temple (7:1-8:3); resistance of the people to any kind of reform (8:4-9:21); and the means of escape from destruction--the way of salvation lies in accepting the Lord as the true God (9:22-10:25). The close relationship of the first part of this sermon to other Scriptures is worth considering: 7:3 is related to Deut 7:12-15; 7:7; and to Deut 4:40, while 7:5-7 is related to Deut 14:29; 24:19-21; and chaps. 28-30.

The prophet probably also based his message on the pronouncements made by his predecessors regarding the temple: Amos 5:21-24; Isa 1:11-12, 16-17; and Mic 3:9-12. Several noteworthy points arise in a critical study of these passages from Jeremiah:

1. The prophet made use of the people's past history as recorded in 7:22-26 to study and analyze God's behavior in behalf of his people and the people's subsequent reaction. The interpretation of that incident is applied to his contemporaries.

2. The texts are quoted but not explained. Biblical terms coming from the book of Deuteronomy (6:3; 4:40) as well as from the

¹C. F. Keil and G. Delitzch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1960), p. 151.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 154.

Shilohan incident as a historical event are literally interpreted.

3. A very familiar illustration is used to clarify what the prophet intended to say (Shiloh, vs. 12).

4. God's love and mercy for repentant sinners, rather than a plan to destroy them (26:13), is evident.

5. The message is relevant. It was given at a time when the nation faced the crisis resulting from the non-realization of their dreams of a Davidic reign.¹

Probably the national leaders sent the people to ask for protection in the temple (26:2), but the opposition on the part of the prophet to that behavior and his boldness in the delivering of his message against people's beliefs brought about the series of messages.²

Ezekiel

Ezekiel is known as the preacher of the captivity and the restoration. His messages clarify God's purpose in captivity and his frequent use of parables and illustrations made his messages practical and effective for his listeners.

Ezekiel's messages concisely outline the people's rebellion (in the three allegories of chaps. 16, 20, and 23 and God's absolute justice (3:17; 18:23). The prophet also emphasizes that everything God does is for the sake of his name (36:22, 38); that God is a shepherd (34:11-16); and that God acts to bring repentance (36:31).

¹Romaine Stanley Hooper, "Jeremiah," The Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), 5:871.

²Ibid.

Use of the Bible

In the sermon recorded in chap. 20, one notes Ezekiel's relationship to existing Scriptures and the way in which he applied them in his sermons. The entire message is founded on the spiritual history of Israel and is presented in three stages: (1) By God's command, the prophet reminds the elders of the many times their forefathers rebelled against God in the desert, and of the punishments (always merciful) that God gave them. (2) Applying the narrative to his present audience, Ezekiel denounces their rebellion, stating that since they are no better than their fathers, God will also punish them according to the warnings of His law. (3) Ezekiel declares that at the end of the punishment, God will still gather his church and he will give it knowledge about its sins and about itself. He will love it and give it grace so that it might serve Him.¹

Ezekiel begins his sermon by recalling the moment when Moses returned to Egypt with the gracious message of Jehovah (Exod 4:29-31).² He then continues the development of his message with the following harmonious progression:

Apostasy in Egypt	20:5-8	Deut 4:37; 7:6-7
Apostasy in the Wilderness	20:9-26	Num 14:13-19; Exod 31:13-17
Apostasy in Canaan	20:27-29	Lev 23:13, 18; Deut 12:2-3

¹E. L. Allen, "Ezekiel," The Interpreter's Bible, 6:167.

²H. L. Ellison, Ezekiel, the Man and His Message (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1956), p. 78.

the Old Testament prophetic messages and the sermonic preaching of the early Christian church. Briliot affirms that "use of the oral lecture in the service is a trait that unites Judaism and Christianity."¹ These two are the only religions that make of the Word the main vehicle of the liturgy, or holy acts.² This makes it possible to presuppose why the explanation and interpretation of the Word play so important a role in their religions.

Preaching in the New Testament

The sermonic form of biblical preaching finds its most effective expression in the New Testament with the preaching of Jesus and the apostles. From the advent of Christ, the message transforms itself into an evangelistic proclamation. Friedrich, talking about Jesus' preaching, says: "His exposition was proclamation and his teaching of the coming of the kingdom became the challenge asking for decision for or against it."³ The cold reading and spiritless commentary gave way to the kerygmatic form called proclamation.⁴

the laws; the haphtarah, or reading from the prophet; the Derashah, or 'investigation, study' a sermon either by the one reading from the prophets or by another member of the congregation; the benediction pronounced by a priest if one was present" ("Synagogue," Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (1960), pp. 1055-56.

¹Yngue Briliot, A Brief History of Preaching (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1905), p. 2.

²Ibid., p. 20.

³Gerhard Friedrich, "Kerusso in the New Testament," TDN (1976), 3:713.

⁴Ibid.

The Sermons of Jesus

Jesus' preaching attracted everyone's attention because of its double nature. Mark identifies Christ as a preacher "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14), yet at the same time Jesus is the kingdom among us," (Matt 12:28; Luke 17:21). His message is both a proclamation of good news and an exposition of the behavior which may be possessed by those who receive it (Mark 1:21). His preaching was characterized by a wonderful union of power and charm. Its dominant note was authority, and his addresses displayed supreme confidence in God, in himself, in his mission and in his message."¹

The people responded well to him and pointed to him as a prophet (Matt 16:14), thus leading to the presupposition that they related the style and content of his preaching to the function they knew of their prophets. Therefore, by relating Jesus to the prophets (Matt 16:14), the people who heard him became convinced of the urgency of his message--an urgent call to receive the kingdom² (Matt 4:17) at the opportune time (Mark 1:15). This sense of urgency represented in such commands as "Repent" (Mark 1:15), "seek first the kingdom" (Matt 6:33), "follow me" (Matt 9:9) demanded an answer without delay.

¹Edwin Charles Dargan, A History of Preaching (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), p. 2.

²In the NT the preaching of John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles and others is described by the use of some thirty different terms. The most important are keryssein, "to herald," "to proclaim" (used sixty-one times, kerygma about nine times); evaggelizesthai, "to publish good news" (used over fifty times, evaggelion over seventy times); and didaskein, "to teach (used around ninety times). . . . Everett F. Harrison, Baker's Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 414.

Nature of Jesus' preaching

Since he first appeared in public as the proclaimer of the Word, Jesus, in his preaching, constituted the motive and theme for those who heard him. He attracted multitudes from every social stratum. Like that of the Jewish masters, Jesus' messages were founded on the teachings of the Old Testament. In Capernaum, he used Isa 60:1 to deliver his first recorded expository sermon; his preaching carried the mosaic seal (John 6:30-35). However, his interpretation was fresh and appropriate. Harwood Pattison makes the following analysis of Jesus' preaching:

1. It was extremely natural. So unaffected was it, so entirely free of all artifices that to speak of the eloquence of Jesus, still more his elocution, seems almost profane.
2. While there are profound depths in the truths Jesus taught the force in which he expressed them was as clear as it was natural.
3. The very words which he chooses are pictures in themselves. (The Beatitudes, uttered in the sermon on the Mount.)
4. He had a marvelous skill in packing a truth into a sentence. ("Where the treasure is, there the heart will be also." "Cast no pearls before swine.")
5. His similes remain inimitable (the prodigal son, the sower going forth to sow.)
6. He often used metaphors. (John the Baptist is a reed shaken by the wind; the first disciples are called fishers of men; Herod is a fox.)
7. His teaching was often highly dramatic. (The little child first set in the midst of his disciples, then cradled in his arms, taught them the secret of true gentleness; the basin and the towel toward his disciples feet, a lesson of humility.)
8. It is astonishing how even the imperfect record of his discourses reflects the time in which he lived, the land of his birth, youth and manhood and the people among whom he moved.
9. The Old Testament's Scriptures were the source of his teachings.

10. His teaching showed a progressive consistency (e.g., Nicodemus he talked of the new birth, but to the woman of Samaria, of the spiritual character of true worship).¹

Jesus' Biblical preaching

Jesus' main interest lay in expounding the true meanings in Biblical sayings. Starting with Moses' writings, he taught all the biblical statements so as to convey to his hearers a current application of those teachings. (Luke 24:27).

His addresses were based on Old Testament propositions made relevant to his own time. For him, the Law of Moses was the Word of God (Mark 7:10-13). When he talked about bread (John 6:35), his propositions were founded on Exod 16:14-15. In the same way, his discourses about the responsibilities of marriage were based on Gen 2:24. His suffering and death are explained through abundant biblical statements such as Isa 53; Ps 41:9; Zech 13:7. Yet his messages were relevant to the current situation and to the needs of his audience. McKenna, addressing the effectiveness of Jesus' preaching says, "Because he lived on the raw edge of human need, his proclamation of truth always had a personal touch in which men and women saw themselves."²

Clearly, Jesus' preaching not only positively affected the feeling of those who heard him, but these messages were often prefaced by his awareness of their personal needs. It happened when he talked to a single hearer--the Samaritan (John 4:39)--and also

¹C. Harwood Pattison, The History of Christian Preaching (Philadelphia: American Baptist Pub. Society, 1903), pp. 15-25.

²David Loren McKenna, The Jesus Model (Waco, TX: Word Books Pub., 1977), p. 158.

when he talked to multitudes--the Samaritans (John 4:42).

Douglas White asserts that Jesus was superior to all previous expositors. He depicts Jesus' preaching as "heart-searching interpretation and application of the truth, to convince."¹

The most notable example of Christ's exposition is recorded in Luke 4:16-22.² The original context of that passage refers to the coming deliverance of Jerusalem and the restoration of the Jews from the captivity in Babylon; but according to Thompson, "now Jesus applies the prophecy to the new and greater deliverance that he is bringing."³

This message, Jesus' ministry is to be seen as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. His ministry has an eschatological approach in the sense that "this day the Scriptures have come to fulfillment and the last day has begun, the era of salvation has arrived."⁴

Jesus' eschatological discourses

Jesus' eschatological discourses likewise find support in the biblical teachings. When he analyzed upcoming events, he took

¹Douglas N. White, Predicacion Expositiva (El Paso, TX: Casa Bta. de Pubs., 1980), pp. 18-19.

²"Though he read two verses in Isa 61, it is quite possible even probable, that he gave them an extended exposition of those statements in their context. Only what he began to say 'unto them' is recorded for us" (ibid., p. 21)..

³H. P. Thompson, The Gospel According to Luke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 91.

⁴Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke (Exeter, England: Paternoster Press, 1978), p. 178.

his point of departure from similar biblical situations: "The end of the world will be like it was in the days of Noah" (Matt 24:37); "the punishment for Sodom and Gomorrah will be more tolerable" than for those who reject his servants (Matt 10:15). Thus, his preaching along with his appeals carried strong biblical content: "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). The expression "as it is written," found often in Jesus' speeches and in private conversation with disciples (Luke 24:46; Mark 14:27), occurs as Jesus supports his statements with the biblical teachings which he himself had inspired.

Jesus' Messianic messages

Jesus' messages are centered around Christ throughout the Scriptures. He is "the anointed one" (Luke 4:21); the "living bread" (John 6:35); the "living water" (John 4:14); the "good shepherd" (John 11:14); "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6); "the door" (John 10:9); "the resurrection" (John 11:15); "the judge" (John 5:22); "the husband" (Matt 25:10); "the wine" (John 15:1, 5); "the saviour" (John 12:47); "the eternal life" (John 17:13); and "God" (John 14:10, 11).

It is interesting to note that many of these symbols had pointed to the coming Messiah in the Old Testament. When Jesus presented his message, the symbols familiar to the audience gave them the opportunity to compare the type with the antitype, and to establish the analogy.

Thus the essential elements of Jesus' biblical teachings are found in his use of the Bible as the foundation of his preaching (Matt 12-40-42), the interpretation he gives to the passages (Luke

20:21), and the application of His teachings to present needs existing among his hearers (John 7:38, 39). The effectiveness of His messages is evidenced by the reaction of those who heard him: "All men seek for thee" (Mark 1:37); "of a truth this is the Prophet" (John 7:40); "never man spoke like this man" (John 7:46); "our hearts burned within us" (Luke 24:32); "we know that he is indeed the Christ" (John 4:42). Undoubtedly his sermons were relevant.

Analysis of the Sermon on the Mount

Since the content of Jesus' sermons has been briefly studied collectively it would be convenient to take a closer look at one of them as a specific example. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-7:29) is not the exposition of a single passage, because as Augsburg says, it "may incorporate excerpts of numerous messages Jesus gave."¹ Nevertheless, it has been chosen for its expository nature and organical completeness.²

A series of contrasts are used to point out the purpose of the sermon. Ellis recognizes

. . . the contrast between the teaching of the Old Testament law by the Pharisees and their schools, and the superiority of the new law; the superiority of Jesus over/against Moses; the superiority of Christian discipleship over/against the disciples of the old law as expounded by the Pharisees.³

In this assertion Jesus is not only the new Moses, but "one

¹Myron S. Augsburg, The Communicators Commentary on Matthew (Waco, TX: Word Book Pub., 1982), p. 59.

²Matt 5:31 seems to be in contradiction with the expository nature of the message, but Mark 10:6-9 sheds light upon its true interpretation.

³Peter F. Ellis, Matthew (Collegeville, MN: Order of St. Benedict, 1973), p. 36.

who speaks in the place of God,"¹ one who is greater than Moses. By Christ's time biblical messages had suffered some misinterpretation and it was necessary to hear someone with authority trace the right principles.²

According to Augsburg, it is precisely that "Jesus introduces a basic element of hermeneutics, biblical interpretation while affirming the continuing relevance and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures."³

As the expression "the kingdom of Heaven" is repeated again and again through the discourse (5:3, 10, 19, 20; 6:10, 33; 7:21), it could be the general theme of the sermon whose content is distributed as follows: the citizen of the kingdom (5:2-15), the righteousness of the kingdom (5:17-48); the exemplary citizenship of the kingdom (7:1-12); conclusion (7:13-27).⁴

It seems clear that in presenting this sermon Jesus was moved to call for a new vision, or a new approach to the kingdom of God in the contemporary thinking of the people. "It outlines the

¹John P. Meier, Matthew (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980), p. 38.

²It is in the light of these frequent ancient Jewish misinterpretations of the Bible that we can understand that Jesus said to the Pharisee: "For the sake of your tradition you have made void the Word of God" (Matt 15:6); and to the Saducees: "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (Matt 22:29)" (Hyde, p. 26).

³Augsburger, p. 69.

⁴"Our Lord's proclamation of the kingdom of God was associated with a new conception of the infinite loving kindness of the heavenly Father. His message reflected the true character of God (John 14:11, 12)" (C. H. Dodd, Apostolic Preaching [New York: Harper & Brothers Pubs., 1949], p. 4).

kind of life which is expected of the new community."¹ The message is logically organized and biblically centered--the Old Testament is cited over and over again, and its teachings and authority are reaffirmed (Matt 5:17-19).

In summary, Jesus was first among all preachers.² His proclamation and teaching of the Word of God through public discourse became an essential and permanent trait of the Christian religion.³

Apostolic Preaching

In a broader term, says Kerr, "apostolic preaching began on the Day of Pentecost."⁴ It is worthy of consideration that the neotestamental preaching follows a logical sequence, a progressive movement without interruption. John the Baptist preached the coming kingdom; Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was at hand; but from Pentecost on, preaching proclaimed that the kingdom had already come. Christ preached the kingdom, but the apostles preached Christ.

Using sundry different titles, they identified the kingdom with Jesus: "to teach and preach Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42); "this Jesus" (Acts 17:3); "the Christ" (Acts 8:5); "the gospel" (Acts 8:25); "the Word of God" (Acts 8:4); "Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18); "the Word" (Acts 8:4); "good tidings concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 8:12); "Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23); "the word of the cross" (1 Cor 1:18). All these titles are not necessarily concentrated within the literal phrase "the kingdom,"

¹Augsburger, p. 59.

²Dargan, p. 7.

³Ibid.

⁴Hugh Thompson Kerr, Preaching in the Early Church (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1942), p. 14.

however, much evidence exists to show that the kingdom as such refers to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.¹ Thus their preaching was eminently Christ-centered.

From the time of apostolic preaching, the kerygma was not only the act of proclaiming, but in addition, the thing proclaimed.² The essence of the New Testament teachings are bound together by means of the kerygma. Using the words of Hunter, "the pattern of the kerygma runs right through the New Testament giving to it, amid all its diversities, a deep essential unity."³

Kerygma content

The apostolic message is distinct from that of the synagogue. In the latter, the Bible is read, the content is analyzed, and finally an exhortation follows, or a command to obey the teaching is given. The apostolic kerygma, in addition, injects the enthusiasm and force of an extraordinary event, something that has just occurred--the death and resurrection of Jesus. The audience's reaction is different because of the new element between hearers and the preachers. They are guilty of Christ's death (Acts 3:13-15).

¹Scholarship as well as experience, attests the fact that the preaching of Christ, past, present, and to come, crucified, risen and ever living, reflects and repeats the true kerygma of the NT." Archibald Hunter, The Message of the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1944), p. 24.

²"Both ideas lie at the heart of the kerygma; as content of the message and as the act of preaching. Thus both, as witness to past event and experience of present event, the kerygma is central in primitive Christianity and contemporary theology." James Robinson, "A New Testament Quest of the Historical Jesus," Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 25 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1959), pp. 41-43.

³Archibald Hunter, Introduction to New Testament Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 68.

Therefore they have to do something with the message: "Repent and be baptized in Christ" (Acts 3:19; 2:38). "What God has done gives authority"¹ because what is being proclaimed points out that redeeming act.

The emphasis in apostolic preaching reaches its climax with the resurrection of Christ. Thereafter, biblical exposition is not only a review of past history without fervent appeals, or challenges to act differently, but an interpretation and application of its fulfillment in Christ. Salvation has come only through the risen Christ (Acts 4:12). Thus, the kerygma becomes an effective way to proclaim the good news. Kamphaus recognizes this assertion when he says:

The resurrection of Jesus is--this is what Paul is saying--the basis and at the same time the medium of the Christian faith. By it the preaching of the Christian message stands or falls. This preaching lives because Christ lives and is alive in it. Hence it is that the witness to the resurrection of Jesus has become right from the outset the heart and center of the Christian kerygma.²

It would be fair to admit that the influence of the apostolic message went beyond any other type of message because its content rested on the two basic events in which humanity was involved: The Christ who died for the sinners, and the Christ who was risen to save "those who believe" (John 3:15). Paul transforms these two events in the formula of his preaching:

I delivered unto you, first of all, that which also I received: That Christ died for our sins, according to the

¹Claude Thompson, Theology of the Kerygma (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 2.

²Frank Kamphaus, The Gospel for Preachers and Teachers (London: Sheed and Word, 1974), p. 11.

Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor 15:3, 4)

With the proclamation of this formula, the apostolic message gave a new dimension to the Old Testament teachings, because its content basically came up from it. It helped the hearers see the fulfillment in present events of issues recorded in the past. Thus, Peter's narrative sermons as much as Paul's, shed light on the present through proclamation. This manifested the new dimension of the apostolic preaching.¹

The only biblical authority the apostles could resort to was the Old Testament writings, thus their messages became expositions of what the prophets wrote about the promised Messiah. Peter's message to Cornelius is based on the words God gave Israel concerning Jesus (Acts 10:36-48); Stephen's message points out through biblical exposition how Jesus became the Redeemer and Saviour (Acts 7); Philip just opened the Scriptures and expounded what it said about Jesus (Acts 8:35); Paul also followed the same pattern (Acts 13:17-25; 17:2). For these preachers, the Bible of the Old Testament was not only the most important book, it was the only authority in transmitting God's inspired words.

The sermons of Peter

A brief analysis of Peter's first recorded sermon is made here. "It is a kind of pattern that will be followed by other

¹"Peter's address on the Day of Pentecost was preached in a new dimension. No longer was it necessary to say that the kingdom of God was at hand, the apostles now could proclaim that the kingdom had come. The promised day of the Lord was ushering" (Holland, p. 18).

preachers in the beginning of the Christian era."¹ The sermon's content (Acts 2:22-38) is outlined as follows:

1. Interpretation of Joel 2:28-32 and Ps 16:8-11.
2. The person and work of the Lord (vss. 22-25).
3. Origin (genealogy) of Jesus through the line of David (vss. 26-30).
4. Emphasis of the kerygmatic ingredient of the resurrection and exaltation in power (vss. 31-37).
5. Application of the message to the hearers because they crucified the Lord (vs. 38).

Although later other elements of Jesus' heavenly function were added, particularly in the preaching of Paul, the five preceding functions formed the primary content of apostolic preaching.²

Peter's sermon is a demonstration from Scripture of the Christological kerygma. By this theological approach, the apostle sought to prove, both from experience and Scripture, that "God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah through His being raised from the dead by the Father."³ According to C. H. Dodd, this main concern is present in many of Peter's recorded sermons:

The first four speeches of Peter cover substantially the same ground. The phraseology and the order of presentation vary slightly but there is no essential advance from one another. They supplement one another and taken together, they afford a comprehensive view of the content of the early kerygma.⁴

Those speeches can be summarized through a series of common elements. For example:

¹Kerr, p. 21.

²Ibid.

³C. S. Mann, The Message Delivered (New York: Morehouse Barlow Co., 1973), p. 18.

⁴Dodd, p. 21.

1. The age of fulfillment has dawned (Acts 2:26). The things which God foreshadowed by the mouth of all the prophets, he thus fulfilled (Acts 3:18); all the prophets from Samuel and his successors told of these days (Acts 3:24).¹

2. This fulfillment has taken place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, from which it is possible to "determine counsel and foreknowledge of God, as it is written. David, as a prophet, knew that God had sworn to set one of the fruit of his loins upon his throne";² thus he was proclaimed, by implication, to have been born of the seed of David (Acts 2:30-31 and Ps 132:11).

3. Jesus has risen and has been exalted at the right hand of God (Ps 110:1). He has been made Lord and Christ (Acts 2:32-36). He is the stone which was rejected by you builders and has become the cornerstone (Acts 4:2; Ps 118:22). God exalted him at his right hand as Prince and Saviour (Acts 5:31).

4. "The Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory."³ Having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, he poured out "this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33). "We are witnesses of these things and the Holy Spirit which God has given to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

5. The Messianic age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Jesus (Acts 3:21). This same issue is presented in

¹"It was a standing principle of Rabbinic exegesis of the Old Testament that what the prophets predicted had reference to the days of the Messiah--that is to say, to the expected time when God after long centuries of waiting, should visit His people with judgment and blessing, bringing to a climax His dealings with them in history. The apostles, then, declared the Messianic age had dawned." (Ibid.)

²Dodd, p. 22.

³Ibid.

Acts 10:42 with another format: "This is He who is appointed by God as judge of living and dead."

6. There is an appeal for repentance. "The offer of forgiveness and of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of salvation"¹ are commonly emphasized also in their sermons (Acts 2:38, 39; 3:19-23, 26; 4:12; 3:31).²

In summary, Peter's sermons are based on Scripture and follow a set pattern in which, exegesis of the main passage is made (Acts 2:17-21), the context is explored to interpret and better explain the biblical portion (Acts 2:22-35); the message is applied to the people (Acts 2:36); the message is Christocentric; and the story of salvation is clearly depicted (Acts 2:38-40). Acts 2:25 and Acts 2:34 clearly illustrate these main points of the sermon.

Although Peter's sermon in the house of Cornelius is directed to an audience whose religious formation possibly does not relate to the history and events of the Old Testament, it follows the same sermonic pattern. However, "it gives in fuller details the story of the life of Christ."

The Pauline kerygma

Later, in the history of the early church, the apostolic kerygma acquired some additional doctrinal emphasis. The Pauline kerygma tried to give meaning to the function of Jesus in heaven. Thereafter, his preaching declares that Jesus is the "Son of God" (Acts 9:20); that "he died for our sins" (Rom 5:8); that he also

¹Ibid.

²These six points can be found in greater detail in Dodd, pp. 22, 23.

"maketh intercession for us" (Rom 8:34). These points rounded off the early apostolic kerygma and gave to it an evangelistic approach that appealed as much to believers as to unbelievers.¹ God not only has become flesh to dwell among men and die for them, but he has risen and now is living in heaven where he continues to intercede in behalf of his people.

It seems evident that the Pauline kerygma went beyond the traditional concept when the apostle had to write to and work among the Gentiles, whose formation ignored the historical link of the Jewish people with the new Christian faith. Thus, James L. Price affirms:

In interpreting and applying the gospel, Paul could assume a familiarity with its essential confessional statement. Moreover, since Paul wrote to communities that were predominantly Gentiles, he did not merely repeat what the earliest Christians had proclaimed in their missions to the Jewish.²

Thus, Pauline kerygma came to prevail as a sort of confession throughout the history of the Christian church.³

The sermons of Paul

After Jesus, White says,⁴ Paul is the most prestigious preacher in the beginning of the Christian era.⁵ However, even

¹"There is an important element which at first sight, at least is absent from his preaching, so far as we can recover it from the epistles, namely, the explicit reference to the ministry of Jesus, his miracles (Acts 2:2), and teachings (Acts 3:2)" (Dodd, p. 27.)

²James L. Price, Interpreting the New Testament (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971), p. 122.

³George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974), p. 340.

⁴Douglas M. White, p. 18.

⁵Holland, p. 19.

though there is a wealth of material coming from his speeches and letters "which were essentially written sermons to be read in the churches to which they were addressed,"¹ only a few of these public sermons have been preserved in the book of Acts that could be analyzed for content. The first recorded sermon is considered here as it appears in Acts 13:16-27.

Paul begins with God's choice of Israel, and then traces some important points of God's dealing with Israel down to the present time. Paul goes through the exodus from Egypt, God's tender nursing in the wilderness, and the conquest of Palestine. God did not leave his people alone, but provided leadership through the ministry of the judges, then by the kings, particularly David, who was "the greatest one."²

David being the starting point to prove his main argument, Paul turns to the messianic promises made to the king, and then leaps across the years to find their fulfillment. The words of John the Baptist are keys for him to show how John announced that he was but a forerunner of the coming Messiah.

Paul explains the rejection and death of Jesus, and thereby proves him the Messiah, taking into account that it was precisely what the Scriptures had predicted. Finally, he concludes with the good news of the resurrection "which he attests by the testimony of eyewitnesses and arguments from the Old Testament prophecies."³

¹J. E. Adams, Audience Adaptations in the Sermons and Speeches of Paul (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 14.

³Ibid.

Paul paid homage to the doctrine of their fathers, he went directly and logically to the heart of the sermon: the death of Jesus for sinners and his bodily resurrection from the dead. As Weaver and Brochers suggest, "he relied heavily on logic and authority."¹ These arguments were constructed on the accepted authority of the Old Testament writings.

A succinct analysis of this sermon's content follows:

1. Jesus' historical frame of reference with which his audience was familiar (vss. 17-25).

2. Certain scriptural, historical, and logical deductions from the foregoing concerning Christ as the Messiah of the Jews and Savior of all mankind (vss. 26-37).

3. A practical application of these truths to the audience (vss. 38, 39).

4. A solemn warning and appeal to his hearers (vss. 41, 42).

In this summary, the four fundamental points considered by the Jews as the essence of their faith are especially highlighted. Those elements, according to G. E. Wright are:²

1. God is the God of Israel.

2. He chose the Patriarch for himself.

3. He redeemed his people from Egypt, leading them through the wilderness.

4. He gave them the land of Palestine as their heritage.³

¹Andrew T. Weaver and Gladys L. Brochers, Speech (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1940), p. 335.

²G. H. Wright, God Who Acts (London: SCM Press, 1952), p. 16.

³"To such a confessional recital, Jews often added God's choice of David to be king and the promises made to him and his

In summary, the Pauline messages were expositions, nurtured with the prophetic declarations of the Old Testament, which sought to confirm the Messianic function of Jesus, and the role of his resurrection as the guarantee of salvation for the human race. It should be noted that the content of this sermon closely relates to the previous messages presented in the book of Acts. As C. H. Dodd expresses it, "It may be compared on the one hand with the speech in Acts 2:4 and, on the other hand, with the speech in Acts 10. It is a mixture of the two types of speeches."¹

Of the sermons preached in Thessalonica, there is little information, but from what can be obtained from Acts 17:2, 3, it is probable that Paul--as Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:30-35)--began at the point of the Jewish interest regarding the Old Testament prophecies and their Messianic fulfillment (vs. 2). He read the passages of the Scriptures and then explained them in the light of their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.² "He argued with the people by referring to the Scriptures" or "he discussed with the people by reading the Scriptures."³ He expounded (διαλέξατο, to

descendants (Pss 78:67-72; 89:3, 4). Paul proclaims the great confessional truth of Israel's faith which speaks of God's redemptive concern for his people and undergirds the Christian message." Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," The Expositor Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981), 9:425.

¹Dodd, p. 29.

²Newman Barclay and Eugene A. Nida, A Translator Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles (London: United Bible Societies, 1972), p. 328.

³Ibid.

open fully)¹ or discussed the prophecies to the effect that this Messiah was to redeem humanity through his suffering and atoning death and resurrection. Paul finally identifies the Jesus he is preaching about with the promised Messiah of the Jewish Scriptures.²

In Paul's preaching the traditional pattern of biblical sermons that emphasize in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus receives a new element. He adds that Jesus not only died, was resurrected, and ascended to heaven, but that He is interceding for man, that He is the Son of God, and more precisely and directly that He died for our sins.³

On the other hand, Paul's sermons, even when containing almost all the elements of those earlier sermons, seem to confirm that he was not an eyewitness of the life of Christ. The miracles (Acts 2:22), teachings (Acts 3:22), and ministry of Jesus are not included in his messages.⁴ However, it is quite probable that in most apostolic speeches those aspects of the gospel were not used as such. Mounce remarks that "when we review the early speeches, we are struck by the fact that in only two of the five is there any

¹"The literal expression 'opening' (the Scriptures) should be taken to mean 'explain,' 'interpreting,' or 'expounding' them. However, in some languages one cannot use the phrase 'explain the Scriptures' as one can only explain what the Scriptures say, in other words, the content of the Scriptures, not the writing themselves" (ibid.).

²The Wesleyan Bible Commentary, 6 vols. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1969), 4:604.

³"The Jerusalem kerygma does not assert that the exalted Christ intercedes for us. It may be that in Rom 1:34 Paul has inserted this on his own account into the apostolic formula" (Dodd, p. 25).

⁴Ibid., p. 27.

reference at all to the life and ministry of Jesus."¹

Conclusions Drawn from Biblical Literature

The sermons discussed here are based on Scripture which the preachers used as a source of information and authority. The apostles quoted the Prophets who had resorted to the available written material to support the messages they preached. The concern of those who stood out as exponents of the Word was how to make God's voice known in a simple and understandable way. Jeremiah and Ezekiel quoted the Scripture and used Israel's recorded experience to glean practical application for their contemporaries.

Jesus based His sermons on correct interpretation of the Scripture. He analyzed misinterpreted words and sentences to give them back their true meaning. He used illustrations in many forms as tools to convey a message and apply it to his audience. "No man has ever talked like this man" (John 7:46).

Apostolic preaching also rested heavily on the Scriptures. Through interpretation explanation, and illustrations extracted from biblical historical background and contemporary application, these messages became effective instruments in the hands of the apostles.

New Testament preachers had access to the whole OT sacred writings and thus had a major opportunity to exegete the teaching of these writings. All their sermons show a marked interest in highlighting God's behavior toward sin, his forgiving love, the

¹Robert Mounce, The Essential Nature of NT Preaching (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1960), pp. 79, 80.

promise and fulfillment of a Savior and his redeeming act for those living on earth. He is the satisfaction of all man's needs (Acts 2:38, 39; 3:25, 26; 17:29; Jer 31:3; Ezek 20:40).

The apostolic kerygma completes the picture of salvation, a dominant key in New Testament preaching. To bring this concept to people, it was necessary to interpret what the Old Testament had announced as a future event and then apply it to their present situation as the fulfillment of ancient prophecies. The apostolic kerygma was the dogmatic and urgent confrontation with the hearers, a trait that is recognized as characteristic of true biblical preaching. The kerygmatic content of preaching "may be neither ignored or diminished without destroying the Christian message."¹ Kerr is right when he concludes his statement about preaching by saying: "Apostolic preaching, therefore, defines and determines for us and for all time what the content of Christian preaching really is."² Everything related to the content of the message forms an appropriate subject for study in order to give shape to today's proper concept of biblical preaching.

Current Literature

If biblical preaching was seen as nourishing, challenging, and relevant in the past, today, complaints abound about its devaluation. Pierre Benton says: "Sermons today are spiritless, irrelevant, dull, and badly delivered."³ Others have expressed the

¹Holland, p. 20.

²Kerr, p. 40.

³Pierre Benton, The Comfortable Pew (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965), pp. 96-97.

need for more significant preaching and encouraged a return to that kind of preaching which in the past exerted great influence upon the hearers.

Kyle Haselden expresses his concern this way: "We have to grant that the general level is still low and that there are today no preachers who have a nationwide reputation and influence comparable to the kind wielded in the past."¹ Declarations like this reveal that true biblical preaching has been looked upon with a side glance, or that its concept has been minimized. Assuming that the "primary stage" is the proclamation through God's Word of what he has done for men, Perry affirms that "the quality of preaching always declines when the conception of preaching is removed from primary to second stage."²

It is probable, then, that the essence of apostolic preaching is not being considered seriously in the elaboration of the message to nurture those spiritually hungry. It seems evident that there is need "for powerful, energetic, forceful, biblical preaching,"³ a kind of sermon that interprets and reproduces God's messages for today and, at the same time, can identify itself with and be applied to the needs of human beings. Perry pleads for this kind of sermon:

We need, however, more sermons that deal with people's problems, meet their difficulties, and answer their questions, help to heal their hurts. These will be the sermons adapted to human needs and applying the principles of the Word of God to daily experience.⁴

¹Kyle Haselden, The Urgency of Preaching (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 18.

²Lloyd M. Perry, Biblical Preaching for Today (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), p. 10.

³Ibid., p. 11.

⁴Ibid., p. 10.

If the preaching is weak, it is because it does not "confront people with the new reality which has occurred and because the sermon is issued in general rather than specific terms."¹ For Gerhard Ebeling² and Robert Jensen,³ however, it is not preaching, "but the weak content of our preaching which is at fault," thus emphasizing the role of biblical content in the nature of the message to be preached.

On the other hand, a prejudice exists labelling one of the biblical methods--expository preaching--as cold and calculated; its object is to appeal to the intellect rather than to psychological strings of men.⁴ But the opposite should be true, because "exposition must be designed to make hearers understand, feel and act."⁵ This means that good exposition, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will always satisfy the demands of heart and will. Furthermore, "the best exposition draws attention to the light that is in the Word of God, while at the same time calling attention to the human situation and promise of hope because of that light."⁶ This is a balanced situation that should be maintained if exposition is expected to be meaningful to the hearers, rather than being coldly centered on a passage. In summary, expository preaching, when

¹Clyde E. Fant, Preaching for Today (New York: Harper & Row Pub., 1975), p. 9.

²Gerhard Ebeling, quoted by Fant, p. 9.

³Robert Jensen, quoted by Fant, p. 9.

⁴Fant, p. 9.

⁵James E. Massey, Designing the Sermon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), p. 23.

⁶Ibid.

properly developed by means of a qualified channel, affects the hearers in a positive and attractive way.

Misconceptions on Biblical Preaching

In considering some aspects of biblical preaching, it should be pointed out that there are many types of sermons which, while being called biblical, do not adequately portray the reality of a biblical sermon. John Knox denied the existence of biblical value in a sermon which is the product of quoting "a few words of Scriptures as a kind of ornamental frontpiece for a discourse which owes nothing either to these words or to any part of the Scripture."¹ He furthermore adds: "The mere treating of incidents in the biblical narrative or scraps of teaching even when done faithfully and in an edifying manner, does not qualify preaching as biblical."²

A sermon that uses a phrase or sentence from a passage alien to the context is not a biblical sermon. James Crane³ offers an example of such a sermon based on the expression, "In the hand of the living God," used to encourage a congregation. It was, however, a violation of the context which referred to a different matter (Heb 10:31). Douglas M. White⁴ affirms that a biblical sermon is not the result of running through a chapter or Scripture passage,

¹John Knox, The Integrity of Preaching (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), p. 15.

²Ibid., p. 20.

³James Crane, El Sermon Eficaz (El Paso, TX: Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, 1959), p. 79.

⁴Douglas M. White, p. 65.

commenting about a word or phrase or even a whole verse, while believing that an expository sermon is being preached. Sometimes the preacher fills a sermon with verbal content that he already knows and then tries to seek biblical passages to support what he purports to say.¹ In another context, preachers may prepare a sermon by collecting illustrations or short stories and searching the Bible looking for supporting passages. Milton Crum says that "such preaching may be biblical to the extent that the preacher thinks biblically, but the new insights into human life and the fresh nuances of the gospel which are given through the study of the Scriptures will be missed."² He finally declares that "the preacher who does not listen to God through the Scriptures must either run dry or preach a gospel other than the gospel of God."³

Difficulties in Biblical Preaching

Even though the expository sermon is the one which best transmits God's voice to men,⁴ the fact that many modern preachers do not use it, is due, in part, to the difficulties presented, not by the sermon itself, but by the nature of the preacher, the time he can devote to preparing the sermon, and his probable lack of study habits.⁵

¹"The preacher misuses the Bible when he searches its pages for some ingenious texts which can be developed to give authority to his view." Colin Morris, The Word and the Words (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1975), p. 71.

²Milton Crum, Jr., Manual on Preaching (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1977).

³Ibid.

⁴Haddon W. Robinson, p. 19.

⁵"The typical minister is called upon to be many things: counselor, educator, administrator, custodian, carpenter, and preacher. It is sometimes difficult to insist that the primary

If the preacher is not a man ardent with God's fire, one who believes that his message could constitute the last chance for some soul, then his words will be cold and calculated, the enthusiasm of conviction will be absent from what he says, and he will talk as one without authority. "Expository Biblical Preaching can be arid if the preacher himself is arid."¹ On the other hand, if the messenger possesses a charismatic nature and is convinced of the urgency of God's message; if he is an assiduous student of the Bible and pays attention to his people's situation, his sermon will be as vigorous a proclamation as those in the days of Pentecost.² The charismatic factor is not, of course, an absolute one because a charismatic preacher will not preach a sermon filled with the Spirit and with highly biblical content if he depends only on his personal charisma.

Preparing a biblical sermon requires a thorough study of the chosen passage. Key words, syntactical construction, and doctrines cannot be overlooked. This type of preparation requires time. It is probable that some preachers find themselves hindered by the lack of time, and that they see the barrier. However, some preachers may spend more time than is actually needed. Liefeld says:

responsibility is that of preaching, or interpreting the Word. . . . Placing the preaching task first will allow the minister to organize other responsibilities around it and will unify the work giving coherence and balance to other jobs" (Holland, p. 115).

¹Douglas White, Predicacion Expositive, p. 35.

²Preachers are divinely called to preach, in power and demonstration of the Spirit. Too many sermons are bland, innocuous, soporific. They deal in vague abstractness, pleasing platitudes, psychological theories, and watered-down theology, instead of telling people how to get righteousness of God in their heart through Christ" (Roland Q. Leavell, Prophetic Preaching Then and Now (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), pp. 12-13.

I'm convinced that the kind of exegetical instruction many seminary students have received leaves them thinking that exegetical preparation for sermons consists of parsing, diagraming and doing word studies. Consequently, an inordinate amount of time is spent in detailed work, while relatively more productive study of the past in terms of its literary structure, flow of thoughts, and so on, is neglected.¹

Intellectual enrichment can be a very positive factor in the preparation of biblical sermons. The lack of this element sometimes hinders pastors from mastering the subject. Good biblical preaching requires a broad knowledge of biblical context and, in some cases, of the whole background of the books written about the passage. If the passage comes from the New Testament, for example, all the New Testament should be in context. "The longer and more thoroughly a preacher has studied the entire New Testament, the more informed and rich his message should be."² Perhaps it would require that the preacher use in his sermon all the correlated texts he would be able to find, and he must know about the relationship between the chosen passage and others on the same subject.

Another perceived difficulty in the preparation of biblical sermons is that of matching the passage to the needs of the congregation.³ Many preachers choose the topical or life-situational method, thinking that, in doing so, they can cope better with the people's real needs. They do not consider themselves bound by any textual limitations. This gives them an ample opportunity to work directly with every real or supposed problem. But, as Miller says, "A topical discussion which is not at the same time an exposition of

¹Walter L. Liefeld, New Testament Exposition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p. 18.

²Ibid., p. 19.

³Ibid.

Scriptures, is not really a topical sermon."¹ In the case of expository preaching, the passage determines or points out the need.

Variety in Methodology

Pastors may employ several ways to maintain the interest and enthusiasm of those who listen to biblical preaching. Using only one form could diminish interest. When one develops a series of expository themes, either about one book of the Bible or several portions of a book, using only one methodology, the congregation tends to tire and not perceive the message. Unger affirms that "the tendency to confine pulpit exposition leads to monotony of treatment, discouragement in the cultivation of the expository method, and eventual abandonment of it altogether."²

Jeff D. Ray suggests five ways in which to vary biblical preaching:

1. Exegetical exposition which uses shorter passages and major lexical study.
2. Historical exposition which expounds the great events of the Bible regardless of the amount of the Scriptures involved.
3. Doctrinal exposition which assembles all the major Bible passages on a subject and ascertains the meaning of each.
4. Biographical exposition which deals with the order of events in a person's career.
5. Character exposition which may deal with the same person as biographical exposition but emphasizing the moral qualities and inner character of the individual.³

In Merrill Unger's opinion, variations of the expository method are reduced to only two: the topical method and the textual

¹Miller, p. 28.

²Unger, p. 48.

³Jeff D. Ray, Expository Preaching (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1940), pp. 59-68.

method, in which all the forementioned are comprised.¹

This reduction seems to be the most popularly known and accepted. The topical form is presently one of the most employed. This may be because as Massey recognizes: "Together with an obviously wider range of variety of topics to choose, this design also allows for the most innovations on the part of the preacher."² That, however, does not in any way mean that it is the best form of interpreting the Word of God: the same author concludes that "the ideal sermon will be as biblical in content as functional in meeting a definite need as possible."³ Thus, the topical sermon is biblical only as long as its content is biblical according to the stated criteria.

Hermeneutical Principles

As mentioned above, the biblical sermon is framed within regulations which determine its authenticity. Sound hermeneutical principles spell out the guidelines for the proper study of the text in a biblical sermon.

The term hermeneutics "is in disfavor among some contemporary scholars who argue that it is not more than theological jargon for interpretation."⁴ Ebeling, for example, sees no distinction between interpretation and hermeneutics,⁵ while C. F. Evans declares that "hermeneutics is only another word for exegesis or

¹Unger, pp. 49-52.

²Massey, p. 21.

³Ibid., p. 24.

⁴Anthony C. Thiselton, The Two Horizons (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980), p. 10.

⁵G. Ebeling, Word and Faith (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 321.

interpretation."¹ A third position is sustained by P. J. Achtemeier, who states that while exegesis implies inquiry into the meaning which a text had for its own author and its original readers, interpretation concerns itself with the text's present meaning for today and that "hermeneutics formulates rules and methods to get from exegesis to interpretation."² In regard to this, Norval Pease suggests seven points as general guidelines when applying the hermeneutical principles to preaching:

1. All preaching must be biblical preaching. It should have a text or passage to be analyzed with the natural division of the text, and the theological implication of the passage.
2. It must demonstrate the unity of the Scriptures.
3. Let Scripture explain Scripture.
4. Employ a proper interpretation of biblical words and sentences.
5. Consider the context and historical background.
6. The message must be interpreted literally unless it is obviously figurative.
7. Adjust the sermon to the correct use of the typological principle.³

In spite of all the discussion, the concepts of hermeneutics and interpretation are still being used indistinctly. However, all positions considered, for the aim of the present study, hermeneutics follows the concept proposed by Achtemeier.

¹C. F. Evans, Is Holy Scripture Christian? (London: SCM Press, 1971), p. 33.

²P. J. Achtemeier, An Introduction to Hermeneutics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 13, 14.

³Norval Pease, "Hermeneutical Principles Applied to Preaching," in A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1974), pp. 257-260.

Exegesis

As a part of sound hermeneutics, biblical preaching requires exegesis. Exegesis is the "historical investigation into the meaning of the text."¹ It represents the backbone of the biblical sermon because, as John H. Hayes says, "Only when there is exegesis is there communication and understanding."² Taking this fact into consideration, it may be feasible to suggest that when a text is read to be understood or interpreted, exegesis is involved.³ Thus, since the primary objective of the preacher in his sermon is to communicate and make himself understood by the hearers, the exegetical development of the sermon plays an important role. He who expounds the Word of God seeks to understand, first, for his own enrichment, and second, in order to clarify the true meaning of the Scriptures and to apply it to present life. Since the Bible is not the object of private or particular interpretation, each passage or text needs to be studied within its context, according to the exegetical rules which include the historical background of the passage. "It means that the full understanding of any single passage depends upon the understanding of the whole book in which the passage occurs."⁴

If preaching is biblical, its content will cling to the rules of exegesis established by hermeneutics. "Exegesis, in sum,

¹Gordon D. Fee, New Testament Exegesis (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), p. 21.

²Hayes and Holladay, p. 5.

³Ibid.

⁴Fred L. Fisher, How to Interpret the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 40.

is the foundation of all truly biblical interpretation."¹

Interpretation

Once a passage has been selected with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the necessary tools for exegesis have been used, interpretation is the next step. To interpret a biblical passage means to bring to life, ideas, words, and expressions from the historical deposit of the Bible, and to combine them with an effective application to the hearers.

The biblical teachings of the past can illuminate the present and offer significant solutions when proper interpretation is followed by right hermeneutics. The preacher can grasp the meaning of past events only as he is sensitive to their meaning for the present day. As John Knox remarks:

There is a mutual relationship here, a kind of alternation or rhythm, the past throwing light on the present, and the present on the past; but in some measure concerns for relevance and concerns for authority must be present throughout and from the start.²

Thus, exegesis and interpretation play a decisive role in the construction of the biblical sermon.

Homiletical Rules

Biblical preaching is also regulated by homiletical rules. They determine the form and content of the sermon.³ Data gathered through exegesis and interpretation of the text become a sermon

¹Bernard Ramm, Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), pp. 7, 8.

²Knox, p. 27.

³H. C. Brown, A Quest for Reformation in Preaching (Waco, TX: Word Books Publishers, 1968), p. 27.

when they are explained, illustrated, and applied¹ in a relevant and compelling way. Charles Koller defines the function of homiletics: "to put flesh on the bones of my outline,"² that is, to make it a true sermon.

Homiletical rules have been gleaned through an analysis of the best sermons in every age of the church, thus, scholars such as Köller,³ Whitesell,⁴ and Edwards⁵ have grouped the following homiletical elements as important points in the development of biblical sermons:

1. Explanation. Explanation relates to the exploration and interpretation of the text. All the truth discovered in the chosen passage must be explained. Explanation includes what the text says in relation to Jesus Christ and to the history of redemption, as well as the statement of causes or conditions suggested or discussed in the text.⁶

2. Illustration. Illustration makes the content of the text clear and understandable through the pictorial presentation of the truth discovered in the passage.⁷

3. Application. What the text says must be applied to

¹Perry, p. 27.

²Charles Köller, Expository Preaching Without Notes (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), p. 50.

³Ibid., pp. 51, 52.

⁴Whitesell, pp. 31-91.

⁵O. C. Edwards, Elements of Homiletics (New York: Pueblo Pub. Co., 1982), pp. 10-39.

⁶James Cox, A Guide to Biblical Preaching (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), pp. 50, 54.

⁷Brown, p. 58.

people's needs in their own present situation. Application may be considered the most important part of the sermon because it produces a personal "encounter between God and man."¹

Criteria Used in Identifying a Biblical Sermon

The concepts already delineated in this study make it possible to recognize the criteria governing the elaboration of a biblical sermon. On the basis of these concepts, a biblical sermon meets the following criteria:

1. It is based on a biblical passage. The text provides the logical starting point of the biblical sermon. The text, says James Cox, "is the reminder of who we are, where we are going and what we ought to be doing."² Brown and Nichols, using different terms, arrive at the same conclusion:

A text is the fabric for the sermon. A short text furnishes the preacher the starting point; on the other hand, a long text gives the preacher an entire view of the message, from the beginning till the end.³

A text represents a potential opportunity for the Word of God to be heard afresh. A text could be thought of as an interpretative potential, a waiting opportunity for the vitality of the biblical world's original transcendent experience to be rekindled in the present.⁴

Thus, a biblical sermon should be based on a passage or biblical portion that provide the leading thought through the preached message. Jesus' sermon on Luke 4:16-27 is a proper example.

2. It is based on an exegetical analysis of the text. In order to correctly interpret a text, an exegetical analysis should

¹Whitesell, pp. 91, 92. ²Cox, p. 31. ³Brown, p. 44.

⁴J. Randall Nichols, Building the Word (New York: Harper & Row Pub., 1980), pp. 26, 27.

be done. The goal of exegesis, says Warlaw, "is to situate ourselves so that we apprehend--the text--as a living form."¹ The analysis of the text is essential for biblical preaching because Bible, as history, holds information from the past which needs to be interpreted. Brown makes this assertion clear when he states: "Apart from the natural, grammatical and historical meaning of the passage, the minister cannot preach authentic biblical sermons."²

3. It is based on a right interpretation of the text which includes:

a. A study of the original meaning of the words and sentences. If the passage is to be explained, every key word in the text must be explored till its original meaning comes alive. The full meaning of the whole text cannot be clear unless every single important part is studied in its original background. Whitesell is more explicit when he affirms that:

The expositor seeks to find the true and exact meaning of the Scripture and set the meaning against life today. . . . We need to explain many of its words, phrases, sentences, names, places, movements, persons, every area of the biblical text we need to explain.³

Discovering the meaning of every important word within the text is necessary, not only because of its historical nature, but, as Miller says:

Words are symbols of meanings in the mind of the author and can be interpreted not by putting into them what they mean to us, but by investigating what they meant to the one who used them.⁴

b. A study of the causes, conditions, or situations

¹Don Wardlaw, Preaching Biblically (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), p. 35.

²Brown, p. 51.

³Whitesell, p. 31.

⁴Miller, pp. 45, 46.

suggested or discussed in the passage. This is the argument part of the sermon and one of the main characteristics of the apostolic sermon.¹ To expound the why or how as it is presented in the text reveals to what extent the sermon detects problems, offers solutions, gives reasons, and persuades one to accept it. In commenting on this criterion of the biblical message, Cox says:

Just as it is often helpful to know the cause of disease in order to treat it successfully, so it may be helpful to recognize the etiology of a need in the course of prescribing a remedy. If the text suggests a cause, it is convenient to explore the consequences if it is accepted.²

All biblical sermons are designed to persuade and convince men of salvation, of the work of Christ for mankind, and of the present situation of the world. The message should be an explanation of every question formulated by the text.

4. It is applied to people's present needs. In biblical sermons the result of investigation into the passage should be applied to people's present needs. The analysis and the interpretation of the text become a sermon when they are transformed into a living message that touches hearts and produces an encounter with God. Application in this sense means the reconstruction and adaptation of past biblical experiences to contemporary needs, or as Whitesell argues: "Application makes the hearers say: 'He is speaking to me! The truth found in the sermon is designed to be obeyed, or practiced. . . . Application is, therefore, the most important part of the message.'³ See Peter's sermon in Acts 2:38.

In recognizing the function of application related to biblical preaching, Whitesell concludes: "Biblical truth is meaningless

¹Acts 17:2.

²Cox, p. 76.

³Whitesell, p. 92.

unless it bears on life. What the text says is not said before people, but to people."¹ Brown, in his approach to this matter affirms that "as explanation presents the message of God 'then,' so application presents the message of God 'now'."²

5. It is eminently Christocentric. All biblical preaching must be Christocentric. Whenever the Bible is opened, the redemptive work of Christ in some way should offer hope and good news to the hearers. Cox correctly suggests that "Christian preaching is always within the context of God's purpose as revealed in Jesus Christ."³ Edmund Clowney adds that the text should be approached in the context of its own setting in redemptive history with the intention to discover Christ's work through every important passage.⁴ Jesus is the central personage in both OT and NT. If the text is useful for a sermon, it carries in itself a direct or indirect relationship with the salvific work of Christ.

6. It is illustrated. Clarity forms one of the key elements in biblical sermons. The pastor must make the content of the text easy for ordinary people to understand. According to Robinson: "One means of earthing our sermons lies in the use of illustrations. Well chosen, skillfully used, illustrations restate, explain, validate or apply ideas by relating them to tangible experiences."⁵ Perry, too, recognizes illustration as an important part of the biblical sermon.⁶ But Whitesell goes beyond any other when he talks

¹Ibid.

²Brown, p. 60.

³Cox, p. 50.

⁴Edmund Clowney, Preaching and Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1961), p. 74.

⁵Robinson, p. 149.

⁶Perry, p. 16.

about the role of illustration in biblical preaching, "A sermon is virtually worthless without good illustration."¹ Thus, illustrations, like windows, bring in light while also resembling an aspect of the truth, helping to clarify truth, and informing and moving the hearers. Jesus' parables and similes are good models.

Conclusions Drawn from Current Literature

This study of current literature reveals concern that all biblical preaching be solidly founded on the application of the principles of biblical interpretation. Exegesis is an effective way of producing a clear understanding of the history of the passage under study. Only by knowing the "then" is it possible to interpret the "now" of any chosen passage. The concepts expounded hereto insist on the need to apply and make relevant what God intended to make known to the hearers through his Word.

Data gathered from hermeneutical principles and homiletical rules help in the establishment of guidelines for the creation of criteria to identify the truly biblical sermon. These easy-to-follow criteria, however, demand hard work, commitment, and an intimate relationship with God, the congregation, and the Bible. These criteria, taken from the experience and practice of renowned preachers and theologians may bring back to the pulpit the assurance that God talks to man through his Word in the biblical sermon.

¹Whitesell, p. 75.

CHAPTER III

APPLYING THE CRITERIA

This chapter studies and evaluates fifteen sermons recently preached by fifteen pastors of the Central Dominican Conference. The sermons were preached in Spanish, but an English synopsis of each message has been made including the most relevant details.¹ Also included is a short description about each preacher and the church to which the message was addressed.

First of all recognition and respect for these men who have submitted their sermons for the present study must be expressed. They are sincere men, committed to giving the church the best for its spiritual welfare. Their careful work has contributed greatly to the growth of the church. Their dedication and zeal are key elements in protecting the church from worldly influences. I have worked personally with these men as a co-worker, as Lay Activities Secretary, and finally as Conference President, which gives me personal knowledge of their many achievements.

In order to know to whom these messages were delivered, a brief glimpse of the Seventh-day Adventist Church situation is given.

¹It has seemed beneficial for this study to include one of my own sermons recently preached in the process of my doctoral program.

Seventh-day Adventist Church
in the Dominican Republic

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of the largest Protestant churches in the Dominican Republic. With a membership of over 48,000, it has attained great prestige and influence in the Dominican society. Its social and educational work have helped to establish a cordial climate with the other churches and with the government as well.

Currently, the Seventh-day Adventist organization is comprised of two fields: namely, the Central Dominican Conference, with a membership of 32,000 in 150 congregations under the tutelage of a small ministering body of about forty workers; and the recently organized (1971) Northern Mission, with a membership of 16,000. Another mission field, the Southern Mission, is now in the process of organization.¹

In spite of the small number of workers, the church keeps growing because of the enthusiasm of the many lay people who work with the ministers in preaching what they believe is the last message to this world.

The first Adventist missionary came to the Dominican Republic in 1907. After fifteen years of missionary labor, the first local mission was organized. At that time, Catholicism exerted considerable influence upon the lives and minds of the people.² For many years missionaries had to struggle against fanaticism, religious

¹Ramon Araujo, "Proyecto Mision del Sur" (Santo Domingo: Asociacion Central Dominicana, 1983), p. 67.

²Fernando Perez Memen, La Iglesia y el Estado en Santo Domingo (Santo Domingo: Editora de la UASD, 1984), pp. 41-42.

intolerance, and cultural deprivation.¹ Sometimes they had to dress church doctrines in social robes in order to get them across to the people. Hence, preachers felt a great need to defend their doctrines and, consequently, the force of their preaching rested mainly on external evangelism rather than the internal nourishment of the church.

Because many of the missionaries who helped to establish the church lacked a command of the Spanish language, their jobs centered mainly in the administrative part of the work. Thus, laymen were elevated to the category of ministers and were placed as leaders in the churches. As a result, advances in preaching were slow, probably because preachers lacked the needed techniques. Today, things have changed, and the new generation of ministers is trained and prepared to bridge this gap.

Present Situation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

In general terms, the present Adventist Church in the Dominican Republic is conservative. It takes its norms and the writings of Ellen G. White seriously; it respects and recognizes its ministers. The church members believe that "we are living in the time of the end of the world" and they struggle to let others know it by visiting people and giving Bible studies. When a catechumen becomes a church member, he has forsaken all sorts of vice, gambling, and worldly

¹Felix Mejia, Breves Ensayos (Santo Domingo: Imprenta Arte y Cine, 1945), p. 70. Mejia dedicates a good portion of his book to attack Protestant churches. He uses harsh expressions to challenge Catholic followers against Protestant believers, particularly the Seventh-day Adventists because of their "fanaticism."

amusements such as dancing and theatre attendance. As a visible demonstration of conversion, the wearing of rings, make-up, and any other sort of adornment is eschewed.

The current problems of the Dominican society, however, are reflected in the membership of the church which is composed of new converts who lose their jobs, if they have one, because of Sabbath keeping; some who have no jobs at all and whose families endure serious economical unrest; some who attempt to migrate to seek a new life but are rejected by foreign authorities; and thousands of restless youngsters who attend different universities and bring to the church their frustrations and misfortune of unpleasant relations between teacher and students. All of them, together with the needs of a new type of converts the middle class and the professionals, must be taken into account while God's message is preached every Sabbath morning. Three factors have influenced biblical preaching in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Dominican Republic:

1. The Catholic Church for quite a long time prohibited the use of the Bible and excommunicated those who tried to study the sacred book. A person with a Bible in hand was considered a heretical Protestant. To preach to an audience unacquainted with biblical information, and sometimes strongly prejudiced against it, was not an easy task.¹

2. The Seventh-day Adventist Church emerged slowly because it had to wrestle against fanaticism, intolerance, and persecution, even when these were not legally authorized. Thus, to evangelize

¹I still keep a Bible I rescued out of the fire prepared to destroy many of its kind at a public meeting in 1954.

people, it was sometimes necessary to combine attractive stories with themes which could be commonly accepted by all until the preacher could gain the trust of the people. In some places, the preacher had to address the people without any Bible in order to avoid prejudice. To keep the audience, preachers sometimes had to talk for one or two weeks without saying the names of God or Jesus. In countries of other religious backgrounds, Protestant, for example, preachers publicly open the Bible and advertise their meetings by using biblical slogans. This is not so in the Dominican Republic where almost 100 percent of the people come from Catholic backgrounds.

3. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Dominican Republic has until recently been made up of families of low educational levels. This situation forced the preachers to adapt their messages so they could be easily understood and accepted by these people.

These three factors have so permeated the Dominican field that the type of preaching has been very simple and full of short stories and illustrations. The preachers' main concerns have not been the meaning and explanation of the biblical passage; but rather the proof that the chosen topic for preaching is strongly supported by the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.

Evaluation and Analysis of the Taped Sermons

In chapter 2 different scholarly positions on biblical preaching were presented. The results of that study yielded a definition of the ingredients which comprise a biblical sermon. Those elements are now used as the criteria for the analysis and

evaluation of the fifteen sermons randomly chosen from those submitted by the ministers of the Central Dominican Conference.

No claim is made here that the sermons evaluated in this study constitute the best the preachers could offer. They were recorded under normal Sabbath worship conditions. Most of them were preached on one of two special occasions: the end of the year or the beginning of a national evangelistic campaign. Therefore, most of the messages follow a similar pattern, since they were bound by similar circumstances. Even when preachers were specifically asked to preach a biblical sermon, no further explanation was given so as to elicit their interpretation of the term and their preference in preaching. As will be seen, most of the ministers chose to preach a topical sermon, possibly because they found it easier to deal with or more appropriate for their purposes.

The samples presented here constitute a fair representation of the typical preaching situation which presently exists in the Dominican Republic. Thus, every one of the fifteen sermons are evaluated on the following questions:

1. Does it have a leading biblical passage?
2. Is the passage literally and historically analyzed?
3. Does the sermon investigate the causes, conditions, or situations discussed or suggested in the text?
4. Does the sermon apply to the people's needs?
5. Is the sermon Christocentric?
6. Is the sermon illustrated?

Obviously, a topical sermon does not respond to all of these

criteria, specifically those designed for an expository sermon.

However, an overall analysis is made based on the stated criteria.

Sermon Number 1

Background

The preacher is an ordained pastor and a graduate from Antillian College with a B.A. in Theology. He has worked successfully in various districts for ten years and is presently ministering to one of the main urban districts in the capital.

This sermon was preached in the principal church of the district, a church with over 300 members, 70 percent of whom are young people. It was preached on the first Sabbath of 1985 for a communion service.

Synopsis

If you were asked, "How was the year 1984 for you, what would your answer be? A local newsman asked such a question to different people. The answers included: "very good," "very bad," and "not so bad." Those who answered may have considered the physical, economic, and family aspects. But I think that the spiritual factor was not taken into account.

What has this past year left for us? What may have been recorded by the angels about our daily living? What may have been written on each of the pages of the year? Have we arrived at a negative balance? Is there something left unresolved with our neighbors or relatives? Or do we have a positive balance because we got our lives fully organized before God? It would be wonderful if we could initiate this new year with a clean sheet.

If that is not the case, if we have hidden sins or blemishes in our character, let us go to the biblical statement of 1 John 1:7. Let us analyze it: "But if we walk in the light. . . ." The fact

that we are here today reveals that we are under the light of the Holy Spirit. The apostle says: "If we walk . . . and the blood of Jesus cleanseth us. . . ." Ask yourself today: Have I settled all my accounts with heaven? This is an appropriate time to confess. The following verse says: "If we say that we have no sin. . . ." After spending three and a half years with Jesus, the apostle John had learned a lot from his Master. He understood human nature, and he knew that as such we are all affected by sin. Thus he says: "If someone says that he has no sin, let him examine himself, and be careful, because it is not true." But then comes the next verse to encourage us and fill us with hope. "If we confess our sins. . . ."

In celebrating this spiritual feast, confession of our sins is in order. With trust we can come to the throne of grace and even if we have been careless in our lives, by Jesus' blood we can obtain forgiveness. There is power in his blood to cleanse us of our sins. The Lord wishes to eradicate the stain of sin from our lives. We have come today, weak as we are, so that the miracle of cleansing of forgiveness and of purification can take place in our lives. 1 John 1:9 says "If we confess our sins. . . ."

From literal Israel, who were considered God's people, we can learn some lessons. It is impressive to consider all the spiritual celebrations carried on by that people. They met every morning and evening for worship. The whole family had devotions and communicated with God. They also kept their weekly appointments to praise God. Together with those spiritual feasts they had special celebrations--seven extraordinary feasts. Let us consider the feast of trumpets which was celebrated on the first day of the seventh

Jewish month. On that day, the trumpet would be played loudly in the Israelite camp to remind everyone of the atonement day to be celebrated on the tenth day. Some writers have written about how important this was to them; the trumpet was played thirty times during the day so no one would forget. It was a holiday. The following days were devoted to personal spiritual preparation for the tenth day--a very significant day. Leviticus 16 narrates the incidents of that great occasion.

About this day the Jewish Encyclopedia says: "The first days were of penance; they were designated to produce a change of heart and make the Israelites like newborns, thus reaching the culmination of that spiritual birth on the tenth day with atonement feast."

According to the Seventh-day Adventist Commentary, "that was the only compulsory feast for all the nation." It was a judgment day. The preparation demanded was so thorough that the officiating priest left his house for seven days prior to the feast. He would spend the week in the temple praying, meditating, and going over the ceremony, since his own life was in danger should anything go wrong. The high priest would spend the night previous to the atonement in complete vigil. The next day he would offer sacrifices for his own sins and those of the people. At the end of the ceremony, he would put his hands over the scapegoat representing Satan. The priest would then confess all the sins of the people, thus symbolically transmitting them to the goat, which would be taken to the desert, carrying upon itself the evil of the people. Afterwards,

the people would feel free because they had obtained forgiveness for their sins.

All this was symbolical. It prefigured the true Lamb that would make atonement for the sins of the Jews as well as for all Christians. John says, "This is the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world." For that reason John says that there is power to cleanse in Jesus' blood.

The atonement feast was celebrated because on that day the people would be cleansed of their sins. They had reached unity among them all. It would have been a privilege to belong to that people. But ours is a greater privilege. Today we have come to celebrate the Lord's Supper. God wants us to analyze our lives, to organize our thoughts, to confess our sins, and to accept the purifying element of Jesus' blood.

In the book The Great Controversy, page 470 (Spanish edition) it says: "In both services purification had to be accomplished with blood." Today we no longer have to offer sacrifices because Christ already shed his blood for our sins. It cleanses us from sin and reconciles us with the Father.

This is the time to participate in such a rite. But before we do, let us think about the rest of our lives. There should be no barriers to hinder our participation. Let us accept the blood of Jesus that our sins may be forgiven, that we may be free of evil so we can participate in the Lord's Supper, praising and blessing God's name.

Analysis

This is a topical sermon which presents a series of the preacher's personal viewpoints supported by Bible texts which serve the purpose. Even though 1 John 1:7-9 seems to be the leading text, no intention to explain the passage is observed, but there is a good relationship between what the text says and the thoughts of the sermon. Christ is presented as the true Lamb, the true sacrifice whose blood cleanses us from all sin. The Jewish feasts fit well as an illustration to clarify the message and help the application to be relevant.

There is general agreement in the biblical teaching. Biblical passages of the New Testament--1 John 1:7-9--are explained with instances of the Jewish feasts in the Old Testament. In the same way the Old Testament antitype--the Lamb--becomes the true type in Christ. The description of the day of atonement, and the preparation needed, are applied to those who are going to participate in the Lord's Supper.

Although this is only a shallow exploration of the leading texts, the message is clear. It would have been better if the preacher had applied questions to the texts: What does it mean to be cleansed? What does it mean to walk in light? Why must we confess our sins?

Certain words or phrases like "light" or "to walk in the light," "cleanse," and "sin" could have been studied, as some of them cannot be literally interpreted.

Summarizing the Analysis

1. 1 John 1:7-9 is not fully analyzed.
2. The message is controlled by the leading text.
3. The original meaning of important words like: light, cleanse, sin, etc. were not studied.
4. The sermon takes the verb "to confess" from the leading passage and analyzes its historical background according to the Jewish tradition rooted in the Old Testament.
5. The teaching of the text is applied to the hearers.
6. The sermon is Christocentric.
7. The sermon is well illustrated with biblical devices.
8. The message is relevant.

Sermon Number 2

Background

The preacher pastors a five-church district on the outskirts of the capital city. He graduated from Antillian College in 1975 and, since then, has been engaged in pastoral work. He was ordained in 1979.

The church where this sermon was preached is the biggest in his district, with over 300 members, mostly young people.

Synopsis

Since Israel had been chosen to preserve the knowledge of God on earth, it had been the special object of Satan's hatred. While God's people obeyed him, Satan would not be able to harm them. Thus he devoted all his power and cleverness to induce them into sin. Seduced by his temptations, the people had broken God's law and fallen prey to their enemies.

Even when they were taken into captivity in Babylon for many years, the Lord did not forsake them. He sent his prophets with reproaches and warnings to waken them and make them see their guilt. When they repented and humbly turned to God, the Lord sent the encouraging message they needed and promised to take them back to their homeland. Through an impressive illustration, God showed his power to free them but still warned them of the power of the accuser of the brethren.

We find this episode in Zech 3:1-8. This is the fourth of eight visions given to the prophet-priest Zechariah. It shows the people's situation and the urgency of their need to obtain

purification to reach God's power. Zechariah sees Joshua clad with filthy garments before the Angel of the Lord, asking for mercy on behalf of his people. While Joshua is pleading for the fulfillment of God's promises, Satan stands to resist him. The enemy points to the people's transgressions as a reason for their not being worthy of God's favor. Thereby, Satan claims them as his own and demands that they be delivered into his hands.

The servant of the Lord in her book Prophets and Kings says that the high priest cannot defend himself nor his people from Satan's accusations. Satan maintains that Israel is not cleansed or free from evil.

Like Abraham and Moses, the high priest does not support the people and their sins, but he participates as an intercessor. He is shown in his filthy garments, symbolizing the people's sins which he carries over himself as their representative. Thus he stands before the Angel confessing his guilt and that of the Israelites, and humbly asking for forgiveness. According to divine inspiration, this angel is Christ himself, the Savior of all sinners. He is the only one who can shut up the enemy and who tells him, "God reprimand you. . . . Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" And concerning Joshua he said: "Take off the filthy garment from him." This meant that, in spite of the people's past transgressions, the priest was enabled to continue before God in his sanctuary.

The Angel then said: "If thou walk in my way." Afterwards, referring to Jesus Christ, he said, "Behold I bring the Branch."

This vision conveys two lessons for our church today; not

only for the members but also for the leaders. In it we picture ourselves in our true condition and our need to obtain purification, and forgiveness from God. But we should not overlook the fact that moral purification should precede peace and spiritual prosperity. Moreover, God cannot shed his blessings over a people or person who is not in harmony with him.

If we recall Zechariah's vision, Satan was claiming Joshua as his own because of his sins. Likewise, he is ready to accuse us day and night when we have fallen into sin. He'll make us believe that the enormity of our sins will not allow us to receive God's forgiveness. However, there is a promise for us. If we turn to walk in God's ways, if we keep God's mandates, we will reach the spiritual condition needed to be able to minister before God. He will send the Branch that we may obtain divine favor through faith in Jesus.

By virtue of Christ's merits, we will walk in his ways and keep his statutes. God wants us to have the opportunity to be what we used to be. By acknowledging our own mistakes, by censoring our own condition, we will not allow Satan to accuse us when we are seeking mercy and favor from God.

As we read in Rev 14:10, the accuser of the brethren keeps accusing day and night. He does not cease, there is no truce in this controversy. It repeats itself with every soul delivered from evil. Sometimes things go well until we decide to join the church. Then troubles start. But, brethren, Christ presents himself as our hope, as the Branch.

Ellen White declares in Prophets and Kings, page 430:
"Satan's accusations against those who seek the Lord are not

provoked by the disgust they cause him with their sins. He is delighted with their deficient character. His accusations originated in his enmity with God. He tempts them to break God's law and then claims them as his captives and disputes Christ's right to take them away."

This is what happened with the woman brought to Jesus. Those who accused her had lead her into the trap and, instead of bringing along the two adulterers, because they were interested only in tempting Jesus, they brought the woman to test Jesus' reaction. Satan sets the net and when we fall into it, he presents himself before Christ and accuses us.

Satan knows that those who seek God fervently in order to obtain his forgiveness and grace will receive them. Therefore, he reminds them of their sins that they will be discouraged. Constantly he looks for complaints against those who try to obey God. He tries to make them see even their best and most acceptable service as corrupt. Through unnumbered deceptions and most cruel tricks he intends to obtain their condemnation.

We know that, according to the vision we are dealing with, man cannot confront Satan's accusations by himself. Therefore Jesus must come to say: "God reprimand you, this is a brand plucked out of the fire."

With our filthy garments of sin, we can confess our sins to God, and we find no merits in ourselves to be cleansed. But Jesus imputes his justice to us, and taking from us those filthy rags that symbolize sin, he clads us with gala garments that we may continue before God's presence. There is however, a condition for this:

"If ye walk in my ways and keep my commandments."

We still have the opportunity to find forgiveness and restoration in Jesus Christ. And even when this parable was fulfilled in part with the people of Israel, it is also a prophecy for us, applicable to the present and the future.

This vision refers also to the experience of God's people during the final scenes on the day of atonement. The remnant church will then be put through grave trials and anguish. Those who keep the commandments will feel the Dragon's wrath. Those who stay faithful to God, even when threatened and prosecuted, even when betrayed by relatives and friends, will receive forgiveness and liberation through the Branch that is our intercessor.

Sometimes we feel as though God has forsaken his church. He sometimes permits some circumstances that we may examine ourselves. As long as we, as members and leaders of the church do not recognize our sinful condition and in good faith repent from our sin and ask for forgiveness, the enemy will be looking at our filthy rags. But thanks to God Jesus has ordered that those rags be taken from us. He has ordered that we be clad with clean garments so that we may stand before him without Satan pointing his finger at us.

If we want to be recipients of the divine blessings, the only course is for us to confess our sins with a humble heart, and the Lord will give us victory through faith in Jesus Christ.

Analysis

In this study, the preacher shows the intention of entering into the historical context of the passage. Secondary texts, which

would strengthen the development of the theme are scarce. However, there are abundant quotations from Ellen White to amplify and support the exposition. Illustrations are also drawn from the Bible to adequately enlighten the thoughts under discussion: Moses and Abraham illustrate well the intercessory function; utterances of Ellen White are also used to clarify the development of the sermonic ideas.

The preacher establishes a good comparison between what the passage said to the listeners of that epoch and what God says to his people today. As Joshua was accused, stood before the Angel--Christ--and was justified and liberated, so the remnant people will also be accused by the enemy. The application runs easily and appropriately when he says: "If the remnant walks in the ways of the Lord, it will be defended, justified, and delivered."

Christ is highlighted as the one who defends, justifies, forgives, and frees the people who walk in his--Christ's--ways.

In summary, the sermon has a leading biblical passage, the preacher tries to get the original meaning of the key words and sentences--Branch, filthy rags, Angel, Satan as accuser, etc., he explains what the passage meant in the past, he interprets it, and applies it to his audience. The application fits well and runs easily from texts to the congregation. Through the study of the text, the church is seen in its present situation and also in the future when Satan's wrath will try to get God's children for his side. It is a good biblical sermon, according to the stated criteria.

Sermon Number 3

Background

The preacher is a veteran worker who has been a church minister for about twenty years. Before becoming a pastor, he spent many years as a colporteur and was a prominent layman.

The preaching of this sermon took place in an urban church with a membership of over 350.

Synopsis

In the year 32 of our Christian era, Jesus met with his disciples for a special occasion. The apostles were happy about this meeting. They thought that their Master would bring important news which they anxiously expected. However, they were surprised when what Jesus said was not what they had expected.

Matt 16:16-18 says: "You are the Christ. . . . I will build my church. . . ." These men expected Jesus to make a statement about the establishment of his kingdom. They hoped to have an active part in that kingdom; they wanted to be freed from the Roman yoke. Some of them expected to get important positions. "Someone like this man," they thought, "who feeds a multitude with a few pieces of bread and fish; one who heals the sick, no matter what the sickness may be, this has to be our king." But what a disappointment! Jesus had already said "My kingdom is not of this world; I have come to edify a church." Then, the man who had come to edify a church was crucified. Was he a dreamer? Where was his church?

Those who expected his earthly kingdom were discouraged, their hopes vanished, and every one went his own way. However, three days later, they heard of the resurrection. Some believed while

others doubted. Nevertheless, their spirits rose because he who had promised to edify a church was resurrected from the dead.

God's church started with two members in Eden. Then, it spread through the patriarchs, prophets, and disciples. Before the ascension, Jesus made a promise to the Christian church. Later when they were together in the upper room, they received the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the early rain. After they received this power they went to preach a message and mobilize the world.

Peter, a fisherman, received the power and, with only one sermon, converted 3,000 souls. The Bible says 3,000 although since it was not customary to count the women and children, it could have been around 10,000 or 15,000 that were baptized on that day.

Today we have the same responsibility for preaching the Word, and that Word, full of power, will make the people respond to the Spirit of God. Peter, the great preacher had no money, and no car; but he had the power of the Holy Spirit. That is what the church needs today. No matter how humble and simple a place it may be, what it needs is the Holy Spirit, that the people may see God through its members.

No one can give what he does not have. But if you have Christ in your heart, what should you do about it? Share it with others. Three thousand were added to the small church, then 5,000 and so on.

Today, the Adventist work is spreading throughout the world. Wherever we go, we find a family with the hope of one day seeing Christ. The disciples preached what they had heard and seen. What do you preach? What did the disciples do besides preaching?

Mark 16:17-18 says: "And these signs will follow those who believe. . . ." Today we have to do the same thing. It is not preaching only. We have to visit the sick, pray for them, and tell them about the love of Jesus. He will do his work in the life of the sick. God is waiting for our decision to be willing instruments in his hands.

In the last century, Jesus' church reappears to continue the work established by Christ. The church of the twentieth century has the power to finish God's work. It is the work of the early rain to prepare hearts for the pouring of the latter rain which will happen soon. Souls are converted to Christ because of the Holy Spirit. We are here because the Holy Spirit has brought us. And here we serve the Lord.

The disciples had only the early rain, and even when we feel its effects today, we are sustained by the promise that very soon the latter rain will be poured abundantly. But we have to get ready. The disciples had to do it in the upper room, and we too have to be prepared to get out and see the effects, the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Today, we have faith, we are sure of the promise, but we do not have the power we should. For that reason, we should be united in Christ and ask for power to finish God's work.

Christ edified his church upon a rock. "Upon this rock shall I build my church." And the rock was Peter's testimony for Jesus. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The church was edified upon Christ.

Ellen White says, "The church is to hold firmly and decidedly

its principles before the heavenly universe and the kingdoms of the world. The firm faithfulness in upholding God's sacred character will attract the attention and admiration of the world, and many will be induced by the good works they see to glorify our Father which is in heaven.

Even when once in a while we see some members wander away, the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. It still marches like an army in order, because Christ, the Captain, is leading.

Let us notice Paul's words in Eph 2:20-22. "Edified over the foundation of the apostles . . . Jesus himself being the chief corner stone." Here he says again that Christ is the rock upon which the church is edified. Ellen White in Christian Service, page 20, says: "God's church is the palace of holy life, filled with varied gifts and endowed with the Holy Spirit. The members will find their happiness in the happiness of those whom they help and benefit."

It is a privilege to be members of God's church. The church that keeps God's commandments and has the faith of Jesus; the church that is commissioned to preach a pure and true message--the Adventist Church. Those who have been called from darkness to his wonderful light will reveal the grace of Christ, that our neighbors and friends may see Christ through our lives.

How should the church be? Eph. 5:27. "To present it glorious for him. . . ." The stain is caused by sin. Each individual member must be without stain, without sin. Thus the church will be holy and without blemish.

As a member of the church, I am part of the body of Christ, and in being so, I have to keep myself pure, holy before God. And so does everyone else who is a member of the church.

The relationship between Christ and his church ought to be very intimate. It should be a husband-wife relationship. Christ is the husband, and the church is the wife. Thereby, the church has to be holy, pure, and spotless. He is the head, the church is the body.

Rev 1:13 shows Christ walking to and fro in the church. He says: "I will not leave thee orphans, I will come to thee." And he is with us. The holy Spirit is with us to guide, lead, strengthen, and help us win victories, to help us win souls. All those who wish to live their lives in harmony with divine purposes, and who desire the soon coming of Jesus must join this church. "Then the King will say to those at his right. . . ." Then shall we enjoy a glorious kingdom for ever. First, Christ came to edify his church. Now this church is getting ready to be taken to heaven. We must proclaim it to all the world. We are most precious to God's eyes. Let each one be most important to this world, let every one be the salt of the earth.

Analysis

Matt 16:16-18 seems to be the main passage, but the whole sermon is based on the word "church." The historical background and the context are ignored. The preacher took the word "church" and developed the theme and the sermonic ideas from his particular way of thinking. The causes, conditions, and situations suggested in

the passage are not considered in its most important details. The passage adequately exalts Christ. Even when the key word is "church," emphasis is given to the rock. In Matt 16:18 with other passages like Deut 32:4; 2 Sam 22:2, 31, 47; and Ps 18:2, the preacher would have found plenty of support in explaining the word "rock." The message the preacher wants to convey is, apparently, that the church is invincible because it is founded upon the Rock which is Christ. However, the concept is not well developed.

The sermon does not explain the biblical passage nor does it apply it to the audience. Instead, it abounds in descriptive duties of the church members and what the church expects from them. Appropriately, Christ is exalted as the one who cares for the church and who will come soon for his church.

The message is well illustrated, particularly when the preacher compares Christ and his church with the intimacy between husband and wife. The application is very general, but the hearers were moved to stay in the true church in order to inherit the kingdom. It is a topical sermon. In short:

1. The message has a leading thought the preacher took from the supposed preaching portion. He used only the term "the church" from the passage but did not say what the text says about it.
2. The passage is not studied in detail. The text's historical background is not considered.
3. There is no intention to explain the meaning of important words to help the audience understand the text or thought better. Words like "rock," and "hell" related to the church deserved analysis and explanation.

4. Causes and conditions reflected in the passage are not clearly explained. What does it mean that the church is founded upon a rock? The preacher read a passage but he did not preach from it.

5. Application is poor because the preacher did not develop his sermonic ideas directly from the passage, in other words, the flow of thoughts was not controlled for the chosen text.

6. Christ is exalted as the one who cares for the church and he who comes soon for his church.

7. The message is full of good illustrations which help the congregation understand what the preacher attempted to say.

8. It is a compelling message.

Sermon Number 4

Background

The preacher is an ordained minister with ten years of experience in pastoral work. He graduated from Antillian College with a B.A. in Theology and recently earned his MA in Public Health.

The church in which he preached this sermon is the largest in the eastern region of the country. It has over 800 members, most of them young people and foreign students who attend the School of Medicine in the city.

Synopsis

Everything God executes is perfect, faithful, and true. The creation of man was one of the most sublime feats God could ever conceive. But if creating a man was a glorious deed, much more glorious was God's plan for salvation because it showed not only his great love toward the universe, but also his justice.

Let us analyze the first phase. Before man was created, before he existed, the plan of salvation was already a concept in the mind of God. There in his mind was the idea of how to save the man, if he chose to sin.

You may ask, "If God knew that the man was going to sin, why did he create him? Could not God, in his great wisdom, create a being who would never sin? How can this behavior relate to the idea of an omnipotent, infallible, and perfect God?"

God designed a being who had free will, a being able to make his own decisions. In the attributes of love, justice, and liberty comprised in God's character, there was the idea of free will or self determination, which the created man should enjoy. Today we

know that the only obedience or submission in which we find true liberty is in Christ. Any other obedience generates slavery and terrible imprisonment. Therefore, since God would never interfere with the principle of self-determination, man has two choices: to sin or not to sin. The decision would be made only by the man. Thus, things being as they were, God anticipates himself and conceives a plan for redemption. It would have never been executed had Adam never sinned.

In the second phase of the plan, the first coming of the Messiah is announced. This announcement conveys two important aspects: the promise and the fulfillment of the promise. Gen 3:15, "And I shall put enmity. . . ." This covenant of grace was established with the man in Eden. To him was given the divine promise that the seed of the woman, that is the church, would wound the serpent, Satan, on his head. It would be a mortal blow to the enemy. With Christ's death on the cross, not only would the man be freed from sin, but also God's character would be vindicated before the universe.

In Gal 4:4 we read: "But come the fulfillment of the time. . . ." Ellen White comments on this passage in the Desire of Ages: "It was determined in the heavenly council, the hour in which Christ was to come and when the great clock of time marked the time, Jesus was born in Bethlehem."

No one except Christ remolds the character ruined by sin. He came to raise from the dust and redo, according to the divine model, the character that had been stained. Yes, Jesus' death is a determining factor for our life. Only in Jesus can we find liberty.

He frees the oppressed hearts, awakens the numbed conscience, redeems and saves from sin.

The third phase of the plan for salvation is the announcement of the second coming of our Lord. It consists of five different aspects: (a) promises of the author, (b) confirmation of the promise, (c) reconfirmation, (d) adoption, and (e) victory. In John 14:1-3 we find one of the most precious promises given to man by our Lord. "Let not your hearts be troubled. . . ."

It was Jesus himself who promised to come again. In his final discourse, after his crucifixion and resurrection, the Savior promises to come back. "If I were gone, I will come back. . . ."

With his first coming, Jesus shed rays of heavenly light to lighten the world darkened with sin. In finishing his mission, he said, "I return to my Father." And there, on the Mount of Olives, he imparted specific instructions to his disciples, before ascending to heaven. Then two angels appeared to the same Jesus. From then on, Jesus has been our intercessor. Since then, heaven is not too far from us. Jesus lives in the heart of each believer, in the heart of all who seek him. The promise made to his disciples is the blessed promise; and very soon, when he comes again, he will take along all redeemed sinners.

The second aspect is that promise, confirmed not only by the angels but also by the same disciples who once received the Holy Spirit, proclaimed with power the message of the second coming. The most outstanding message of the apostolic, early church, was the proclamation of Jesus' second coming. "Maranatha," was their greeting, "Jesus is coming soon."

Now, the third aspect is the reconfirmation of this coming. If the early church confirmed Jesus' second coming, who will reconfirm such an announcement? We are in charge of that task. But, are we doing our part? Only when the remnant church meets its obligation of the preaching and living the message, will it be ready to fulfill the fourth aspect of the third phase for the salvation plan: to be adopted as sons and daughters of God.

In Rom 8:32 we read: "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption, to wit; the redemption of our bodies." Even in Paul's time, the church already suffered in its own flesh the problem of a faithful Christian life, because where God's principles are followed, there is difficulty and persecution. For that reason they hoped for the adoption and subsequent restoration of their bodies--the adoption of being called "Children of God." 1 John 3:1-3 confirms this desire and hope of these men and women. "See what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called sons of God."

Once adopted as sons and daughters of God, there is a principle that must not be forgotten. Eph 5:8: "Walk as children of light." Some forty years ago, John and Beatrice Spangler were missionaries in China. They were killed by bandits. When friends went to recover the couple's belongings, they found Beatrice's Bible. On its first page there was a prayer: "Lord, I abandon all my purposes and ambitions, and accept your will for my life. I give you my life, my everything, that it be yours forever. Fill me and seal me with your Holy Spirit."

John and Beatrice knew what it meant to be God's adopted children. They had understood God's plan of salvation for their lives. The Lord does not accept anything less than unconditional surrender. Half-converted Christians will never enter heaven. They would not find happiness there, because they know nothing of the elevated and sacred principles that rule the family of God.

The true Christian keeps the windows of his soul oriented toward heaven; he lives in communion with Jesus and surrenders his will to the Lord, because his major desire is to be like Jesus. Only when there is full understanding of the plan of salvation, only when we fulfill all that implies do we obtain victory, which constitutes the fifth phase of the plan. Only this way will we be ready to say with Paul in 1 Cor 15:57: "Thanks be given to God. . . ."

In concluding this message, I want to appeal to your hearts, that we may say like John and Beatrice: "We accept, Lord, your plan for our lives."

Analysis

This is a kind of didactic message about the plan of salvation that the preacher wanted to transform into a sermon. It is presented in three phases. The first phase does not have biblical support even though the sermonic ideas are verbalized with biblical concepts. The second phase is supported by Gen 3:15 and Gal 4:4, but no intention to explain them is found. These texts are used to develop the theme, but the preacher continues presenting his own thoughts. The third phase, supported by John 14:1-3, is well explained; the passage is expanded with other biblical texts. Jesus'

second coming is clearly presented. Although the third is subdivided into various aspects, the emphasis on Jesus' coming to adopt us as sons and daughters of God continues to be the leading thought.

The history of the quoted passages were not considered at all. The preacher cited these texts--with the exception of John 14:1-3--but he does not intend to study the causes, conditions, or situations discussed. Only two texts, 1 John 3:1-3 and Rom 8:23, are used to confront the audience. They also are presented with only minimal explanation.

The message is eminently Christocentric and full of information about the plan of salvation, but lacks practical application. The illustration of the missionaries does not fit the purpose of the sermon well.

The message is clearly suitable to the audience. The preacher made known the various phases for the plan of salvation.

Summarizing the Analysis

1. This message does not have a leading text to be followed in the development of the sermon. It is a topical sermon and the leading thoughts are taken from the Bible.

2. As the message does not have a passage to analyze, important words and sentences are not studied in their original meaning. Questions like: What does it mean to be adopted? What does it mean to walk as children of light? could have been explained to the hearers.

3. The sermon does not explain reasons, causes or conditions suggested by texts. Some few passages--John 14:1-3; 1 John 3:1-3; and Rom 8:23--are lightly explained.

4. The message lacks practical application.
5. Christ is presented as the center of salvation, the redeemer, and the one who is coming soon for his own.
6. The message lacks proper illustrations.
7. The preacher made an appeal to accept the Lord's plan for his hearers' lives, but he based his appeal on a story not clearly related to the message he tried to convey.

Sermon Number 5

Background

This preacher is a young man in his thirties. He graduated from Antillian College and has worked for about five years as a church pastor in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. The church where this sermon was preached resulted from an evangelistic campaign. Although most of the members are farmers, the church is located in a semi-urban area.

Synopsis

Today, for the well-being of the church, we are going to study three vital points.

1. Jesus makes the difference between his disciples and the world clear; those that serve him and those that do not serve him. In John 17:9-13, 15, 16, the Lord is praying for his disciples-- both past and present. This action points to the close relationship between Father and Son, and Christ and his people, and is done in order to make clear the difference between those who belong to the world and those who belong to Christ. In John 1:9-14 we find that the "world" means the majority of the human beings, those who have not yet decided to serve God. But it is said to recognize that many of us at times do not show in our own life what it means to be a son, a disciple of God, and what it is to be in or belong to the world. A broader explanation may be found in James 4:1-7. This statement needs no explanation. Christians are those that reject the worldly passions, that accept God's will. For that reason, in the Lord's prayer in John 17:20 he includes that all that God has permitted to Christians is to be guarded from worldly passions.

2. Let's go to the second part. Persecution is here presented. A true child of God is known by his actions. That was what the Lord commanded when he said: "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." The Christian demonstrates with his life that he is united to God; that he is doing God's will; and it is shown through his works. Let's see how the Lord presented the idea that persecution would be suffered by all those who anxiously want to do God's will.

In John 17:14-17 the Lord says: "I have given them thy words and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." Brethren the truth of God, which is his word, is the only thing we must obey. A disciple of Jesus is the one who says only what Jesus taught him to say (John 14:21, 23). Christians live in this world and are persecuted by this world because the devil, as it is recorded in Rev 12:17, is full of wrath against those who keep the Lord's commandments. In other words, the Christian, being God's instrument, is guided by God in such a way that his life becomes an open letter to the world, and that example motivates persecution.

Satan's wrath demands we, God's children, be covered with Christ's righteousness which is the only qualified instrument to overcome the enemy. Christians are persecuted not because they scoff at those who are not Christians, not because they live outside

the teaching of the gospel, but because they are doing what the Word of God teaches. For that reason Jesus said: Sanctify them in thy truth, keep them in thy teachings, because that is what sanctifies them.

Are we turning Jesus' prayer into a reality in us? Are we living as true disciples of Jesus before the world? Let's see the third part.

3. Part three deals with the love and unity that may exist among the disciples, so the world will recognize Jesus as the Father's representative, and us as sent by him. Let's read in John 17:20-23: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, as thou Father, art in me and I in thee, that they may also be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and that hast loved them, as thou have loved me." Here the Lord produces the great truth that we may have love and unity for and with each other as it is between Christ and the Father. Humanity united with divinity will end this work of preaching the gospel. This is possible only through the Word of God that we live and preach. A popular saying says: "Nobody is able to preach the gospel unless he is a living testimony." There is no other way to preach the gospel except by our testimony. Love and unity are to move us before the world in order that the world may know how it can live lovingly and in unity. Paul says in 1 Cor 13 that love never ceases. You and I being

different may be one only in thoughts and action. In 1 John 4:8 the apostles give a definition of what the unity between God and man and vice versa really is: "He that loveth not, knoweth not God." Do we really love? Are we really God's instruments in this world, and are we God's instruments to other Christians, in order to hold love and unity? Note what Sister White says in the Desire of Ages, page 593: "All those that have been born in the heavenly family are in one special sense brothers of Jesus. The love of Christ links all the members of his family and wherever this love is manifested the divine filiation is revealed. Jesus became a member of the earthly family in order that we become members of the heavenly family. He is the Son of man and brother of every son of Adam. Heaven sees him as a brother of the sinners, as the saints. Those that have fallen are embraced by the love of Christ and every good action to lift up a fallen soul, every act of mercy is recorded as if it were made to him."

How united are we with each other? What kind of love do we have? Again from page 596: "Love toward man is earthly manifestation of God's love. The King of glory came down to be one with us in order to set that love and make us sons of the same family."

We are God's family, God's people. We are identified by the love and unity that should be manifested in his church till the end of the world.

Have we accepted by God's power to be different from the world? We are called to proclaim this message, to live it, and to share it with others. Therefore, my prayer is that those things can be a reality. May God bestow his blessings upon you.

1. The meaning of the passages are not clearly analyzed. The preacher does not give information about the text nor the context.

2. Even when each part has its main text, they are not properly explored. The preacher read John 17:14-17 but put aside the text and continued talking about what he thought or what he wanted to emphasize. The same thing happens with John 17:20-23. However, the concept of persecution is well explained.

3. The sermon takes into account what the text says to people today and applies the message to their needs; a strong Christian life provokes the wrath of Satan and moves persecution; we are not of the world, because we do not live as the world does; we are identified as God's family when we show love and unity among us.

4. Christ is exalted in his role of brother of the human family, and as the one who forgives sinners.

5. The preacher raises questions like: How united are we with each other? What kind of love do we have? but he offers no answer either from the text or of his own.

6. The message is clarified with some effective illustrations.

Sermon Number 6

Background

The preacher works as assistant in the Publishing Department and pastors a congregation in the capital city. He graduated from the Adventist Dominican University in 1984 with a B.A. in Theology.

Synopsis

The text for this sermon is found in the last part of Rev 2:19: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." When we think about the word faithful, our mind pictures the idea of the honest things, the right things, etc. The Dictionary offers the following definitions of the word faithful: "constant, perseverant, one who holds what he believes, is worthy of confidence, a Christian totally submitted to the church's authority." Since we know that the church's authority is indeed the Lord Jesus, then John is calling us to be faithful to Jesus.

"To be faithful" does not mean that we should be faithful till the last day of our life, but that, should it be necessary, we should be ready to die for the Gospel's sake. The important matter in this text is the beautiful promise: "I will give thee the crown of life." In it the Lord says: "If you are faithful in spite of trials, deceptions, and disappointments among many other things, I will give you the crown of life."

As a way of example, the faithfulness of two biblical young men will be presented. In Gen 39:7, 9 says: "And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast her eyes upon

Joseph, and she said, Lie with me." Potiphar's wife was Satan's instrument to destroy Joseph's fidelity to his principles. The woman took advantage of a moment when they were alone and nobody else was around to try to seduce Joseph in such a way that the young man's fidelity was greatly tried.

In verse 9 Joseph answers to the woman's request: "There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou are his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" So Joseph explained that he must be faithful to Potiphar, who had relied totally on him. But above all, Joseph did not want to disappoint his God. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

This action is called faithfulness; this young man was really convinced of what he had believed. He kept the Christian principles in the deepest of his heart and that fidelity kept him steady in the supreme hour of trial. Joseph was faithful to God in adversity and prosperity. No doubt about it, he had promised himself to be faithful to the Christian principles he had learned from his father in his childhood.

"But the character of Joseph endured temptation whether in adversity or prosperity. He manifested in Pharaoh's palace the same fidelity toward God that he had shown in jail when he was in prison" (PP 222). Joseph was ready to endure death, if necessary, to maintain his faithfulness to God.

Another good example of fidelity is found in Daniel. For the sake of his faithfulness to God, he challenged the king's

authority. In Dan 6:4 it says: "Then presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault for as much as he was faithful, either was there any error or fault found in him."

Presidents and princes believed they could find fault in Daniel in regard to the Babylonian laws, but they could not, because Daniel was also faithful to his government duties. Into both, Daniel and Joseph, the good seed had been sowed, and nobody was able to take them out of their beliefs. They decided to be faithful to God even when that action meant the loss of their lives or freedom. Why were the men willing to offer their lives and be faithful to God? It was because they made a pact of fidelity with God. So the Lord expects from every one of his children to keep the Christian principles and be faithful to Him.

In comparing these examples with Rev 2:10, we can conclude that both Daniel and Joseph put into practice the admonition of John: "Be faithful." Are we ready, likewise, to sacrifice our lives and be faithful to the Lord? For the answer to be positive, we must do as they did. Let us surrender unconditionally our lives to the Lord and make a pact of fidelity so that even when trials and temptations come, and our faith in God be shaken down, we will be able to say: "Lord, I will be faithful to you no matter what."

Analysis

This sermon is based on the word FAITHFUL. By using two expanded biblical examples, the preacher tries to explain the meaning of the word. However, neither the text itself nor the context are explored to discover the full picture of the church in

that painful period of the church. To define faithfulness by saying that "it is a Christian who submits himself to the authority of the church" is not in accordance with the concept that emerges from the main text. Fortunately, the preacher corrects the former approach by adding: "A Christian who submits himself to God."

Even when the sermon correctly explains that "be thou faithful unto death" does not mean till the last day of our lives, the preacher cannot overlook the fact that it is also necessary to be faithful every day of our lives.

Important words like "I give thee" and "crown of life" are not fully explained to balance the tension of the term faithfulness. The message is well illustrated; the main point is clarified with some other biblical texts and, especially, with the two vivid examples of Daniel and Joseph.

The sermon does not confront the church with its real need of being faithful to God now. The preacher spends much time talking about what happened in the past but does not bring these experiences to face the needs of his people. Why must we be faithful today is not discussed. Christ is not presented as the one who helps young men in trial. Righteousness by faith is not emphasized. In short:

1. The message does have a leading text.
2. The proposed text is not exegetically analyzed.
3. Important terms are not discussed or explained.
4. The sermon is well illustrated.
5. It is not a Christ-centered sermon.
6. The sermon is not properly applied to present people.

Sermon Number 7

Background

The preacher graduated from Antillian College in 1975. He has partaken in different church-related responsibilities and has worked as a colporteur, church pastor, and departmental secretary. He was ordained in 1979.

The church where this sermon was preached is located in the outskirts of the capital and has a membership of about 200.

Synopsis

Saul, the prominent Jewish dignitary, was born in Tarsus, principal city of Sicily, the southeastern province of Asia Minor. Tarsus was located on a fertile plain near the Mediterranean Sea. This city was known for its nurture of Greek literature and philosophy, and for some time was under Roman domain. It is inferred that when Saul was born, he gained Roman citizenship. Therefore, Saul had two citizenships, because he was also a Jew. This he explains in his letter to Philippians. Phil 3:5-6 says that he was a Hebrew of Hebrews, "as touching the law, a Pharisee." Saul was raised in Jerusalem and strictly educated, according to the law, at the feet of Gamaliel, who was one of the most outstanding Jews of his time. The rabbis considered Saul a promising youth and held great expectations for him as a zealous and able defender of the ancient faith. Therefore, he was appointed a member of the Council. Taking advantage of his position of power, Saul became a fierce persecutor of the Christians, thinking that he was rendering God a service. In his defense before Agrippa, Saul testified that he used to think

his duty as a Pharisee was to do things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. He explained that, among other things, he imprisoned many of the saints by order of the principal priest. Other times, while punishing Christ's followers in the synagogue, he forced them to blaspheme God's name and was enraged against them. He also persecuted them even in foreign cities.

Saul had even taken an outstanding part in the judgment and sentencing of Stephen, and the impressive evidence of God's presence with the martyr induced him to doubt the justice of the cause he ardently defended.

Saul saw that Stephen was a man of God, that he was guided by the Holy Spirit, and that he was right in presenting Jesus as the Savior. Thus Saul was confused, and in his confusion, he consulted the priests who convinced him that Stephen was blasphemous and that Christ was an impostor. Then, with serious struggles against his conscience, he decided to become a strong opponent of the doctrine taught by Jesus' disciples. He decided to go to Damascus with power and a commission from the priest and the prince of Israel. The trip was long and dangerous and led through desolate deserts. On the last day of their trip, when they were getting closer to Damascus, Saul and his companions contemplated the refreshing scene before them. They saw the wide extension of fertile land, the beautiful gardens, and the fruitful harbors irrigated by the fresh currents coming from the surrounding mountains. And while they watched with admiration the beautiful city below, they suddenly saw a bright light coming from heaven. A light that excelled the sun in its brilliance at noon; this light surrounded Saul.

The light was too radiant for human eyes. Thus, bewildered and confused, Saul fell prostrate to the ground; while there, he heard a voice talking to him in Hebrew: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And he said, "Who art thou Lord?" And the Lord said: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

The words he heard moved his heart with irresistible force. His mind was enlightened with a rushing stream of light that cleared his ignorance and mistakes of his past life, and showed him his need of the Holy Spirit.

Now Saul saw that in persecuting Jesus' disciples he had been doing Satan's work. He saw that his conviction of right and wrong had been based mostly on his implicit trust in the priests and magistrates. Saul had believed them when they said that the resurrection was no more than a clever invention of the disciples. But when Jesus revealed himself to Saul, he was convinced of the veracity of the disciples' declarations, and in that moment of heavenly enlightenment, he decided to change the course of his life.

Right there Saul surrendered himself fully to the convincing power of the Holy Spirit. There he asked the great question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And you know the answer.

Saul obeyed instantly, and got up. Shaking and fearful, he opened his eyes but saw nothing because the light had blinded him. Then, his companions, leading Saul by the hand, got him into Damascus where he stayed for three days without seeing anything. During those days he had no food or water. Those were days of rigorous self-examination and humbling of spirit. With anguish he recalled again and again his part in Stephen's martyrdom. He reviewed all the

times he had shut his eyes and ears to the most impressive evidences that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah. During those long hours of solitude, he remembered many of the Scripture passages that referred to the first coming of Christ. Carefully he studied and tracked those prophecies, his memory sharpened by the conviction that had taken hold of his mind. In reflecting on the meaning of the prophecies, he was amazed at his own past blindness and at that of the Jews, in general, who had induced many to reject Jesus as the Messiah. Now, he who had been a proud Pharisee was prostrated before God with the humbleness and simplicity of a child, confessing his own indignities and invoking the merits of the crucified and risen Savior.

Saul now wanted to be in full harmony and communion with God and the Son, and in the intensity of his desire for forgiveness and acceptance, he offered fervent prayers to the throne of grace. His prayers were heard. They were not worthless because his deepest thoughts and emotions were changed by divine grace. His most noble faculties were put in harmony with God's eternal purpose. Christ and his justice became more than anything else for Saul. For that reason, when later on he wrote to some of his churches, he expressed the close relationship he had had and still had with Jesus Christ. He wrote: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I. . . ." (Gal. 2:20). And again he wrote to another church "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil 3:8). Thus Saul, the persecutor, became Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles.

In the story of Paul's conversion, impressive principles are given to us as Christians. First, it provides stunning evidence

of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit to convince men of sin. Saul was a cruel man; he was far from God, believing that by persecuting and killing Christians he was doing God's work. But, when he was under the influence of the Holy Spirit, his life was completely changed.

We have seen many bad people, people who are problems in their homes and their communities, but, when they listen to God's call and put themselves under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they are converted into new creatures. Saul's career was stopped by Jesus, who convinced him of his sins. But there is an interesting aspect that should be considered. When Saul asked, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" the Lord placed him in contact with the church. There he would be able to know God's will regarding his life. Therefore, Christ carries out his work of revelation and conviction but the church is commissioned to point out the truth.

In the early church, there was a man of good testimony, a man known for his obedience to God's commandments, for being a faithful Christian. His name was Ananias. God chose him to instruct Saul, to explain to him the message of redemption, to bring him to repentance and baptism.

On this occasion, Ananias represented Christ. In place of Jesus, Ananias touched Saul's eyes that he received sight; and when Ananias prayed, Saul received the Holy Spirit.

Everything is done in the name and by the authority of Christ. He is the source and we, as the church, are the means for communion. To Ananias, as a member of the early church, was entrusted the task of helping Saul in his decision.

Today there are many who, like Saul, pray and feel their need of God and consider themselves sinners. They want to find the way of salvation, but do not know how. God calls you and me to seek those people who pray and want to be saved.

During this national evangelistic campaign, the Lord presents before us a wonderful opportunity. In this community there are many modern Sauls, many who are to be saved. And we are the instruments to help these people. God knows exactly where they are, he knows their spiritual condition, their problems and needs. But God needs our collaboration in seeking them. Therefore, let us make good use of this opportunity that the Lord gives us and pray that he will lead us to his children still out of the sheepfold.

Analysis

This message is a biographical exposition of Paul's life. As such, it is eminently biblical. As evidenced by his conclusion, the purpose of the preacher was to emphasize the function of the church as God's instrument.

If so, his narrative did not need to include as much time on Paul's early biographical sketches but rather more on his conversion and Ananias's commission.

The last part makes a good connection between Paul's experience and Ananias as church representative. It offers a clear application by way of comparison between Ananias and the mission of the present church.

This narrative method does not need many illustrations to be clear and understandable, so the message, being an illustration

itself, did not need any more and fell easily on the ear of the audience.

The message does not have a leading text, but the sermon is delivered by using a biblical story. The preacher studies the historical background and follows the narrative apostolic method, but he does not arrive at a proper conclusion. Early preachers used the narrative method to argue and to convince the hearers about the fulfillment of a prophecy concerning the Messianic function of Christ or any other important matter, but in this sermon the only purpose of the preacher seems to be to make known Paul's story before his conversion.

A practical application is found. What the preacher says about Ananias is used to challenge the present church to do the same, especially, at the beginning of a national evangelistic campaign. Jesus' function as the one who inspires and moves the church to act is not clearly presented.

Summarizing:

1. The message does not have a leading text.
2. The biographical story is literally studied.
3. The supposed main points in Paul's story are not discussed at all.
4. Christ's function is not clearly presented.
5. Application on Ananias's account is good.

Sermon Number 8

Background

The preacher is a non-ordained young minister who has been pastoring churches for three years. He graduated from Montemorelos University with a B.A. in Theology.

This sermon was preached in a small rural church of about fifty members, most of whom are young people. Farming is their main occupation.

Synopsis

Every Christian has at some time contracted an obligation of some kind. In meeting an obligation both parties have their responsibilities. When we refer to an obligation or pledge toward God, we know that he is very exacting in what he expects from us. Thus, if we meet our obligations to him, it would be easier to meet our other commitments. From the moment of his baptism, every church member acquires an obligation with heaven. If you feel worried about doing your part, you must take courage, for God is ready to help you meet your obligations.

We can illustrate this idea by noting the care with which the farmer gets a loan from the bank. The bank offers the necessary orientation so the farmer can have a successful harvest. Then, when the harvest is over, it is possible for the farmer to meet the obligation with the bank. And it is all made possible, thanks to the interest of the institution. God does likewise with his children. He asks and expects something of them, but does not forsake them; instead, he provides motivation and strength that the obligation may be fulfilled.

There are different dimensions to the obligations of the Christian. The apostle Paul presents them in Eph 3:18. The width of our obligations is measured by the physical world, the time and the length of time God gives to meet that obligation. It comprises the whole width of existence. It is incommensurable. It goes from eternity to eternity and its outcome goes in the same direction. It conveys the unlimited desire with which it is executed. Thus, the obligation is wide. In essence, it encloses everything.

The second aspect, according to Paul, is length. It is measured by the distance that must be covered by the obligation from the day of baptism till death. It comprises the breach between what we must fulfill and what we want to fulfill. It symbolizes the distance covered by Christ in coming to this world to meet his redemptive obligation towards humanity.

In the third place, we must consider depth. It points out the place where the obligation is to be met. It is the personification of the pledge; it is the unknown part. It explores whether we are willing to descend to the most gloomy depths to save a soul. It questions us to see if we understand our duty; it makes us discover the truth about things; it makes us thinkers because it stops us from meditating and forces us to seek the proper way to solve problems.

We should be grateful to God who obligates us, for in that way we become Christian thinkers, men who wish to penetrate new fields of inner thoughts, and who irrigate their lives with the fresh water of divine content in order to meet that obligation.

God expects deep thoughts from you. He demands intrepid

work for his sake; clear ideas, commitment, depth in the work for the Lord. Your commitment toward heaven makes you a heavenly mouthpiece. Have you ever thought about the depth of your words? Are they in tune with your obligation?

The fourth dimension is height. The obligation is an elevated pact with God. Think for a moment of God's place, then compare it with the place where you are. There is much distance. Thus is the nature of our obligation toward God. He makes transactions of high significance, not petty deals. As his kingdom is in the highest, so his obligations. Therefore, think about it. When you were called into the church, how elevated was that call?

These four dimensions make us discern more clearly the scope of our obligations. When the last Alpinist ascended the peak of Mount Everest, they understood the height of their obligation. It will not be difficult to meet elevated obligations if our glance is set on the highest point.

When we meet our obligations we reap great results. For example:

1. Our friendship with God is increased
2. God's trust in us is confirmed
3. Our relationship with God is more accessible
4. Our feelings of insufficiency disappear
5. Our mental faculties are enhanced
6. We better accept the challenges of heaven
7. We understand the divine program better
8. We discover God's actual expectations for us

9. We appropriate for ourselves the divine elements that help us meet our obligations.

10. We become the happiest beings in seeing heaven's requirements as reality in our lives.

This outcome will be as real as we are complete in our obligation. The faithfulness and completeness with which they are met will produce in us a mature Christian, a leader in the church, a servant in God's work. We were anointed, baptized to carry on a special task. The magnitude and extension of that obligation places us above any human ideal. "It was the purpose of the Savior that, after ascending to heaven to become the intercessor of man, his followers continue the work he had initiated. Will not the human instrument show a special interest in giving light to those sitting in darkness? But God requires that all those who know the truth, try to win others to it" (Christian Service, p. 12). In the same book, page 14, "Each true disciple is born in God's kingdom as a missionary."

These thoughts should make us think of the meaning of our obligation toward God. If at that moment--of the baptism--you had not examined your life, you must still do it. How? Watch yourself, see what is wrong. Christ gave us an example of the importance of his obligation. As Gregory Naciancenc expressed it: "It is a wonder to think that he who was the bread of life, initiated his ministry undergoing hunger; and being the water of life, he would end being thirsty; being hungry, he satisfied man's hunger of him. He was called devil, but cast away the demons. He prayed, but is the one who hears our prayers. He was tired, but is our rest; he paid

taxes, and is the King of kings. He was sold for 30 silver coins, and is the world's ransom. He was silent as a lamb, however, he is the eternal Word."

Nothing deterred Christ from meeting his obligations before the Father. We also have a challenge: to meet our obligations to God. We are redeeming agents of humanity. Are we fulfilling our duty? Let us ask him for the necessary strength to do it.

Analysis

The main text of this sermon--Eph 3:18--is employed in an allegorical sense. A study of the literal meaning of the text would have given the preacher the true purpose or intention of the writer. The context is not explored in order to better understand what the apostle wanted to say. The sermon is constructed with thoughts and ideas outside the text. Seemingly, the message comes from the text, but the text is not explained. The main words of the text could have been used as a natural division of the message. The content of the sermon could be discovered there by explaining every key word--length, width, depth, and height--first in their original meaning and then, as he did, by applying it to the present situation.

The central theme is the obligation each Christian has to undergo. The message consistently emphasizes this relation between God and man. Christ is presented in the background of the sermon as an example that should be followed in fulfilling obligations, but the sermon does not say how we could fulfill our obligations.

Christ is the center of all obligation between God and man. The illustration given by Gregory Naciancense, however, presents Jesus

as the one who neglected commodities and privileges in order to fulfill his obligations.

The message is not clear for the type of audience to whom it was presented. The illustration of the loan from the bank is very suitable because farmers are familiar with that kind of business, but the development of the sermon, the explanation of the four sides of the obligation are not easy to understand for simple people with a low educational level. The message, however, compels the audience to meet their obligations to God.

In summary:

1. The message has a leading text.
2. The text is not historically or literally studied.
3. The text is not properly explained.
4. Christ is presented in the background of the theme.
5. What the message says is applied to people.
6. The preacher used good illustrations.

Sermon Number 9

Background

The preacher is a young minister in his thirties. He graduated from Antillian College with a degree in Theology in 1979. Since then, he has been pastoring churches in different districts of the Conference. The church where this sermon was preached is a town church with a membership of about 80.

Synopsis

Deut 30:16 "I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou may live and multiply: And the Lord, thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it."

These words were addressed to Joshua who was about to be placed as successor of Moses. To him God said: "I command you this day to love the Lord thy God." When should we love our God? Tomorrow? Yesterday? Today? "For I command you this day to love the Lord thy God." What does it mean? What does it mean to truly love our God with all our heart? What does it mean to a Seventh-day Adventist to love his God? What does it mean to you to love your God? Do you love God with all your heart? If you asked how many loved God, all would raise their hands, for all of us claim to love God. But, the question is: Do we love him truly? "For I command you this day to love the Lord thy God."

The Adventist people are much like the people of Israel. They were instructed about things, but they either forgot or did not want to do them. When the Israelites were about out to possess

the promised land, God talked to Moses and said: "Do you see that land in front of you? You will not enter it." But he said to Joshua in a clear way: "For I command you this day to love the Lord thy God." I do not know how many of you, when walking on a muddy trail, keep walking on the mud. Surely we would walk where others have walked before. And it says clearly here: "To walk in his ways"--to walk in the way that the Lord has told us, the way that is already much used. That we walk in the way that leads us to the eternal life, the way that takes us to an encounter with the true God, and to live with Jesus Christ.

". . . to keep his commandments. . . ." Which of the commandments are we keeping? What are the commandments that God talks about? The verse says, ". . . his statutes and his judgments. . . ." There is a difference between commandments, statutes, and decrees. When talking about commandments, one refers to something already established. The people of Israel knew the commandments and understood them as well as we do today. But God was reminding them that to be able to love him truly, they had to keep his already established commandments.

But the people of Israel forgot things. They walked through the desert, they spent 400 years as captives of a foreign land, but now they were about to possess the promised land. And since they forgot the commandments, God gave them statutes.

The Adventist people, like ancient Israel, are walking to the heavenly Canaan. Are we walking on the way that will take us to encounter our God?

". . . that thou may live and multiply. . . ." Where are we

going to live? For how long will we live in the heavenly Canaan? For life in the kingdom of heaven is eternal, and we shall be sanctified. We shall be vivified if our testimony is in accordance with God's words. Our lives will be a living testimony to God. If we walk in the true way and keep his commandments, we will come to win many souls for the kingdom.

". . . the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. . . ." In 1844, the people of Israel emerged again as God's people and started to preach the message of eternal life. We have been preaching for over a hundred years. As we approach the end of time, God is supposed to be with his church and with each one of us. We are almost entering the heavenly Canaan. Are we ready to enter it? 2 Cor 3:18 says: "But we all, with open gaze beholding as in a glass . . . we are transformed. . . ." When you look at yourself in a mirror, what do you see? Let us picture the people of God looking at themselves in a mirror, that is, the ten commandments. The mirror reveals what we are. It reveals what we have. Let us stand with open gaze beholding the glory of the Lord," and then wonder, "Are we walking in God's way? Is our testimony in accordance with our God's mandate? Do we love God truly, with all our heart?

"But we all . . ." not a part, not my neighbor, but all, God's people, we, "with open gaze beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord." What is it to be changed? It would mean to live a true testimony, to love God with all our hearts. If we tie the thoughts of 2 Cor 3:18 with 2 Tim 2:22 ("Flee also

youthful lust, but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart"), we will find that those who call on the Lord walk in the ways of justice; they walk in the ways that take them to eternal life. They are the ones who are truly changed "from glory to glory" to live with Christ in the kingdom of heaven.

Let us think about those men who had a true testimony, about those men who loved God truly and surrendered their lives to him to live with him for ever. We could mention Joseph, who loved God and walked in his ways, and died with the hope of going back to the promised land. We could think of Moses, who struggled and guided a people through the dangers of the desert because he wished to enter the land, and above all, because he loved God.

We could also think of Caleb, who loved God so much that when everybody was against him, he stood for God's justice; and also of Joshua, a man of love, who truly loved God; and Paul, who surrendered to God with all his heart. When he heard the call, he asked, "What do you want me to do?" We could also mention Timothy, Titus, and many more who loved God and wanted to enter the land.

But what about us? We do not face an earthly Canaan like Moses; but we look up to the heavenly land where we will live with Christ forever. To Joshua it was said: "I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God. . . ." May we be able to say today and tomorrow these words: "I love the Lord." And that every day we will walk in the ways, keeping his commandments. "And the Lord shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it."

Analysis

This is a brief study of Deut 30:16. The passage is divided into four parts, full of questions but very poor in the proper answers. Questions like: What does it mean to us to love God? Do you love him truly? If properly answered, these questions would have given the sermon well-explained material. On the other hand, the lack of literal study of the passage prevents the preacher from explaining the original intention of the writer and the reasons why God asks the people to love Him. The happy consequences of loving God are absent from the message. The text is quoted again and again, but neither the text itself nor its context is ever interpreted, so the application is vague.

Application does not identify the hearers with a direct problem. For example: In what specific ways are the Adventists like Israel? How can we walk in the Lord's ways? By the way, the expression "to walk in the Lord's ways" is understood literally when the preacher uses the example of walking in the mud.

The fact that the preacher seeks to apply each part to the church is appropriate. If he had left them until the end, the people could have forgotten them all.

Although the sermon is full of illustrations, the preacher does not make clear the connection between the fact and the example. When he cites Joshua, Joseph, Caleb, and others, he does not say why they loved God. These two key words would help the audience to know how to gain the same experience.

2 Cor 3:18 is quoted but not explained in its true meaning. The relation of the mirror and the commandments the preacher wanted

to use is more properly found in James 1:23-25. Why the passage was written is not mentioned. The message is God-centered, but God is not presented in his function as provider of all good, redeemer from slavery, nor his eternal love for his people.

The message is applied to the church by saying: "If you love God he will bless you in the land he will give you to possess.

In summary:

1. The message has a leading text.
2. The text is not literally or historically studied.
3. The text is not explained clearly.
4. The message is God-centered.
5. The message is applied to church.
6. The message is well illustrated.

Sermon Number 10

Background

The preacher is an ordained minister. He graduated from Antillian College with a degree in Theology and, for seven years, has been pastoring churches in the Central Dominican Conference.

This sermon was preached in a town church characterized by its fervor and success in soul winning.

Synopsis

The epistle to the Phillipians was written in the year of A.D. 63 by the apostle Paul, and was sent with Epaphroditus from Rome, where the apostle was imprisoned. Paul's letter warns against the "dog" and those who mutilate the body. These are the ones who mutilate the church--the body of Christ. Today we should still be aware of them, because they have not finished their work and will keep trying until Jesus comes.

Epaphroditus was a friend of Paul. He journeyed to Rome to carry some financial help to the apostle. Paul says that this man was about to perish. During that time he caught an illness that almost caused him to die (Phil 2:30). Thus, brethren, those pioneers of God's kingdom are an inspiration for Christians of all ages.

Jesus, as he did for the fig tree, will give us one more year as our intercessor and will bestow upon us his divine grace. We will have one more year to work for Jesus. In the parable of the fig tree, he let us see the importance of time. Ellen White says: "He who loses days and weeks because he is not available to accomplish what it is presented to him to do, no matter how humble

it should be, will have to give reasons for the wasted time (2 SM, p. 206).

To us who are a part of a prophetic movement, the coming of a new year is of great significance because time and prophecy are combined, and it is not possible to refer to the Adventist movement without taking into account dates such as 1844 and 1907. Christ's first coming was linked with time (Gal 4:4). In the same way, his judgment and second coming are also linked to time.

I want to open a discourse about the achievements of the church in 1984.

No matter how sad was the last year, nor how outstanding our achievements, nor how great our success, all are part of history. The apostle Paul presents one of the best alternatives to close one year and to open another. He says: "Not as though I had already attained . . . but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." Probably the apostle has in his mind the image of the competition accomplished by runners in the coliseum. In 1 Cor 9:24, the same apostle says: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?" You may say: "Then, in this congregation, only one person will get the prize. I want to obtain it. If it is only one prize, I want to get it." Let me tell you what you should do: come in and share the race with me and Jesus, thus you will also be a winner.

The apostle continues saying in Phil 3:13 "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. . . ." In other words, he describes himself as

in the battle field fighting for the triumph and the crown of victory. In vs. 12 he is shown as tied to Jesus' hand. In Gal 2:20 he is also shown as crucified together with Christ. Certainly, this is the only condition for getting the prize in the Christian race: to be hidden in the life of Christ.

As we have already said, Paul was a prisoner living in a rented apartment when he wrote this letter. All who wanted to visit him could do so. In spite of the chains he carried, he still felt free to write and to speak. He said: "I am fettered, but my words and writings continue moving." Chapter 3 describes him in an open evangelistic action, but an interesting detail in these verses says that he forgot all he left behind. Sometimes we fail because we try to live in the past. In a race, the worst mistake the runner can make is to look back. We cannot look back; we must look forward. We don't have to be anxious about the past. Although we cannot completely forget it, don't let it interfere or get in the way; we have to go on. In Pompey, many lost their lives because they went back to get their goods and their valuables. Our Lord asks us to be watchful. In Luke 17:32 he says: "Remember Lot's wife." These words were enough for his audience to be encouraged to look forward. When God's people were about to cross the Red Sea, they felt themselves surrounded with perplexities, so they wanted to go back to Egypt. But God commanded them to move forward, and then, successfully, they crossed the Red Sea (Exod 14:15). In Luke 9:15 the Lord says: "No man, having put his hands to the plow, looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." So brethren, from now on, let us put our hands on the plow and let us not look back, but forward.

It is possible that we have been fighting against some secret habits, home difficulties, resentment against someone else, or maybe someone has fallen in love with a non-Adventist. The Lord's servant says: "We have nothing to fear except we forget the way the Lord has guided us in the past." Let's go back to Paul in Phil 3:13, ". . . reaching forth unto those things which are before. . . ." To Paul, as also to us, eternal life is worth waiting for. Paul says in verse 14 that he had a goal to reach. As Moses in Mount Pisga saw the promised land, likewise Paul had a glimpse of the eternal home. You and I also, in the midst of tremendous calamities, may contemplate eternity. In 1985, let us apply to ourselves Paul's motto: "to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Analysis

This sermon is based on Phil 3:12-14. The preacher makes an elaborate and detailed presentation of the historical background of the epistle, but he does not spend as much time in analyzing the chosen passage. These three verses would have meant more had the preacher asked questions such as: Why did he say that? What does it mean to establish good rapport between what the writer said and its meaning for the present time? It is clearly seen in the comparison made between those that run the race and the need of those present to do the same thing. Another good example is the emphasis on the idea of "forgetting those things which are behind" which is nurtured with other texts (Luke 17:32; Exod 14:15; Luke 9:62). The message is well illustrated. The example of Pompey fits well with the purpose of the sermon; the emphasis is on not looking back,

forgetting what has been left in the past, and reaching forth into those things which are first. The parable of the fig tree does not have room for the development of the theme. The digression made to present church achievements affects the unity of the sermonic idea the preacher wants to construct about Paul, who is the central character in the sermon.

The sermon spends much time in irrelevant historical information related to the epistle or to a secondary personage. Some materials gathered from exegetical study could be of help in the sermon, but it is necessary to determine the purpose of the sermon in order to make an appropriate selection. Exegesis is not the sermon. A general view of the epistle and a comparison with the other prison epistles would have been more helpful. The chosen passage is well developed and explained, particularly the biblical portions taken from the whole text. Some important words like perfect, target, and prize are not explained in their original meaning. These key words determine the true purpose the writer had in mind.

The biblical portion as a whole is literally explained. From almost every explanation, the preacher gets an application useful to the audience's needs. Not much of Christ and his salvific function is found. Gal 2:20 is probably one of the few places where Jesus is presented, however, the leading text could have been developed by saying that it is only through Jesus, or Jesus in us, that we gain a successful victory. The preacher started saying so, but did not go very far. The message is not as clear as it should be because it deviates from the theme of the biblical passage.

In summary,

1. The sermon has a leading text.
2. The text is literally and historically studied.
3. The text is explained.
4. Discussion and suggestions of the text are considered.
5. The sermon is not Christ-centered.
6. The sermon is well illustrated.
7. It is applied to people.

Sermon Number 11

Background

The preacher is a young minister in his mid-twenties who has been working for about three years. He was first a Bible teacher in one of the academies and assistant pastor before he became director of a full district. He graduated from Alajuela College in 1982 where he earned a B.A. in Theology.

This sermon was preached to a small urban congregation located in a suburb of the capital city.

Synopsis

Ellen White says in Prophets and Kings: "The whole universe watches with intense interest the final scenes of the great controversy between good and evil. The children of God are nearing the frontiers of the eternal world." Prophecies will be fulfilled. Very soon we will reach the end of this world. The gospel will be preached, and Jesus will come for the second time. God will finish the work. The apostle Paul, in Rom 9:28 says: "For the Lord will execute. . . ." We have a very important part in this great event. The Lord will complete it with or without our help. If we do not want to do our part, someone else will do it. The Holy Spirit, the third agent of the Deity, is given to us to be of use in this service. Many think that the Holy Spirit will serve our purposes, as we choose it, and not for the service for which God has called us.

In Desire of Ages, page 626, Ellen White says: "We cannot use the Holy Spirit, but he will use us. By the Spirit God works in his people." If we do not allow the Spirit to work his way in our

lives, then it is probable that we are working with carnal energy and not with the power of the Spirit. According to the Spirit of Prophecy, "without the Spirit and power of God, it will be in vain that we try to represent the truth." For that reason, our need for the Holy Spirit in God's church is made very clear. Before ascending to heaven, Jesus left us some words that should resound in our ears today. Acts 1:8 "And you will receive. . . ."

In Selected Messages, volume 1, page 439, Sister White says: "We can only be made apt for heaven through the work of the Spirit in the heart, since we should have Christ's justice as our safe-conduct, if we are to have access to the Father to have Christ's justice daily, we must be transformed by the influence of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is to elevate tastes, sanctify the heart, and ennoble every man."

The Holy Spirit, in the early rain, purifies and transforms us until we reach victory in every aspect of our lives. This is the preparation we should make before being ready to receive the latter rain.

This idea can be illustrated with a lot of land that needs to be fertilized and prepared to receive the seed. Once it is ready, the seed is planted and within a short time, a beautiful plant grows. In the same way, the Holy Spirit acts in our lives. We need to prepare ourselves daily, as a lot of land, to receive the anointment of the Holy Spirit.

Those who don't die to self every day and who do not allow the Holy Spirit to purify and transform their lives, will not recognize nor understand its manifestation in the latter rain. They

will be shaken and eliminated, and their places will be occupied by others who will hold the truth and will unite with God's people who keep his commandments.

In Testimonies, volume 2, pages 70-71, Sister White says: "It is now when we should wash the robe of our character and whiten it in the blood of the Lamb. It is now when we must subdue our pride, passion, and spiritual laziness; it is now when we should awake and make a strong effort to reach symmetry of character."

Moreover, the Holy Scriptures tell us in Heb. 3:7, 8, 15, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, today if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts. . . ."

It is possible that we are in a painful situation, telling the world that we are watching and waiting for the appearance of our Lord while this same world finds itself in great darkness. And the big thing is that you and I have been chosen to lighten this darkness with the light of the gospel. Paul says (1 Thess 5:4): "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness."

Have you not thought that the power of heaven is within our reach? But to be able to receive this power in its fullness, we should divest ourselves of self. Our loving Father wishes to pour the Holy Spirit upon us in great measure. And He orders us to clear the way by renunciation. And then, our eyes will be open to see the obstacles that our lack of Christianity have placed in others' ways.

James 5:17 says that Elijah "was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain and it did not rain." Only a faith firmly rooted in our God and the purity of our character will make us apt to do great works on this

earth. Verse 16 says: "Confess your offenses. . . ." When one is divested of self; when all false gods are excluded from the soul, the vacuum is filled up with the influx of the Holy Spirit. But this work cannot be done by man himself. Only through the intervention of Christ can it become a reality. When this change is real, the language of the soul will be: "Lord take my heart because I cannot give it to you; it is yours; keep it pure for I cannot do it; save me in spite of myself, my weak self, so unlike Christ; mold me, form me, raise me to a pure and holy atmosphere where the rich current of your love flows through my soul."

The results of the latter rain, according to Desire of Ages, will be abundant. The conversion of thousands is to be repeated, and with much more power.

What are you doing in the great work of preparation? The hour is advanced. We should not delay. Remember that the Israelites spent forty years traveling in the desert when they could have reached the promised land in a short time. When God's people are ready for the latter rain, God's work will be finished in a short time. Let us be ready. Let us ask God for strength, power, perseverance, sanctity, that the promise of the latter rain may be fulfilled in us.

Analysis

Although the thoughts come from the Bible and the writings of Ellen White, no portion of the Bible was studied. The dominant impression of the sermon is that the preacher has used Ellen White's writings to support his points of view instead of the Scriptures. His illustration of the seed on fertile soil appropriately compares

with the function of the Holy Spirit in Christian growth. Also the comparison between what happened with the early rain and what will happen with the believers in the latter rain is suitable and sets a correct application for the hearers.

Instead of an organized sermon, this is a type of informal exhortation. In such cases the preacher does not have to work hard to get a good response from the audience.

Because there is no text to be analyzed, one cannot consider the message a full biblical message. The passages used as secondary references, or to support the preacher's utterances, are not explained; the preacher read the text but immediately abandoned it and continued presenting his own ideas.

Practical application is found in the message. The hearers were called to be prepared today for the latter rain because God, in a short time, is able to pour the Holy Spirit upon the church. Christ is seen as the only one who is able to change the life of the sinners.

In summary,

1. The sermon does not have a leading text.
2. There is no exegesis at all.
3. There is no explanation at all.
4. There is no discussion or suggestions of any text.
5. It is a Christ-centered message.
6. The message is applied to people.
7. The message is illustrated.

Sermon Number 12

Background

This preacher is a young minister who started working after completing junior college. He worked for about four years as a church pastor. Currently, he is back at the Dominican University where he is working toward his B.A. in Theology; at the same time he is assisting in a nearby church.

The church where this sermon was preached is a small company of about 60 members in a rural zone.

Synopsis

It was Friday morning. No vehicles were seen on the streets. Everything was quiet; factories, schools, shops--all remained in silence. The reason for this quietness was the commemoration of Jesus' passion and death. Today's world still remembers--although in a different way--the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This celebration reminds us of the great Jewish feast of the passover. The term passover, known from 1500 B.C. and used by Paul in 1 Cor 5:7, designated a sacred feast of great symbolism for God's people of the Old Testament. Each year, on the fourteenth day of April, first month of the Jewish calendar, the whole people celebrated the occasion, leaving aside all routine work to get involved in the festivities. According to tradition, it was customary for the people to meet by families for the preparation of the feast from the tenth day--that is, four days before the actual celebration. It was called the passover lamb and it was to be sacrificed and eaten, together with bitter herbs and unleavened

bread, by all the families. This lamb, cooked without any seasoning, constituted the passover supper for the people. This memorable Jewish feast had its origin the last night Israel spent in Egypt. Before the victory of the final night, before God's great liberation, before they could see God's wonders, they had to celebrate the passover. That day was to be remembered by Jews, and Egyptians as well, because of the death of the firstborn. The Lord said the blood of the lamb would be a sign for those who belong to the people of God. Thus, all who wanted to save their firstborn from death would paint the threshold of the door with blood. They did it as a sign of loyalty and obedience to the God who rules heaven and earth.

That was a day of great activity and deep pain. When everyone was silently sleeping, the angel of the Lord passed quietly, killing all the firstborn of those whose doors were not marked by the symbolic blood of the passover.

History reveals that Israel was liberated that night to enter into a new experience with God. And the Lord said about the passover, "It will be a memorial for all generations" (Exod 12:14). Through this passage written by Moses, we can see that the passover had a double purpose. It should be a commemorative activity. It should remind us of the liberation worked out by God, and it should also point out the liberation of man from the slavery of sin.

The perfect lamb was a symbol of the Perfect Lamb (John 1:29). Christ is that passover lamb that died for all men. "You were saved with the precious blood of Jesus. . . ." (1 Pet 1:18, 19).

God's servant wrote: "Christ expressed It is done! With

his death great darkness covered the earth, the mountains shook; the sepulchres were open and dead were thrown out of their graves. Amidst all the commotion and the tearing the veil of the temple, the knife fell from the hands of the priest and the lamb escaped. Thus the sacrifice was avoided. The symbolic act had been fulfilled. The ceremony was not needed anymore because, as Paul said, "the lamb had already been sacrificed for us."

Christ died for our sins, he died to give men hope, because he came to seek and save what was lost (Luke 19:10). Isaiah said, "As a lamb. . ." (Isa 53:7). This must be a significant act for us, because according to Paul, Christ came to save sinners "from which I am the first" (1 Tim 1:15). For the life of the firstborn in Israel, it was not enough that the lamb was dead, and his blood shed. Only one thing had primary value: that the blood was placed on the threshold of the door for the divine agent to see.

In the same way, Christ's blood should be sprinkled over our lives so that the redeeming power of the lamb of God can work for our salvation and eternal life. As in the past, our only guarantee on that day when everything will be destroyed and we see God's face, will be to place Christ's blood on our lives.

According to 1 Pet 3:9, the Lord tarries "because he is patient and merciful, no wanting anyone to perish. . . ." Paraphrasing this passage, "The Lord is patient, waiting for the sign of identification to be placed on those who wish to be victorious and be saved when God's angel passes with final destruction for this world. He expects us to be divested of our own justice, and accept the justice of Christ, the Lamb who died for our sins. He expects

us to see our own sinning condition, our filthy rags, to look at our lives and accept his intercession in our behalf; to grow every day, testifying of our home which is heaven. However, this will not be possible unless we understand that Christ is the one who should lead our lives. We should give him the helm and he will take us to a safe harbor.

All our actions are worthless, unless Christ's blood constitutes a sign, and it does its purifying work in man's heart. Then, what Christians are expected to do will have a sanctifying value and will also be a powerful resource for the strengthening of a sanctified experience like Noah, Daniel, and Joseph.

Christ's blood should bring hope and redemption to the discouraged heart. Man should cease being saddened by sin and its consequences. There should be no place for the sense of guilt or distress. We do not reach justice because of our works or efforts, but by the blood of God's Lamb that takes away the sins of the world.

The day of liberation is near. On that day, what will the angel see in your life? Which justice will cover you, your own or Christ's? It is time to place the sign on our lives that show we have applied the blood of the Lamb to our lives and have washed our robes there for ever.

Analysis

This sermon is a narration and application of the Jewish feast of passover. The sermonic ideas come directly from the Bible. The purpose of the sermon is clearly seen through the development of the message. The preacher uses quotations from the Bible and

Ellen White extensively to support his sermonic ideas. The sermon is fully developed in the context of the passover. The typological concept of the lamb in the OT finds its true type in the Lamb of the NT as it was presented by Paul in 1 Cor 5:7. The message presents a clear picture of Christ as Savior and Redeemer.

The biblical portion is studied in its historical context and explained in its most important details. All the past experiences related to the passover are brought to the present time and applied to peoples' needs.

In summary,

1. It has a leading text.
2. It is exegetically studied.
3. The text is explained.
4. It is a Christ-centered message.
5. The sermon is applied to people.
6. The message is well illustrated.

Sermon Number 13

Background

The preacher is pastor of six urban congregations. He graduated from Antillian College and earned his M.A. at Andrews University. After teaching history for one year, he was assigned to work as a minister in the Central Conference, where he has been for the last three years.

The church where this sermon was preached is one of the oldest congregations in Santo Domingo, with a membership of about 250.

Synopsis

Today 170,000 people will die, 350,000 will be born: net difference, 180,000 more mouths to feed. This phenomenon occurs whenever the earth revolves around its own axis. A full stomach does not recognize hunger, nor does hunger understand the reason for its existence. The day may come when getting married will be a crime. In Asia, a baby has a 50 percent chance of reaching six years of age. In Biafra, vultures are better fed than people because they feed themselves on human carcasses. However, there is a hunger which is more terrible than physical hunger: it is spiritual hunger. Amos 8:11, 12 says: "The day will come, says the Lord that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord, and they shall wander to and fro to seek the word of God, and shall not find it."

In the past, God chose men like ourselves to satisfy the spiritual hunger of humanity. James says that Elijah was like us.

It is true that God performed miracles through them, but they also proclaimed the gospel. The apostles were men like us, but the Lord commanded them the work of preaching. We have the same commission, the same message, the same needs. We count with the same experience they counted; we have the same call and we might be guided by the same Spirit. But I believe that our efforts in the work of evangelism are inferior to theirs, even when it is supposed that they may be superior because of the time in which we live. A good excuse would be to say that we do not have available the same amount of spiritual gifts that the apostolic preachers had. There is no doubt that, if our commitment to the Lord was the same as theirs, the result of our missionary work would be very different.

Therefore, I think we can learn a lot from that experience to help us faithfully fulfill our own mission. If we examine the book of Acts to learn the characteristics of the early Christians, their message, the recipients of the message, and the results, we would find:

The call. All of them had been commissioned by the Lord; they were devoted to their commitment.

They were fervent. The dictionary defines fervor as "an intensive heat; ardent and affective zeal toward pious things." There was a fervent attitude in the apostles when they told the council: "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

They were godly men. They prayed (Acts 1:14); they were guided by the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:26; 9:10; 16:10).

They were missionaries. Paul is the highest exponent of this

characteristic. He was "ready to die for the name of Jesus" (Acts 20:21).

They were aggressive. They spoke the Word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31; 5:28, 29).

The apostolic sermons were biblical and Christ-centered. "They ceased not to teach and preach of Jesus" (Acts 5:42). No other message is more important and urgent than the gospel of Jesus. We can use illustrations to clarify the message, but we should be careful, lest the central theme become obscure. Sometimes we listen to messages that, if they were deprived of their illustrations, little gospel would remain. We have a message that no one else is able to communicate. We have the ability of being Christ's messengers because of our experience of conversion, the calling to service of the word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We might say that the gospel doers in the past time were men who committed themselves to the preaching of the gospel. Christianity must break down all prejudice and go beyond any frontier. The apostles interpreted well the order "to all the world," so they preached to every one and everywhere: in the houses, in the market place, in the palace. The methods used by the apostles are never obsolete. Let us put them into practice, and they will yield the same results for us. We are used to a weekly preaching, whereas the early Christians preached every day. These methods are not out of fashion, and experience says that they are the most effective of all. Tertulian said: "We are from yesterday, however, we have already filled up the empire, cities, towns, islands, countries and castles and even the senate." Thus we may start preaching

fearlessly to bring others to Christ (Acts 19:9). In the past time, personal visitation was a task committed to all the believers. Today we have many means of communication and we should use them all; the best, however, is personal work. If we commit ourselves to work together to accelerate the Lord's kingdom, surprising results in saved souls and churches multiplied and strengthened will be seen.

Analysis

The first text of the sermon is cited to introduce the theme, but it is abandoned without further commentary or analysis. Many other texts from the book of Acts are quoted to support the sermonic idea, but no attempt is made to interpret them. Further on, five characteristics of the early Christians are recommended as suggestions to present Christians for achieving similar results in soul winning. This topical sermon consists of ideas drawn from the Bible and related to the life of the present church. It is clear that the sermon uses the Bible rather than the Bible using the sermon. For example: the texts the preacher uses from the book of Acts (Acts 19:9), and those that he uses to support the five characteristics, and the one he used to describe the apostolic sermon (Acts 5:42), all reflect the Bible as a supporter of the sermonic ideas but not necessarily as a communicator of what the Lord says.

The sermon says little about Jesus and his saving act. The preacher says that the apostles preached Christ-centered messages, but in the sermon itself Jesus is almost absent.

The texts were not studied or analyzed, and the historical background of the passages are not analyzed at all. The context

is not explored. Had the preacher studied it, he would have discovered that the meaning of his introductory text goes in the opposite direction. Amos 8:11, 12 says that although the people wanted to get the Word of God, they would find it not. The preacher took only a section of the text and presented his sermon out of its appropriate context. However, the sermon confronts people with their responsibility to preach the gospel.

The message is well illustrated by means of comparison between what happened in the past and what should have happened in the present.

In summary,

1. The texts used are not exegetically analyzed.
2. Circumstances and suggestions of the texts are not explained.
3. It is not a Christ-centered sermon.
4. The message is well illustrated.
5. The message is applied to people.

Sermon Number 14

Background

The preacher is an ordained minister. He graduated from Antillian College with a degree in Theology in 1977. He has been church pastor and departmental secretary.

This sermon was preached in one of the main churches with about 300 members. This church is well known by its success in soul winning.

Synopsis

The theme for this sermon is found in Rom 11:5.

With Abraham's call to leave his homeland and go to the land which the Lord would show him, an evolutive process is initiated which later would give way to the birth of Jehovah's special people.

If Abraham had a personal knowledge of God when he was called, the Bible says nothing about it; but it is true that Abraham did not hesitate in obeying the sacred call. The call was given together with a precious promise: "I will make of thee a great nation." Later on, the Lord confirms the fulfillment of that promise when he says: "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth" (Gen 13:16); "Thy seed will be as the stars of heaven" (Gen 15:5); "Thou shall be father of many nations" (Gen 17:4, 6).

The presence of a numerous and different people in the Bible is out of discussion. The Jewish concept of Abraham as a father in the days of Jesus is clearly understandable in the light of the book of Genesis, because of the relevant role he accomplished in the formation of Israel as a nation. Isaac, the promised son,

begot Jacob, twin with Esau. In the most critical time for Jacob, God changes his name: "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel" (Gen 32:28). A short time before, God had appeared to him in Bethel and had reaffirmed to him the fulfillment of his promise to Abraham: "and thy seed will be as the dust of the earth" (Gen 28:14).

In spite of this divine promise, when Jacob arrived at Egypt, the number of his family members was only about seventy persons, that is, including Joseph's family (Gen 46:25, 26).

Aware of the promise God made him in Canaan, Jacob said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the Land of Canaan and blessed me, and said unto me, behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and will make of thee a multitude of people; and I will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession" (Gen 48:3, 4).

After Joseph's death, it is recorded in Exodus that the Egyptians were very concerned for the growth of the Israelite population (Exod 1:9). Pharaoh ordered the Egyptian midwives to kill all males born of the Hebrew mothers. Note that "the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them. . ." (Exod 12:37, 38).

In regard to the number 600,000, there are diverse interpretations.

1. It is possible that they counted all the males up to 20 years (Num 1:3-43). This figure would give us a population of several million. If it was so, how could it be possible for so many

people to cross through the narrow valley of Sinah without covering an extension of a hundred of kilometers? That is, without taking into account the difficulty of getting a proper place where all could meet together.

2. Other scholars point out that according to the Hebrew accounting, a numerical confusion could be possible. For example: when figures 100 and 1,000 appear close to each other, it is possible to identify them as one hundred times 1,000 or as 100 plus 1,000. They presuppose that it is more feasible that the twelve families that originally arrived at Egypt became 600 in 215 years, than of supporting the idea that 69 men increased the population to 600,000 men in only four generations (SDABC 1:567, 568).

Ellen G. White says that the number of the Hebrew people that left Egypt was more than six million (PP 345); and she also says that millions died in the wilderness (PP 434). It is good to say that this growth was the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The extraordinary liberation of the Israelites, under the guidance of God and Moses gave them a clear awareness of their selection as the special people of God. Balaam took his parable and said: "Who can count the dust of Jacob and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" (Num 23:10). A frail and slave people became the terror of stronger and more numerous people like Moab, Amalek, Habor, and Jericho.

A Special People

"For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God. The Lord thy God has chosen thee to be a special people unto himself"

(Deut 7:6). In this verse, the form of the verb to be is noted:

You are a holy people, and for that reason I have chosen you to be a special people. The relationship of the people with God was to be in holiness, cleanliness, and in frank certitude of their commitment. God himself had confirmed such relationship with his covenant with Abraham as is told in Gen 15:17. Israel became a holy people for its relationship with God who is all holiness. Everything in contact with God will also get that transformation. Moses spent only 40 days in the presence of the Almighty and his face lighted the people.

God showed himself to his people as the "Holy of Israel." The high priest carried on his mitre an inscription with this statement: "Holiness to Jehovah." All the furniture of the sanctuary was consecrated to the holiness of Jehovah. When a person or thing is holy, it makes holy everything in relation with him or it. Of the Sabbath day the Lord says: "Sanctify my Sabbaths." Before that command, Jesus had already blessed it and sanctified it. The strict observance of this day bestows great benefits on the lives of the believers.

From the very moment that God loved it, Israel became God's special people (Mal 1:2; Rom 9:13). There are some biblical instances that show that Israel was special to God:

- a. The Election
- b. The Law
- c. The Covenant
- d. The Glory of Jehovah
- e. The Priesthood
- f. The Salvation
- g. They were entrusted with the Word of God.
- h. The Worship Service
- i. The Promises

Israel lost all these blessings because of its behavior. God rejected Israel as a people because God was unknown among them. They worshipped on high and low places the gods of the surrounding people. The captivity was the instrument God used to bring his people back to him, but they did not repent. Because this instrument did not function as expected, then the Lord sent away the nation of Israel and scattered them among the nations of the earth. By divine inspiration Isaiah says: "Fear not, thou worm of Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (Isa 41:14). Israel's apostasy brought about the breaking of the twelve tribes of Israel into two kingdoms, and finally, the total rejection on the part of the Lord.

The Glory of the Remnant

Many of the exilic and post-exilic prophets talked about the remnant of Israel:

"And I will gather the remnant" (Jer 23:3).

"And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles" (Mic 5:8).

"The remnant of my people shall possess all these things" (Zeph 2:9).

"And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things" (Zach 8:12).

In the NT the presence of that remnant is evident. The apostle Paul says: "Isaiah also crieth concerning Israel, though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea a remnant shall be saved" (Rom 9:27). And also, "Even so at this

present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom 11:5).

The spiritual Israel lives in the dispensation of grace which will end when the world has heard the last admonition from God. It is true that Israel was the people of the promise, however, the Scriptures continuously affirm that we are saved by grace (Eph 2:5). God wanted to show the exceeding riches of his grace (Eph 2:7). It is a gift of God (Eph 3:7). The remnant chosen by grace is blessed in Abraham the father. The remnant church did not come up abruptly, it is the church elected by the grace of God. The remnant cannot be the Jewish people because the Gentiles now became part of the spiritual Israel. Paul says: "For they are not all Israel which are of Israel" (Rom 9:6).

This final statement is a confirmation that the remnant is composed of Jews and Gentiles under the same purpose and ideal. This remnant points to the last church of the prophecy; the persecuted and triumphant people of God. Therefore, let us fear, lest a promise being left to us of entering into his rest be unfulfilled; let us labor to enter into the rest; let us come boldly unto the throne of grace (Heb 4:1, 11, 16).

Analysis

This is a biblical study delivered to the church in a regular Sabbath service. The preacher supports his theme with many quotations to demonstrate the veracity of his assertions. Rom 11:5 is cited as the guiding thought of the theme. Some verses are used and exegeted for a better explanation. Exod 12:37 and Num 1:3-43 are studied in their context to explain numerically the people of

Israel when it left Egypt. Deut 7:6 is studied to point out the holiness God expects from his people. He also explains why Israel became the special people of God. He uses and explains many verses to support the biblical concept of the modern remnant as the church of God for the last time. The preacher devotes quite a long time in the past history of the event and apparently does not dwell much on the present. A closer identification with the modern spiritual remnant would be more profitable for the purpose of his speech. The preacher uses good illustrations and applies what he discovers to the church. The three terms: "Let us fear," "let us labor," "let us come boldly" are employed to challenge the church to act as the true remnant. There are some references to the grace of God as means of salvation, but the preacher does not intend to show Jesus as the redeemer or the partaker of salvation for his remnant. In summary:

1. The message has a leading biblical theme.
2. The theme is exegetically analyzed.
3. The main points of the theme are discussed and analyzed.
4. The message is well illustrated.
5. The message is not Christ-centered.
6. The message is applied to the listeners.

Sermon Number 15

Background

The preacher, a recently ordained minister, graduated from West Indies College. After having worked abroad, he joined the Central Dominican Conference in 1982. Presently he pastors an urban district in the capital. The church where this sermon was preached is the main oldest church in the capital city and has a membership of over 800.

Synopsis

Do you know that a story like that is also found in the Bible? In John 8:1-11, the story of an adulterous woman is presented. It is one of the most beautiful biblical stories related to forgiveness. Let's see what happened. In verse 1, Jesus went northward and all the people came unto him. He sat down and taught them. It was on that occasion that the Scribes and the Pharisees came up to him with a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery.

"According to the law of Moses, she should be stoned; what do you say?" they asked. Let me tell you that in Lev 20:10, the law of Moses states: "The man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, both shall surely be put to death." In a text in Deut 22, the method of execution to be used for such an occasion is suggested.

According to these laws, this woman was condemned. But the Pharisees wanted to snare Jesus, they wanted to tempt him by bringing this case to him. Jesus continued to look at the ground. He stooped down and with his finger wrote something on the ground.

When they pressed him for an answer he stood up and said: "He that is without sin among you, let him be the first to cast a stone."

A very important fact is present here. Had Jesus said that the woman should be stoned, they would have accused him of taking justice into his own hands; in addition, such an utterance would run against his reputation as a loving and merciful man. Perhaps nobody would ever call him the friend of sinners again. However, should he say that the woman should be released, he would be accused of teaching against the law and tolerating sin. So Jesus chose to do what he thought was best: he wrote on the ground.

Some scholars try to give reasons for his behavior. They say that Jesus knelt on the ground because he wanted to gain time. He did not want to make an accelerated judgment against this woman. Others say that he was presenting the problem to God, before making a final decision. Let us think of his example. Jesus thought and meditated before condemning, he did nothing in a hurry. Others say that Jesus acted as if he did not hear well so they could repeat the accusation and realize the enormous evil they were committing. Another group says that Jesus was ashamed and couldn't look the woman in the eye. But the most generalized version claims that Christ wrote with his fingers the sins of the accusers. The Greek word "graphe" used here means "to write something," but in this particular occasion the word used is "katagraphe," that means "writing a judgment against somebody." That explains why the story says he was writing the sins of the accusers.

Jesus answered them, "He that is without sin among you let him be the first to cast a stone." This word "without sin: not

only means "he that is without sin," but something else: "If you have never had the slightest intention of committing the same sin, let him cast the first stone."

"And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one." When Jesus stood alone with the woman, misery and mercy came fact to face. If she was sinner, she should be condemned, but on the other side, Jesus was representing mercy.

"Where are your accusers? None of them have condemned you? Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."

Brethren, this story gets us closer to Jesus, because we know that we can find in him forgiveness from sin. He loves sinners, he is ready to forgive us. In the last 365 days of the year we have probably committed many painful sins. This morning each one of us has something worthy of condemnation. But let us see Jesus. He is faithful to forgive us if we confess our sins. These men did not want to forgive the woman. They were believed to be the moral guardians of the city. Some of us believe we are guardians to judge, to attack, to punish. Be careful how you exert the authority God has bestowed upon you. Authority is for correction, but the Pharisees did not wish to correct.

This incident gives us another important lesson about Jesus' attitude toward sinners. Note that Jesus' first reaction was to forgive the sinner. Sometimes, when we hear about somebody who has fallen into sin we say: "we do not want to talk to that person." If you have the same attitude, let us look again at the story and see Jesus' attitude. Remember, Jesus forgave the woman

but he did not give her freedom to continue in sin. In other words he said: "I know you have committed sin, but I am going to give you a second opportunity. Go and sin no more." Jesus did not come to condemn; he came to save sinners. In the incident Jesus said: "I came not to condemn anybody, for that reason I'll give you a new chance to reshape your life." Brethren, Jesus wants to give us another opportunity. How many of you are ready to accept it? We have before us 365 days. Jesus has forgiven and has forgotten the past mistakes committed in 1984 and gives us again 365 days. He wants to know what you are going to do with your life. At the end of the year he will come to review your case again. Let him do his will in yours.

Analysis

This sermon analyzes the story of the adulterous woman as recorded in John 8:1-11. The passage controls the resultant sermonic idea. The preacher exposes the elements integrating the story. He sought proper secondary texts to amplify and give a fuller picture of the situation. Special attention is given to the function of Moses' law concerning adultery, with the purpose of clarifying the dimension of the law; however, the main interest of the preacher is to emphasize that Jesus forgives and gives a new opportunity.

The kerygmatic concept that Christ came into this world to forgive and redeem, and the concept of his love for sinners constitute the dominant picture of the message. The comparison of the woman's situation with ours, and of the Pharisees' responsibility as moral guardians with ours fit well with the purpose of the sermon.

The application is appropriate: as with the adulterous woman, our sins condemn us; but Jesus not only forgives us but gives us a second opportunity to try again.

The preacher illustrates his theme by means of comparison, changing the sentences, and explaining the main idea from different angles. The passage is exegetically and literally studied. Words like *graphe* and *katagraphe* were analyzed to clarify the meaning of the text. Causes and suggestions of the passage are explained. However, why the man taken in the act was not presented along with the woman is not explained.

Many practical applications have been directly taken from the study of the passage: Jesus does not condemn; he does not punish the sinner but loves him; we, as spiritual guardians are expected to correct wrongdoers not to condemn them; no matter what happened in the past, Jesus is ready to give us a second chance.

The message is evidently Christ-centered.

In summary,

1. The sermon has a leading text.
2. The passage is exegetically studied.
3. Causes, discussions, or suggestions in the texts are studied.
4. The message is Christocentric.
5. The message is well applied to people.
6. The illustrations fit well with the message.

Sermon Number 16

Background

This sermon was preached by the writer in a Spanish Church located in an urban area near East Chicago, Indiana. Some sixty persons form the entire congregation of the church.

The Need of a Consistent Christian Testimony

Texts: Isa 38:1-20; 30:1-8

Subject: Testimony

Theme: Consistent Christian Testimony

Proposition: A consistent Christian testimony is the key to Christian success.

Introduction

This morning we have the opportunity to speak of a biblical personage who has great significance in the lives of many Christians because of the similarities in the development of their Christian lives. He was a man well-known for the testimony of his faith in God, and also, for his failure to constantly uphold that testimony. Hezekiah's experience is narrated in three different places: 1 Kings 20:1-15; 2 Chron 32:24-31; and Isa 38:1-39:8. That means it is very important. God wants us to take note of this experience. He wants us to be on the alert in this particular matter (Rom 15:4).

Hezekiah was a successful administrator. According to 2 Chron 32:27-30, "He prospered in all his works." He was a successful politician. According to 2 Chron 32:7, 20-23, the king was magnified in the sight of all nations. Hezekiah was a successful

religious reformer. 2 Chron 30 records how he worked to bring back true worship not only to Jerusalem but also to Israel, the restoration of the temple, and the restoration of the passover. However, he was unsuccessful in bearing a consistent testimony.

Transition

Through the recording of Hezekiah's experience, God shows us that he expects us to exhibit a consistent Christian testimony in two important human situations:

1. In Adversity

Brethren, we can infer that we, as Christians, can only live a successful Christian life when we have a firm witness, a constant witness without regard to the consequences in which we live. We have here a very significant case recorded in God's words according to Isa 38:1-39:8. "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. Isaiah the prophet came to him, and said to him: "Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order: for thou shall die and not live." Here, the Lord presents a very particular situation to King Hezekiah. He said: "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live." What did "prepare thy house" mean? Why did he have to put his house in order? Two times in this episode the term house appears. Note what the prophet says in Isa 39:4. He wanted him to pay attention to some particular matter in the house. No matter how successfully the king had worked in the past, he had an everyday work to do, primarily with him and also with his own house. The term house could mean the individual himself. Job 4:19-21 presents a picture of man as "a house of clay." On the other hand,

Paul believes that "if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God. . . ." God asked the King to put his house in order. He was bidden to order his house Politically. He did not have sons. He did not know who was going to succeed him in his throne. He was a politician, and he was working to establish the nation. He had a problem with King Sennacherib (Isa 37). Thus, he needed to work, he needed time, he needed strength to establish the nation against the surrounding nations. It seems to me that when the Lord said, "Put your house in order," he was also thinking of putting it in order Spiritually. He was a spiritual house, his family also were a spiritual house. They all needed to be called to offer a living testimony for God. Certain adjustments were to be done. Probably God wanted to say of Hezekiah what he said about Abraham--who "will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord" (Gen 18:19). It implied that he should also bring the nation to a closer relationship with God.

King Hezekiah was about to die when death was not really conceived. He was only thirty-nine years old; he walked righteously according to himself before God (Isa 38:3). For him, it was not right that death should come at that time. He knew, according to a Jewish legend, that a righteous man dies full of days. He believed he was a righteous man. It was a difficult time for a man like him to die, because Sennacherib was threatening the nation. It would be possible for the very worst situation to come about if the king should die.

Hezekiah prayed to God, and even when the Lord's plan was

to let him rest with his fathers, he heard the prayer. The Lord knows best what will come about in the future. He knows in advance what is better for each of his children, but the king wanted to live. He was too young to die, and the Lord answered his prayer. Verse 5 says: "The Lord said: I will add unto thy days fifteen years." And verse 6: "And I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and will defend this city." Fifteen years of life. This is typical of God's desire for his people. He wants us to live. He wants us to witness for him. He is not a God of the dead, but a God of the living. He wants his children to live abundantly. But he also knows when one thing is better than another.

In those days of adversity, King Hezekiah gave a great testimony about his faith. Verse 15 of the same chapter says: "I will walk humbly all my years. . . ." In verse 19 he says: "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth." He promised that he would walk humbly before God; he promised to worship God, according to verse 19; he promises to tell others about God. He promised to praise God. He promised to serve God for ever, according to verse 20. In other words, adversity constituted a motivation to enhance his devotion and relation with God and become a blessing to others. Thereafter people could know what God had done for him every day, as he says in verse 20.

But things changed when health and prosperity came into his life again.

II. In Prosperity

Chapter 39:1 says that "at that time," that is, the time of the king's recovery, "Merodach-Baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah: for he had heard that he had been sick, and was recovered." Kings, ambassadors, men from other great nations went to see King Hezekiah. They knew he had been about to die, but that he had been restored by means of a great miracle of his God. These men also knew how Hezekiah's God delivered the nation from the king of Assyria; that God had prospered him greatly; that God had given gold, silver, precious stones, houses, and power; that the man was enjoying complete prosperity. But Hezekiah, who had promised to worship God and to make known to others the knowledge of God, when he found himself before guests who came, as recorded in 2 Chron 32:31, to know about God, who came to find out about the God who saves, about the God who heals, about the God who, as recorded in Isa 38:7-8, can change the order of things, the same Hezekiah changed his attitude; his witness was different. He forgot to worship God publicly as he had promised. God was absent in all aspects of the life of this man. No priest was called for a short religious service to thank God for his mercy, and with the opportunity of witnessing before these foreign men; nothing was mentioned about the great temple. God's marvelous deeds were not part of the king's business.

Isa 39:4 says that instead, the king showed all that he possessed: his gold, his silver, his power, his pride. The king showed the ambassadors a house without God. He praised his possessions, but not God. The man who had been crowned with favors and gifts

before God now forgot God's name completely. He had a beautiful opportunity to manifest the power and love and greatness of the God who brought him back to life. God should have been represented before these pagans as the God of all gods. What these men should have heard and seen about God could have been taken to a nation that shortly after would be the leading nation of the world.

This man had a lot of reasons for worshipping God. It seems to me that the theme of the conversation should have been: "How God saved me; how God has delivered me from my enemies; how God has given me life; how good is my God." But the conversation was entirely different. The king's business was not mixed with God's. Probably the king did not want to antagonize or disgust his visitors by talking about an unknown God. The king showed only what he had; his little god of human conception, his pride, his vanity, his weaknesses; things that perish, that had no eternal value. Prosperity and vanity hid God from Hezekiah's story. That is exactly what 2 Chron 32:25 says, but the consequences were not unknown.

Consequences of an Inconsistent
Testimony (Isa 39:6-8)

God said in Isa 39:6-8: "Behold the days come, that all that is in thy house, and that which thy fathers had laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, and of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shall beget, shall they take away and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

Why did Hezekiah fail to bear a high witness for God? In the first place, these men came to him for a formal agreement against

the common enemy, the Assyrians. Probably the letters mentioned in Isa 39:12 contained the terms of the alliance. But the Lord had pointed out his total disapproval for such an agreement. He disapproved any relationship of his people with pagan nations (Isa 31:1-5). The Lord has also told his children: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14). The king was acquainted with God's counsel. But he decided to separate God from his business, because God could not approve what he was about to do. He separated from God for a while, but the consequences of that short separation went on for a long time.

The only reason we ever decide to leave God out of our business is probably because we realize he does not approve of what we are about to do or what we are actually doing. The king could not ask how the Lord saw such an agreement; he had already heard what the Lord said about it. As soon as we decide to set God aside and make our business our own, it is because we know he would not approve of what we do. The consequences are always the same: pain, discouragements and loss of peace and security. To honor God above all is always rewarding. It is much better to honor God by exhibiting a good and faithful testimony than to work with what we think is better without him. Even knowing God's counsel, Eve decided to act in the opposite direction, but you know the results. The same thing happened to Aaron's sons, and you remember the painful consequences.

Application

This story presents a situation which is difficult to understand, but typical of human beings. Many of us act the same way. That is the way we are. Hezekiah's failure to give a consistent

example gives us an example so we will understand that we can also become a victim of such behavior. Sometimes, as he did, we are prone to be inconsistent in our testimony for Christ. If Jesus does not participate in the issues of our daily lives, it will not be easy for us to find him on special occasions. We cannot show what we do not have. Material values can be a blessing when they are recognized as part of God's many blessings to us. Then we can exhibit them only to reveal our gratitude to the One who makes all good possible. It is not difficult to show Jesus on a special day when we have company if we are used to showing him every day to our classmates, to our fellow workers, to our teachers, and in our business relationships. God has called us to be a living testimony for him; to reflect God's behavior in our own life. Our words, our love and understanding, no matter what the situation or circumstances, show to what extent Christ's experience is growing in ours. God has appointed us to be a living testimony wherever we are. A consistent testimony may be a habit, a way of life, in order to face successfully temptations of pride, vanity, and self-sufficiency. Any good that happened yesterday in my life is not good enough for the rest of the week. We must watch and live one day at a time. We must show an every day successful Christian experience. Our good experience of yesterday will be good only if we add a new successful experience every day, every moment. That's what God expects us to do.

God has called us to be Christian men in whose lives are manifested lives of gratitude. The declaration made by the prophet Isaiah should be given to us also. Isa 39:4: "What have they seen in thy house?" They saw gold, silver, they saw a politician, a

proud man, but they did not find God. You are a house, you are a temple. What do people see in your house? It is possible to say: "People can see what I have." But tell me, what is it that you have? Is Christ the center of your daily conversation? What do people see in the daily relationship with you? Let others see in your own house, what God has done for you and also in you. Let us not be afraid to open our mouths to witness for God. He gives us bread, he gives health, he is the one who saves. Let's not get tired of giving him glory because He does not tire of blessing us according to his promises.

Our testimony should be as excellent in adversity as it is in prosperity. All those that are preparing for heaven are invited to be witnesses of the love and mercy of God. They are invited by word and example to show the beauty of the Christian life and the care of a God who is always ready to assist us in our needs and prayers. He is a God who hears, a God who knows what is best for us. A positive testimony always bears good fruits.

Conclusion

Let's not permit our testimony of what God has done in us and for us to be clouded by the hardships of life, much less by the flattering perspectives of popularity. A firm and constant testimony of our faith and gratitude to God will be, unlike Hezekiah's, the key to Christian success. Now is the best time to let this experience come about in your life.

Analysis

This sermon is based upon an adequate biblical portion. The theme is implied in the passage, and the sermonic ideas come

from the passage as well. These sermonic ideas are developed in the same order that they appear in the texts.

The preacher exegeted the passage. He knows the personage to whom the message was first delivered, the circumstances in which it was given; he knows why the message was delivered and what God had in mind when he sent the message. He knows about Hezekiah's reaction, why he reacted as he did, and what he promised after restoration. He knows why Hezekiah failed and the consequences of that failure.

The word 'house' used twice in the biblical portion is studied. The meanings of the word are explored as much in the OT as in the NT.

The biblical portion presents situations which need to be clarified--why the king did not want to die; why the king could not fulfill his promises. The biblical portion also raises questions: What do people see in your house? Why did the king not glorify God before the guests? All these situations are explained in the development of the sermon.

The message is applied to the audience. They are urged to identify with the ups and downs of Hezekiah's religious experience. They find themselves in similar situations.

Christ is presented as the giver of all good things, the one who hears, who responds to our prayers, and above all, as the one who knows what is best for his children.

Some illustrations help to clarify the preacher's point of view: Abraham and his house, Eve's disobedience, and Aaron's sons. Inconsistencies are properly used as illustrations.

The lesson discovered in the passage is applied to the audience. God wants the audience to live a daily successful Christian experience; God knows what is the best for his children; we are houses and we must show what we have in them; we should not be afraid of witnessing of God before company, etc.

The passage was not totally explained. The preacher chose what he wanted from the biblical portion and explained them but the rest of the passage was avoided. For that reason important matters like "The Sign of the Dial" is missing.

The message does not give credit to Hezekiah's high Christian testimony after the incident of the foreign visitors. It would be a good thing to say, to be fair, that king Hezekiah accepted God's rebuke, mended his life, and died giving a consistent Christian testimony.¹

¹This sermon does not pretend to be a model of the Biblical sermon. It is only a starting point to stimulate preachers in this important matter. With this sermon, I am also identifying myself with my fellow co-worker, with whom I've been working for years in the preaching of the gospel.

Summary

This analysis of fifteen recorded sermons represents the first attempt--to my knowledge--to investigate the preaching content of the ministers in the Central Dominican Conference. It is anticipated that it is just the beginning of better days when a more exhaustive investigation can be made to help ministers become better equipped to continue reaching their goals in successful biblical preaching. The analysis has been conducted to discover whether or not certain principles of interpretation and homiletical rules related to biblical preaching have been properly applied. These principles and rules have been already presented at the beginning of this chapter.

Although all the analyzed sermons were based on the Bible; the following observations should be considered:

1. How to exegete a biblical passage is not well understood. A simple exegesis includes: a study of the historical context; i.e., the general historical setting of the passage and the study of the literary context--What is the point of the text? Sermons 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, and 13 skip this important matter.
2. Many sermons lack a leading text or passage. Sometimes this occurrence prevents the sermon from going in one specific direction and deprives the audience of listening clearly to the Lord's voice. In these cases the preacher talks more about what he thinks, his point of view, than about what the Bible says. Sermons 4, 7, 11, and 13 lack a guiding text.
3. Although most of the sermons contain abundant biblical quotations, these texts are often used to support the preacher's

point of view rather than allowing the texts to explain themselves. Sermons 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, and 13 fall short in that category.

4. Most of the sermons do not explain the chosen passage if they have one. The preacher quotes the text, but he continues talking about matters outside the meaning of the text. If the preacher does not study the text to discover the true meaning, this type of situation is always possible. For example: In sermon 1, the text (1 John 1:7-9) raises questions which demand answers. The congregation wants to know, what does it mean to walk in light? How do we confess sin? How can Jesus' blood be applied in my life? But no answers are given to these questions. In sermon 3 the passage affirms something and raises these questions: Why is the church to be built upon Christ? Why did the Lord address Peter by saying: "Thou are Peter and upon this rock . . . ? Causes, conditions, or situations suggested in the passage must be explained. In sermons 5, 6, 8, 9, and 13 the situation is present.

5. In many sermons, the application is vague or too general. When the text is not well interpreted, a situation like this is possible. An effective application results from a proper analysis and interpretation of the passage and from an understanding of the congregation and their specific needs. A sound application comes when the preacher knows what the text says, what his people need, and how to adapt the message to his audience's present situation. In sermons 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9 that anomaly is detected.

6. Christ is to be exalted wherever the Word of God is presented. As much in the OT as in the NT, Christ is the central personage. A message without the good news of salvation and

redemption in Christ is empty. The early Christian preachers worked successfully because they presented a kerygmatic message. They preached Christ "and him crucified." In some of the fifteen sermons analyzed, Christ's roles as Savior, Redeemer, the hope of humanity, intercessor, the one who is coming soon, etc., is not as highlighted as it should be. In sermons 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, and 14 Jesus is barely presented, and is shown in the background instead of the foreground of the message. If the preacher searches his text properly, he will undoubtedly see Jesus in the passage he chose for his people. All Scripture talks about Jesus (Luke 24:27; John 5:29).

7. Although preaching in the Dominican Republic is very colorful and pictorial, some of the analyzed sermons lack proper illustrations. Illustrations help to clarify concepts and make the content of the sermon understandable. Illustrations are like windows; when they are opened fresh air fills the room and light illuminates the darkness. It is said that a sermon is clear when it is well illustrated and these illustrations fit well with the matter to be clarified. In sermons 5, 7, 9, and 11, illustrations do not fit properly with the subject to be illustrated. For example: "The Plot of Land" used in sermon 11 to illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit, does not fit exactly with the true work of the Holy Spirit. The sermon says that "we need to prepare our lives to receive the Holy Spirit, in the same way the plot of land is prepared to produce fruits." The illustration in 2 Cor 3:18, in sermon 9, and the illustration of the two missionaries, in sermon 5, fall into the same category.

Conclusions

This research has found that outreach evangelistic emphasis is still the most ardent challenge for the preachers in the Central Dominican Conference. In general terms, sermons are prepared to motivate the Church to go out and bring in others rather than to strengthen the members in the teachings of true biblical knowledge. It is thus concluded that:

1. Although there is a marked interest among the preachers in presenting biblical messages, many of the sermons being preached currently do not correspond to model sermons with adequate biblical messages to nourish the church.

2. Results indicate that there is a need for sermons guided and constructed with a biblical portion, a leading passage. The passage needs to be interpreted according to the hermeneutical principles. An exegetical analysis of the passage should not be overlooked. Interpretation and application of biblical passages could be handled better if proper guidelines were put into practice.

3. There is a need for more emphasis on kerygmatic preaching. The story of salvation should be the central theme of each message. Salvation for sinners lies in uplifting Christ and him being crucified (1 Cor 2:2).

4. Biblical preaching has proved to be the most effective way to transmit God's counsel. When the Word of God is explained, illustrated, and applied, the minister as well as the believers will enjoy greater spiritual growth.

5. The time spent in preparing the message can be best used if the focus of the study is changed. Many preachers devote

more time to the details than to interpretation and explanation. Thus, people get to know the story about the passage, but not what God says through it.

6. To preach the Word, to proclaim it with a saving power, is a gift of heaven. The man whom God calls to preach is therefore a gifted man; whom God calls, he also enables to do his work. Paul responds to preaching as an "imposed must." Thus, the preacher has an obligation to preach with power what the Lord says, not what he says about God.

7. Finally, it is imperative that ministers receive adequate training and learn to apply principles of interpretation in a continuing education program.

The analysis and evaluation of these fifteen sermons demonstrate that preaching in the Central Dominican Conference is still in need of methods and programs in biblical preaching in order to improve the quality of the sermons and to provide better nourishment to the congregation. The proclamation of the Word demands preparation and competence, prayer, and commitment. When these elements are taken seriously, the Word of God will again become "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword" (Heb 4:12). Correct study of the Bible will return to the preacher his authority in the pulpit, and will guide the church to enjoy a new and more vigorous Christian experience.

With these observations as background, chapter 4 develops a guide to be used in the Central Dominican Conference. By means of workshops or seminars, the ministers in need of that kind

of training will be helped to master better ways to prepare biblical sermons.

CHAPTER IV

THE STRATEGY WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the previous analysis reveal that the ministers of the Central Dominican Conference need more training in the area of biblical preaching. The most desirable program would be courses on biblical preaching offered each quarter at the Dominican Adventist University. However, the ministers cannot afford being absent from their posts for such a length of time, so it is imperative that an intensive, practical type of seminar be prepared for their benefit.

The present strategy offers a means to help achieve that objective. Due to the nature of the program for which it has been prepared, it is necessarily limited to those elements that, within the constraints of time, facilitate the best results in the elaboration of better biblical sermons.

I do not claim that this is the only or most effective way to take preaching back to its true place, but it certainly intends to awaken the desire to continue searching in better sources for better and more abundant material. A minister never ends his preparation for responding with efficiency to his divine vocation. "When Phillip Brooks had attained fame as one of the world's greatest preachers, he continued to take lessons in homiletics."¹

¹Ezra Rhoades, Case Work in Preaching (New York: Fleming Revell Co., 1942), p. 13.

I believe this guide may serve in initiating a course that will produce rewarding results, and that the pulpit will be touched by the divine fire of a vigorous, nourishing, and transforming message.

The headings for the guide and seminar development are as follows:

1. Exegesis
2. Interpretation
3. Analyzing the Passage
4. From Text to Sermon¹
5. Christ-centered preaching
6. Application

Use of the Guide

Description

This course is designed for short programs such as weekend meetings, workers' retreats, or seminars. The whole course lasts twelve hours in the classroom with twelve additional hours of independent study. No more than twenty participants should be accepted at a time in order to allow time for providing meaningful assistance.

Possible Places for the Meeting

1. A church when not in use for services
2. A school room (on weekends or holidays)

¹Detected difficulties in integrating collected information from exegesis and interpretation into the sermon have prompted me to include this section to help in providing a bridge between the analyzed text and the sermon.

3. A youth camp
4. A large conference room

Academic Credit

Arrangements should be made with the Dominican Adventist University so those participants who do not hold a B.A. can earn two college credits toward the completion of their studies.

Pre-requisites

The participants will read four books suggested by the instructor (these would be announced four months in advance and be available through the Adventist Book Center) before the initiation of the program. This would help to create a favorable mental attitude among participants.

The participants will bring a written copy of the most recent sermon they preached in their churches.

The participants will be advised to bring their own Bible commentary, Bible dictionary, and Bible translations (although a temporary moving library will be set up for their benefit).

Requisites of the Course

1. The participants will spend two hours in independent study for each class session.
2. The participants will prepare two sermon outlines during the course, to be turned in for the third and fifth sessions.

Teaching methods

Lectures and group discussion will be employed. The end of the last session will be open for questions and clarifications.

During the last two sessions, two thirty-minute periods will be devoted to group work in which participants will design, construct, and present a written sermon based on material previously handed in and using the principles and rules learned in class. Each group will consist of five members, with a leader and secretary. The result of their work will be read to the whole class.

Time Distribution

The course will be divided into six sessions of two hours each; preferably one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The rest of the time will be spent in independent study and practice. If necessary, three sessions of four hours each may be taught, with a fifteen-minute recess during each session.

Evaluation

The participants will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

Class attendance and participation	50%
Sermon outlines	30%
Reading report*	20%

The sermons will be evaluated according to the criteria for biblical preaching; whether or not they contain:

1. Exegesis
2. Interpretation
3. Christ-centeredness
4. Application

*Participants are requested to report whether or not they read the four books prior to attending the sessions.

Daily Workshop Sessions

EXEGESIS

First Session: (2 hours)

Purpose of the study

To learn as much as possible about the original intention of the writer of any chosen passage.

Study Outline

I. Historical development

- A. Early Period (Jewish Exegesis)
- B. Contemporary Church

II. Task of Exegesis

- A. The task, the key to good exegesis, is the ability to ask questions of the text in order to get at the author's intended meaning. These questions fall into two categories: questions of content (what is said) and of context (why it is said). (Gordon D. Fee, p. 25).
- B. The task of exegesis is to discover the meaning of the Word of God in the first century church. The task of preaching is to know both the exegesis of the text and the people to whom that word is now to be spoken well (Gordon D. Fee, p. 118).
 - 1. Exegesis is the preliminary task for the preacher, "No sermon is truly a sermon (that is a proclamation of the Word of God), unless it is based upon a sound exegesis of the text" (Reginald Fuller, p. 20).
- C. Choosing a passage
 - 1. To begin exegesis, a passage must be chosen.
 - a. Choose and read a text. "A text represents a potential opportunity for the Word of God to be heard afresh, that the posture of a preacher is of one being invited into the domain of experience offered by a text, and that what such an invitee brings to the encounter is gathered up, transformed and interpreted but not ignored in the light of the gospel" (J. Randall Nichols, pp. 26-27).

D. Factors in choosing a biblical portion:

1. Choose a text that reflects your relationship to your congregation.
2. Choose a portion with complete sense.
3. Choose a text that deeply touches your heart.
4. Choose a text that can be clear and simple.
5. Choose a text that points out the essential aspects of the Christian doctrines.

E. Exegesis of the text follows a suggested format:

1. Read the text in its context. What is the author's argument? How does the passage fit in? Why did the author say this?
2. Read also the remote context--e.g., the prison epistles.
3. Try to get the content. What did it say?
4. Read the text in different translations and get significant differences.
5. Limit the chosen pericope. Make sure that the passage you have chosen is a genuine self-contained unit.
6. Make a list of theologically important words. (e.g., in Rom 3:25 "expiation," "blood," "righteousness").
7. Interpret the passage historically. Ask questions like: Who wrote this passage? When did he write it? Who are involved in this matter? What was the social, spiritual, or political situation in the time this passage was written? In what way did the passage affect the people's behavior?
8. Study the text and translation--key words which need clarification in the vernacular language.
9. Study the literary and historical context, form and structure.
 - a. Does the passage serve as a literary bridge from one section to another? Does it serve as the culmination of several paragraphs or sections immediately preceding it? (e.g., 1 Cor 10:6; 12:27-31). Does it serve to illustrate an early assertion? (e.g., 1 Cor 9:9).

- b. Try to discover the genre of the passage. The hearers might want to know whether the passage is in prose, or poetry; whether it is narrative, a speech, a lament, a hymn, etc.
- 10. Study the grammatical and lexical data of the passage, e.g.:
 - The verb "search" in the imperative (John 5:39).
 - Differences between "Agapao" and "Phileo" in John 21:15-18.
 - a. Do a mini-study for any crucial terms.
- 11. Ask these theological questions:
 - a. To what theological doctrine does the term add light?
 - b. How can you use the passage to help your congregation to be more theologically alert?
- 12. Investigate what others have said about your chosen passage.
 - a. Bible commentaries, bible encyclopedias, and books of sermons written by famous preachers are very helpful.

ASSIGNMENT: Analyze exegetically 1 John 2:1-6.

INTERPRETATION

Second Session: (2 hours)

Purpose of the Study

1. To determine the principles for the use of biblical texts.
 2. To interpret the Scriptures so the past becomes alive and illuminates our present with new possibilities for personal transformation (William D. Thompson, p. 39).
- I. Brief history of Interpretation
 - A. Jesus' time
 - B. Reformation time
 - C. Present time
 - II. Reasons for Biblical Interpretation
 - A. Preacher must master his text.
 1. His congregation expects him to listen to God's voice.
 - B. Weaknesses in some sermons are due to incorrect interpretation of Bible texts.
 - C. The true source of a biblical sermon is the Bible, thus the preacher needs to have good control of that material.
 - D. The message becomes the Word of God when the text is interpreted and applied according to its real meaning.
 - E. The preacher's most important duty is to honestly try to interpret and understand the true meaning of the text in order to properly satisfy his people's needs.
 - III. Some Wrong Uses of the Bible
 - A. Omission: quoting only that part which suits you while leaving the rest.
 1. In Matt 4:5, Satan omits an important part of the quoted Psalm. The same thing happens in Gen 3:4; the Devil omits the spiritual death.
 - B. Quoting a biblical expression and adding other thoughts.
 1. Eve quoted what the Lord said to her husband, but she added: "and you must not touch it" (Gen 3:3).

- C. Quoting only part of a paragraph without considering the meaning of the rest.
 - 1. A preacher presented a sermon titled "In the hands of God" taken from Heb 10:31 to comfort people in distress. The rest of the paragraph is totally contrary to emphasis given.
- D. Disregarding the connection of the text.
 - 1. Isa 7:12 is disconnected from the following verses. The same thing happens with 1 Cor 2:9 and Amos 8:11-12.
- E. Allegorizing texts that are to be interpreted literally.
 - 1. Eph 3:18 is sometimes allegorically interpreted.
- F. Wrong division in chapters. Originally the Bible was written without the conventional divisions in verses and chapters as we have it today.
 - 1. Dan 12:1 completes the thought coming from Dan 11:45. The same thing happens with 1 Cor 10:33 and 11:1.
- G. Misconception of the grammatical and lexical meaning of words.
 - 1. In Spanish the name salt and the verb go are synonymous. The quotation from Gen 12:1, "Go from your country," is sometimes a matter of confusion.
- H. Spiritualization of the passage
 - 1. Exod 2:9 is used in preaching to parents and teachers.
 - 2. There is a particularly strong tendency to spiritualize parables. It is good to remember that parables are illustrations and are founded on resemblance or analogy. They are to be taken in the category of allegory.

IV. Principles of Interpretation

- A. Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He will guide and help you understand "all truths."
- B. In interpreting words and sentences:
 - 1. Interpret the biblical words and sentences according to their meanings in the time of the writer--etymologically and historically. A word study begins by tracing the origin of the word and then continues by outlining the successive phases of its uses.

- a. Read the word used in other passages by the same author.
 - b. Read similar passages from the same period of history. Words change their meaning from era to era, from culture to culture, and sometimes from passage to passage. Thus you need to make sure that the meaning you assign a particular word is appropriate to the text in which it is found. (See example of the word "Law" in Psalm 119. See also the word "faith" in Paul's writings.) (Ronald J. Allen, pp. 42-43.)
- C. Interpret the text literally
1. The literal interpretation of the text helps to get the true interpretation of the text. All Bible passages are to be literally interpreted unless the context and the text itself demand otherwise. When a literal passage has more than one meaning choose the clearest interpretation.
- D. Consider the Context and Historical Background of the text
1. A true study of the context considers the circumstances and the historical background of the writer and the addressee:
 - a. The speaker: outstanding contribution, significant aspects of his life, circumstances of writing, the time and place of writing, the reasons for writing.
 - b. The person addressed: the character of the people to whom the words were addressed. How did they react?
- E. Let Scripture explain Scripture
1. "The whole of Scripture can be learned only by interpreting it part by part. No part can stand in isolation, from the whole" (Bernard Ramm, pp. 25-26).
 2. Ellen G. White's writings should not be used to interpret Scripture.
 3. Compare passages.
 - a. Study parallel texts of the OT with the NT.
 - b. Study parallel texts of the Synoptic Gospels.

- F. Investigate sources other than the Bible and know what others have said about the passage. (Commentaries, encyclopedias, text exposition, etc.).
- G. Investigate what the text really says. Next session studies this point in broader details.

ASSIGNMENT: Apply the above principles of interpretation to these passages:

1. 1 John 2:6-10
2. Matt 11:1-6

ANALYZING THE PASSAGE

Third Session: (2 hours)

Purpose of the Study

To discover the true meaning of the passage.

Study Outline

- I. Studying the Text (Brown, Steps to the Sermon, pp. 54-60)
 - A. In its historical background
 1. Study the writer: social, political or religious position; character, moral behavior.
 2. The addressed person: religious experience, character, moral behavior, social status.
 3. The time when the passage was written.
 4. The place where the passage was written. The economical, geographical, and social conditions reflected in the passage.
 5. The occasion and purpose of the writing.
 - B. In its context
 1. The immediate context
 - a. What the passages around the chosen passage say.
 2. The remote context
 - a. What the whole chapter and the book where the passage is found say. The relationship between the passage and the rest of the book.
 3. The general context
 - a. The relationship between the chosen passage and the general teaching of the Bible.
 - C. In its analysis
 1. The language: Is it literal or figurative?
 2. The genre: Is it prose, poetry, a saying, a hymn?

3. The words: How they are used in other passages
4. Grammatical study of words in the passage. Be on the alert especially for the tenses, moods, and number. It is also important to note if the person is talking in first, second, or third person.

D. The text and its truths

1. Ask meaningful questions of the text.
 - a. What do I see, smell, touch, feel, taste?
 - b. What does it mean?
 - c. What did it mean to the people to whom it was given?
 - d. What is the major idea the writer is trying to communicate? How does it relate to the rest of Scriptures?
2. When you have caught the subject of the passage, ask these questions:
 - a. What are the conclusions of the passage?
 - b. How is the Deity related to the subject?
 - c. What result--if any--will the application of this produce in the individual experience?
3. Be on the lookout for the following helpful hints:
 - a. Any change of persons speaking or addressed (Hos 14).
 - b. Any enumeration of examples or instances (such as instances of divine providence in Acts 7:2-52).
 - c. Any cumulative enunciation of ideas, principles, or teachings (1 Cor 13).
 - d. Any contrast, opposition, or interchange of ideas (1 John 4:1-5).
 - e. Any repetition of certain clauses, phrases, or connective words such as: therefore, moreover, nevertheless, e.g., "By faith," Heb 11 (C. Koller, p. 68).

ASSIGNMENT: Divide the class into five small groups and let them analyze and discuss these passages:

1. Luke 6:20-21
2. Mark 9:49-50
3. Matt 22:41-46
4. Rom 1:16-17
5. Jude 14-15

FROM TEXT TO SERMON

Fourth Session, Part I: (One hour)

Purpose of the Study

To help the preacher to move useful material gathered from exegesis and interpretation to the sermon.

Study Outline

I. Selecting Proper Sermonic Material

A. Read and Understand

1. "The minister's task is to read, understand, and also to interpret the text for the modern congregation of believers" (Hayes and Holladay, p. 126)

B. Determine People's Needs

1. The people's needs is a determining factor in selecting the appropriate material. Thus, an intensive study of the passage and an extensive analysis of the congregation produces the sermon.
2. "When a theme of a proposed sermon is thrown against a problem a sermonic idea may be born. When a problem is pushed against the Gospel, the interaction may give birth to a sermon" (Eugene L. Lowrey, p. 19).

C. When the Sermon Starts

1. A sermon starts when what the passage says can be restated, explained, proved, or applied. From now on the door to the sermon is open.
 - a. What does it mean? This concept needs explanation. This concept needs also to be proved.
 - b. What difference does it make? This concept demands application (Robinson, pp. 77-89).

II. Adapting Sermon Ideas to Text

A. Sermon idea subordinates to text.

1. The main thoughts of the text should form the main thought of the sermon.
2. All important points in the text should be used to divide the main points of the sermon.

3. Remember, the main thought of the text should be the leading thought throughout the sermon.
4. Do not omit any important issues of the text.
5. A simple commentary on the text is not enough.
6. A text should not be read and then abandoned. The preacher is responsible for commentary and application. If the text is used only as a springboard to jump to personal ideas, it is much better not to use it at all.
7. When historical texts are chosen, the story must be fully told.
8. Good exegesis of a text is not a sermon, but provides the minister a great amount of information to share with his congregation. Exegesis can be a store to feed the sermon, but not the guiding elements of the sermon.

III. Moving from Text to Sermon

- A. Spend some time in reflection on the text and in prayer.
 1. Ask yourself these questions:
 - a. How does the text address my own life?
 - b. What needs of my own do I see being spoken to or met by this passage?
- B. Try to look through the text at your congregation
 1. Ask yourself these questions:
 - a. What situation in the contemporary world and in my congregation is analogous to the situation addressed in the text?
 - b. How are the participants in the modern situation analogous to those--the speaker, the audience, ancient Israel, the early Church--in the original situation?
 - c. How can the total context of "what it meant" inform and enlighten "what it means?"
- C. Begin with a sense of purpose
 1. Consider the main points that you need to proclaim.
 2. Decide what the audience needs to know from the text.

- a. What the passage treats as important will probably be important for the audience.
3. Decide how the above points will best be applied.
 - a. How are you planning to affect your audience? Do you wish to change behavior? To encourage? To motivate? To bring people to an encounter with the living God?
- D. With the answers to the above questions in mind, prepare your sermon outline (Gordon D. Fee, pp. 133-136).

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare an outline sermon taking into consideration what has been studied. Bring to the classroom both the analysis of the passage and the sermon outline.

CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING

Fourth Session, Part II: (One hour)

Purpose of the Study

To demonstrate that preaching is good news only when Jesus is presented as the center of the message.

Study Outline

I. All Biblical Preaching Should Be Christ-Centered

A. Reasons the Scriptures lay down for preaching

1. Its doctrine is Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor 2:1-5).
2. Christ-centered is the only way of preaching God has promised to bless (Gospel Workers, pp. 158, 160).
3. Christ-centered preaching is a sure guarantee of success for every laborer (R. & H. Extra, Dec. 23, 1980).
4. Christianity becomes power only as Christ dwells in us and gives us his victory (Gal 2:20).

B. Christ should be the main theme

1. "Present Christ as the center of every theme. You do not have to take a text about Christ or preach only on Christ. It matters not what your text may be, if it is appropriate to your subject; you ought to study and pray that Christ Jesus shall be drawing power, the magnet, in the whole discourse. . . . Christ shall be made the center of it all, and all be presented as the mighty Saviour, able to deliver. He must become the satisfaction of every needy, hungry, sin-sick heart, and the eyes of all must look to Him, till men confess Him their Redeemer, mighty to save" (I. H. Evans, pp. 99-100).
2. We are not merely commissioned to condemn, reform, expose error, preach ecclesiology, be students of history and prophets of gloom. We are to be ambassadors of hope. We are to exalt Christ, show the way out of labyrinth of confusion and show men how they can be saved (Eckenroth).

C. The most profitable teaching

1. Through Christ we can do all things (Ev., p. 98).

2. His name wins and attracts men.
 3. Preaching his name is the best formula.
- D. All truth embraced Christ
1. He should be glorified in all.
 2. "All the principles and duties of the gospel bear a more or less direct relation to Him" (Haynes, p. 72).
 3. "Jesus Christ is the atoning work, the center of the extended circle which embraces our whole relationship to God, everything that is profitable to men" (Haynes, p. 74).

II. Christ-Centered Preaching Means

- A. Preaching with power (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 2:4)
- B. Preaching successfully (John 12:32)
- C. Preaching confronting Satan's lies (Ev., p. 98)
- D. Finishing the work
 1. Preaching Christ is the third angel's message (Rev 14:6-12).
 2. Christ-centered preaching will finish the work (TM, p. 424).
- E. Saving preaching
 1. The only saving preaching is Christ-centered (Acts 4:12).
 2. "Set forth Christ to the people as an adequate remedy, as the only remedy, for all the evil in the world; the only supply for the whole world's desperate need; the only hope of salvation from sin, the divinely appointed "way, the truth, and the life" (Haynes, p. 74).
 3. "The world today is in crying need of a revelation of Christ Jesus in the person of His saints" (TM, p. 458).

III. Kerygmatic Preaching

- A. The first Christians preached Christ
 1. Paul preached Christ (1 Cor 5:1-7)
 2. Peter preached Christ (1 Pet 2:18-25)

3. The first Christians preached Christ as:

- a. The Son of God (John 1:18)
- b. The crucified (1 Cor 1:22-23)
- c. The risen Christ (Acts 17:32)
- d. The exalted of all creation (Phil 2:11)

B. Preaching Christ in the message (1 John 4:14)

Preaching Christ's name is the central fact of all effective preaching. This makes the difference between life and death, eternal salvation and eternal loss (Acts 2:36; Matt 16:18).

C. Truth must be presented

- 1. The secret of success (Ev., p. 170)
- 2. The danger of weaving in human threads (Ev., p. 125)
 - a. "Instead of discussing erroneous theories or seeking to combat the opponents of the gospel, why not follow the example of Christ? Fresh truth from God's treasure-house flashed into the minds of men as they listened to Him, and they were won for the kingdom of God. Peter said, 'Thou hast the words of eternal life' (John 6:68)" (Anderson, p. 170).
- 3. Christ is the great center of the church (Rev 14:6-12).

"Our churches are dying for the want of teaching on the subject of righteousness by faith in Christ, and on kindred truth" (Gospel Workers, p. 301).

D. Our supreme task

- 1. "Our supreme task is to present Christ in His fullness-- not only as Judge and coming king, but as a tender Shepherd who guides the wayward home. As our Intercessor at the throne of grace He waits only to forgive and forget" (Anderson, pp. 194-195).

APPLICATION

Fifth Session: (2 hours)

Purpose of the Study

To learn how to apply what the passage says, claims, asks, recommends, or suggests to people's real situation.

Study Outline

I. The Importance of Application

A. The enterprise of preaching

1. "The entire enterprise of preaching is predicated upon the assumption that there are analogies between the situation addressed by the biblical writer and situations in your parish today. It is by pointing out those analogies that you can illuminate the lives of your people with the light of the Word" (O. C. Edward, Jr., p. 2).
2. "The preaching and teaching of Jesus was often prefaced by his seeing the multitudes and their particular needs. The preacher who knows and loves his people will be sensitive to their hopes and fears, success and failure, love and hate, selfishness and sacrifice. The gospel and derivatively the sermon are personal, intimate addresses to human needs" (G. Bartlott, p. 84).

B. The main purpose of the sermon

1. The application of discovered truth

"One of the biblical preaching definitions remarks that the discovered truth must be through the preacher to the hearers. This means that application represents the confrontation between God and man in his own situation with the purpose of bringing salvation" (2 Tim 3:15).

2. The final purpose of preaching

"Application is the final purpose of preaching. To connect the hearers with the grace of God and to nurture the hearers in the life that grace makes possible when it is accepted and regarded in full is the ultimate goal of preaching" (Massey, p. 18).

C. God demands application

1. Even in the Bible times, God again and again rebuked his people for failure to make application of his truths. James puts it this way: "Do not merely listen to the Word and deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22). "The primary purpose of the Bible is to change our lives, not increase our knowledge" (Walter A. Henrichsen, p. 33).

D. In it God confronts man

1. "The center, the very heart and core of preaching values from the Bible is the confrontation of man by God" (E. Faw, p. 12).
2. "The preaching of the Gospel is the eschatological moment in which God's revelatory event happens in the present" (Bultman, p. 63).

E. It focuses on the present needs of the people

1. "Biblical Preaching speaks to the ultimate needs of man, for the gospel cannot be understood except as the preacher becomes involved in the lives of the hearers (K. Barth, p. 46).
2. "The most interesting sermons ordinarily are those whose relevance is unmistakable. They deal with a present problem or difficulty. . . ." (James Cox, p. 54).
3. "After studying the lives of hundreds of preachers and reading countless sermons, we concluded that the preachers who made the greatest impact upon the world were men who spoke to the issue and needs of their days" (Clyde E. Fant, p. 5).

II. Applying the Message to the Needs of the People

A. Use the principle of observation. Ask questions:

1. Is there any example for me to follow?
2. Is there any command for me to obey?
3. Is there any error for me to avoid?
4. Is there any sin for me to forsake?
5. Is there any promise for me to claim?
6. What does it mean to me?

- B. Be selective
 - 1. Choose only one application.
 - 2. Choose the one which fits best with the purpose of your sermon.
- C. Follow the rules of interpretation
 - 1. A proper application can be made only after you have correctly interpreted the passages (Henrichsen, p. 217).
- D. Be specific
 - 1. Put your finger on the heart of the problem and press (Phil 2:7).
- E. Be personal
 - 1. Stick to singular pronouns.
 - 2. Do not forget that application is a personal thing. The Holy Spirit will give you wisdom and the courage of your convictions as you apply his Word.
- F. Write out your application

III. Irrelevant Sermons

- A. Irrelevant sermons are:
 - 1. Those ending with moralistic exhortations or pietistic yearning rather than the gospel.
 - 2. Those that go "round and round inside the text but never come to focus in the lives of the hearers" (J. D. Smart, p. 81).
 - 3. Those that are not focused on the person of Jesus Christ (Segler, p. 127).

IV. Constructing Relevant Sermons

- A. A definitive purpose
 - 1. When starting your sermon have definite purpose in mind.
 - a. Be precise in what you want to accomplish with the sermon.
 - b. Remember, the sermon is a means not an end. It must be adapted to its end.

- c. Have no more than one specific purpose. The purpose states what one expects to happen in the hearers as a result of preaching the sermon, e.g., Paul wrote to Timothy "so that he may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God" (1 Tim 3:15). Jude changed purpose for his letter after he sat down and wrote (Jude 3).
 - d. Having a purpose requires help from God.
 - e. A purpose provides a guide in the preparation of the sermon.
 - f. It produces the expected fruits.
- B. Persuasion and action are two important elements in making an application relevant.

ASSIGNMENT: Get sound applications from the following biblical experiences and relate them to your own congregation:

1. 1 Kings 19:1-15
2. Luke 11:27-28.

SERMON EVALUATION

Sixth Session (1 hour)

	Yes	No
1. Does the preacher relate the message of the Scriptures to people's specific needs?	_____	_____
2. Does this sermon consist of ideas drawn from the Bible and related to life?	_____	_____
3. Does this sermon have one main leading biblical text?	_____	_____
4. Does this sermon use the original meaning of the words to better interpret the text?	_____	_____
5. Is this sermon's idea clarified with biblical illustrations?	_____	_____
6. Does this preacher explore the historical background of his sermonic passage?	_____	_____
7. Does this preacher consult other secondary sources to better explain the text?	_____	_____
8. Does this preacher develop his sermon by explaining a biblical paragraph and applying it to the hearers?	_____	_____
9. Does the preacher explain what the sermonic text is about?	_____	_____
10. Does the preacher research what crucial exegetical issues in the text bear on a correct interpretation?	_____	_____
11. Does this preacher show what his sermonic text says about Jesus Christ and the history of salvation?	_____	_____
12. Does the preacher investigate the meaning others give to his main text?	_____	_____
13. Does the preacher discover what there is in the text that would make it difficult to communicate?	_____	_____
14. Does this preacher try to find if the truth in the text stands alone or if it needs to be seen in relation to a counterbalancing truth?	_____	_____

- | | Yes | No |
|---|-----|-----|
| 15. Does the preacher investigate the causes, conditions, or situations discussed or suggested in the main text? | --- | --- |
| 16. Does the preacher try to find what the practical duties are that grow out of the truth of the text? | --- | --- |
| 17. Does the preacher draw from general literature, personal counseling, or personal observation and experience to exemplify or illustrate the truth of the text? | --- | --- |

ASSIGNMENT: The participants will select one of the sermons prepared during the workshop.

The class will be divided into teams of two and each will interchange their own sermons for evaluation.

The evaluation sheet will be handed out in the classroom.

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Recommendations

As a result of this study, several suggestions have arisen which implemented could improve the current preaching situation, in the Central Dominican Conference. It is recommended:

1. That the Dominican ministers be trained in the preparation and delivery of expository sermons since although the biblical sermon can be topical or expository this last seems to be the style which best transmits the content of the Word of God.

2. That the Dominican University study the possibility of offering such seminars with academic credit in order to motivate the ministers.

3. That the Ministerial Secretary or the Conference President provide supervision and encouragement in a follow-up of the program.

4. That a plan be organized whereby the number of congregations per minister be reduced so the minister may have more time for sermon preparation. One or two ministerial candidates might be assigned for at least two years as assistants under the supervision of a senior pastor.

5. That the Adventist Dominican University underwrite a study to determine whether there is need to amplify or change the current curriculum on preaching, and that a stronger emphasis on hermeneutical and homiletical principles applied to preaching be considered.

6. There is tremendous potential in the body of young ministers now serving in the Central Dominican Conference. They are eager to preach more relevant and compelling messages. The enthusiasm they inject into their messages reveals their vehement desire that

the Word of God reach and transform the hearts of the hearers. May these human resources be channeled and guided till they develop to the fullest to the honor and glory of God.

A P P E N D I C E S

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO THE MINISTERS

Berrien Springs, MI
Noviembre 25, 1984

Muy estimado pastor:

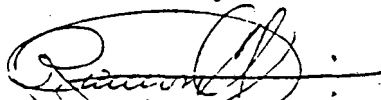
Estoy trabajando en mi tesis doctoral que está basada en un estudio sobre la predicación bíblica en la República Dominicana y qué hacer para lograr mejores métodos. He decidido escribirle porque su información es el núcleo de un trabajo de esa naturaleza. Tenga la bondad de tomarse un tiempcito y

- 1. contestarme un cuestionario sobre predicación bíblica*
- 2. grabarme un sermón predicado en sábado, en el mes de diciembre, en su iglesia principal.*

Todo este material será devuelto a la oficina del pastor Suero a más tardar la última semana de diciembre.

Todo lo que pueda hacer para que esta encuesta cumpla su propósito será altamente reconocido por su servidor, y la iglesia, que recibirá los resultados.

Con mucho afecto cristiano, su hermano y servidor en Cristo,


Ramón Araujo C.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

Cuestionario para los ministros de la Asociación Central Dominicana.

Instrucciones: Haga un círculo alrededor de la respuesta correcta.

- | | | | |
|---|----|----|-------|
| 1. Predica usted <u>generalmente</u> sermones temáticos sobre verdades bíblicas tales como: la segunda venida de Cristo, el sábado, el estado de los muertos, la verdadera iglesia, salud, etc.? | SI | NO | NO SE |
| 2. Predica usted sermones bíblicos procedentes de un pasaje de las Escrituras, y que son una exposición de ese pasaje, en vez de proceder de un tópico o tema? | SI | NO | NO SE |
| 3. Predica usted de manera que el sermón completo es una exposición de ese solo pasaje de la Escritura? (otros textos pueden ser usados, pero sólo para clarificar y explicar el pasaje principal). | SI | NO | NO SE |
| 4. Estudia usted el pasaje de la Escritura en la mejor versión para poder estar seguro de que sabe lo que dice el pasaje? | SI | NO | NO SE |
| 5. Interpreta usted el pasaje para poder saber lo que <u>significa</u> ? | SI | NO | NO SE |
| 6. Interpreta el pasaje en el sermón para que los oyentes sepan lo que dicho pasaje significa? | SI | NO | NO SE |
| 7. Aplica usted la verdad del pasaje para que los oyentes entiendan lo que Dios quiere que hagan o sean? | SI | NO | NO SE |
| 8. Piensa usted que la predicación pastoral debe ser textual (expositiva) a la vez que temática? | SI | NO | NO SE |
| 9. Le gustaría poder entender mejor cómo predicar sermones expositivos? | SI | NO | NO SE |
| 10. Si tiene alguna pregunta o comentario, escríbalo en el espacio siguiente: | | | |

NOTA: Estimado Pastor:

Haga el favor de llenarme este formulario y grabar este cassette. Agradeceré mucho su cooperación al respecto. Devuélvalo inmediatamente. Gracias.

Pastor Ramón Araújo

(Yo le pago cualquier gasto de transporte que tenga que hacer).

APPENDIX C

FIRST WORKSHOP ON BIBLICAL PREACHING SHARED
WITH THE MINISTERS OF THE SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST DOMINICAN CONFERENCE

In order to determine the usefulness of the guidelines for writing biblical sermons suggested by this study, a workshop on Biblical Preaching was conducted in Santo Domingo, in May 1987. This appendix summarizes the results of the aforementioned workshop with the ministers of the Central Dominican Conference.

Given the fact that the mission field of the Central Dominican Conference had been reorganized during the summer of 1986, it was impossible to get together all the ministers that had participated in the first survey for the present project in 1984. Of the 27 preachers attending the workshop, 11 belong to the original group. For the sake of reliability, only the work of these eleven will be compared on a before-after basis. The results of such analysis are shown on the following table.

Table 1 - A COMPARISON OF THE SERMONS PREACHED BY MINISTERS BEFORE AND AFTER A WORKSHOP ON BIBLICAL PREACHING IN THE CENTRAL DOMINICAN CONFERENCE

Criteria	Preachers																					
	(1)		(2)		(3)		(5)		(6)		(8)		(10)		(12)		(13)		(14)		(15)	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11											
1. A leading text	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
2. Exegesis	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
3. Interpretation or Explanation		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
4. Christ-Centered	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
5. Illustration	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
6. Application	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

B = Before the Workshop

A = After the Workshop

* = Presence of a specific criterion

() = The numbers in parentheses represent the ministers who participated in the first survey. The numbers on the second line coincide with the same ministers who participated in the second survey and whose sermons were compared.

As shown on the table above, no significant difference was found for the first criterion, i. e. having a leading text, in the sermons prepared by the 11 ministers before and after the workshop.

On the other hand, while only 5 sermons (#1, #2, #7, #10, #11), had some exegesis of the text before the workshop, 10 preachers

included it after the workshop. As it can be seen, only one of them missed this step from his sermon both before and after.

Regarding the interpretation or explanation of the passage, 7 preachers (#1, #3, #4, #5, #6, #9), did not do it before, while all the sermons prepared after the workshop had an interpretation or explanation of the text.

The comparison shows also no significant difference concerning the application of the text, as only 2 preachers missed that criterion before and none of them missed it after the workshop.

The christocentric aspect of the sermons did not show improvement as expected. Whereas only seven sermons classified positively before the workshop, only the same number was developed with a christocentric perspective after it.

It is the opinion of the researcher that this outcome might have been unintentionally caused by a slightly greater amount of emphasis put into the exegetical and interpretative areas during the workshop. Although it had been designed with a balanced content, including all aspects of biblical preaching, those two areas, which proved almost unexplored for the participants, awakened more enthusiasm on their part.

The overall results are, however, encouraging from the very beginning. Even when not all the sermons achieved their full potential in content as expected, the ministers are motivated to grow, and have in their hands the tools to continue growing. As they apply these principles more often, the quality and content of their messages will be highly improved. As it is suggested in the original plan or Strategy for a Workshop on Biblical Preaching (see chap IV), a follow-up is in order, so the preachers may continue to practice and enhance their presentation of biblical messages.

Sermon #1 on John 19:25-27

In the narrative of Jesus' arrest, trial and passion, the four gospels point out how the apostle Peter, who had promised he would always be with Jesus, in the very hour of crisis, denied his Master. They also tell how the other disciples fled and left the Lord by Himself.

In his crucial hour, God's son is placed between two thieves, one at his left side and the other at his right, with the only purpose of showing Jesus as a delinquent, a criminal, a thief. The scene which is depicted by Ellen White shows a lonely and forsaken man. She says that the heavenly beings covered their faces not to see it; even the sun withdrew its light and darkness covered the earth. (DA 701)

It is then that Jesus exclaims: "My God!, my God!, why has thou forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34) He felt rejected and abandoned.

However, even when the fierce multitude yelled "crucify him, crucify him"; there was someone, courageous and brave, offering moral and human support. It was Mary, Jesus' mother. Prophet Isaiah's words were now fulfilled: "Will a woman forget her son?" (Isa 49:15)

What a woman! Mary was determined to follow all the incidents of the trial, passion and death of her son, as a loving mother. However, in the same way we will consider Mary's quality as a mother, we must also consider the kind of son Jesus was to her.

On the cross (John 19:26), while hanging from the cross, Jesus looks around and gets to see his mother. As a pious son, he can tell she is suffering; that she is hurt and shaken by the scene she is contemplating. And he suffers the pain of the separation from his mother. This mother who had nested him in her womb, this mother who with profound interest had watched for the development of his physical, mental, and spiritual faculties; the mother who "was his only human teacher and from whom he learned true lessons regarding sacrifice, love and compassion." (DA 50) Not even on the cross could Jesus forget the precious teachings of his mother. And here, being sure of his Father's acceptance of his work, he declares to his mother: "Woman, behold your son." (John 19:26) He did not have properties or houses, or farms, but a loving disciple whom -Jesus was sure-could bestow the same love upon Mary.

Jesus wanted to have the assurance that John would act accordingly (John 19:27), he wanted to make sure John had understood his words, and asked him directly to take care of his mother, which John, gladly did. What a son! What a way of honoring his mother till his last breath.

As a son, Jesus understood that to honor her mother was to please her, not one day, or a month, but the whole life. He knew that to honor his mother was not to make her suffer with his misconduct; he knew that it was not to hurt her with decisions against the divine teachings; it was to obey God in all his ways.

To honor a mother is to obey her in the Lord (Eph 6:1). It is not to send a card once a year, or make a call, or give a present, or a flower. To honor a mother is to give her love, obedience, loyalty, and honesty.

Do our mothers deserve that we honor them? Why? Isa 49:15: "They do not forget their children". Prov 31:15: "She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens". Let us honor our mothers and our days will be longer on earth.

Analysis

This sermon is based on John 19:25-27. The passage has been exegeted. The preacher explains when, how, and why the incident occurred. The interpretation of the passage is applied to contemporaneous needs; the behavior of the modern son toward his mother is suggested in a very descriptive way. Jesus is the central figure, but not in his salvific function, although he is presented as the model of the perfect son.

Sermon Number 2 on 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Synopsis

Timothy: his name (father, mother); relationship with Paul; reason for the letter from Paul to Timothy; date; challenge to preach the Word.

Let's go back to the Bible. The Lord demands of Timothy the fulfillment of his duties. He is also told to preach the Word.

In John 1:1-3 we find that Christ is the Word, and He was represented in the Old Testament by the bread which was in the sanctuary. This was a representation of Christ and his Word. Thus, our great responsibility is to preach the Word.

Our society is full of men and women who instead of preaching the Word, devote their time to preaching philosophies and deceiving people with empty messages. We have been called to preach the Word which gives testimony of Jesus (John 5:39).

"Be persistent in season and out of season". This expression means to make use of every opportunity, whether you believe it's an opportunity or not; and even if nobody pays attention. This is another responsibility upon our shoulders (1Cor 9:16). We must convince everyone to listen to our doctrines and teachings.

Verses 3 and 4 are full of information about certain doctrines that were being introduced in the church. Timothy is advised to be aware of the people doing it, since they would try to elect their own teachers in order to satisfy their selfishness. For Paul, their preaching was vain philosophy, without meaning.

"Endure afflictions". Endure all difficulties; do not be afraid to suffer for the Lord. These are words of encouragement that Timothy understood as he realized about Paul's situation, when he wrote this letter.

Although many others act this way, Timothy could not follow the the majority; he had to act and be different. His example would cause others to want to come and listen to the message, because he spoke of Christ. Only, brethren, when we preach the word clearly will people listen and will be able to pay attention to us. This is our greatest responsibility.

"Endure afflictions". Endure all difficulties; do not be afraid to suffer for the Lord. These are words of encouragement that Timothy understood as he realized Paul's situation when he wrote he wrote this letter.

Brethren, we must pay the price for preaching Christ and His Word; nevertheless, the reward will be better, which means that we will receive eternal life. When we are filled with the power of the Word, we can't but say what happens within us.

"Do the work of an Evangelist". The work of an evangelist is a soul winning work. That was Paul's recommendation to his disciple. This is also the work we have to do today.

"Make full proof of thy ministry". The ministry has many facets. We may take care of all of them, but the greatest of all these duties is to open up the Word of God to the people.

Nothing that should be done must be left undone. The apostle says to Timothy: "Now I am about to be offered"; all my responsibilities, all my duties must continue. You, my beloved disciple, will continue doing and guiding the work of God without failing, accomplishing it with the best of your abilities.

Analysis

This message is based on a biblical passage, which has been divided into several portions for a better study and explanation of the original intention of the author. It is historically and literally analyzed; the key words are interpreted. The saving work of Christ is not clearly seen in the message and the application to the church's needs is done in a simplistic way.

Sermon #3 on Isaiah 54:2

Isaiah 54:2 is the chosen text for us today, "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of their habitations: spear not, lend thy cord, and strengthen thy stakes."

The Lord exhorts us today as he did with the children of Israel in the days of old, to go one step further in our efforts and triumphs, and at the same time he tells us how to do it.

Let's consider four important points of this passage:

1. Enlarge the place of thy tents-hut. God has only one tent in this earth. What is that tent? Jesus called this his church or the meeting of believers in one faith, with one hope and with one message. In this world there is only one true tent of the Lord. How do we know it? In the garden of Eden there was one faith. In the historical moments of Israel, despite the multiple forms of thinking, heaven recognized the children of Israel as the true partakers of light.

2. While Christ carried out his ministry, there existed many different religious ideas as today, there were many religious movements that pretended to have the truth, but Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)

3. In the time of the apostles there rose up new concepts which tended to confuse and discourage the newly born Christian Church, but Christ himself had already declared that there was one church and one fold (John 10:16).

4. The current teachings that all religions are good and that the people of God exists in every church is not biblical. No doubt about that in other churches there are good things, and we do believe that although ignorant of the truth many people by their faith and sincerity, will be saved. But this is very different to the teachings of the Lord of having one only and true people, bearers of one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.

5. God is guiding his people, a church in the world whom he has made guardians of his law. To this Church he has committed the sacred and eternal truth that its members must preach to the world.

In the first century the tent of God extended with force, power, and speed. They won hearts, cities, nations, and homes of the Roman empire. This tent extended even to the very house of Caesar.

No one could stop the church members. Criticism, martyrdom, and life in the catacombs did not discourage them. In the middle age,

in the darkest moment of the history of Christianity, the sincere sons of God lived their faith on the mountains and caves. Felix of Nola is a good example. Many died in the altar of sacrifice, faithful to their beliefs, to Jesus, to their principles of love.

In the reformation time Martin Luther rose up to denounce errors and call for a returning to the light of evangelism and early faith. But although the work of reform was good, it was in need of a church obeying and living the truth as taught by Christ and the apostles.

The time came up for the coming of the Adventist movement: the people of the prophetic time; and the church extended all over the world. This work was guided under difficulties, but God worked miraculously. Today people need more than houses, clothes, money, facilities: they need Jesus. And this church must do the work of letting the people know Jesus.

Spare not. Brethren, to believe in Jesus is to make a commitment like the one he did to bring salvation to humanity. True faith not only unites us to the Lord, but also unites us in behalf of others. Faith leads us to action, so we must be ready to serve with the same spirit that Jesus had.

Why did the Lord say spare not? Because he wants us to dedicate more means and strength to his cause; because he wants us to give more Bible studies; because he wants us to practice more our kindness and love with others.

Lengthen thy cords. They represent the gifts and talents we receive from God. Preaching, teaching, singing, are some of them. All these beautiful cords make of us a special church.

Strengthen thy stakes. The stakes which sustain the house of God are not stories nor dogmas, but spiritual principles. How is the stake of your daily study?; the private prayer?; church attendance and faithful observance of the sabbath day?

Analysis

This sermon is based on Isa 54:2. There is a fair exegesis of the text; the preacher makes good use of the allegorical sense and applies the interpretation to the present church. No study of the cause or circumstances suggested by the text is made. The message is not Christ-centered, but the illustrations and application are suitable and appropriate.

Sermon Number 4 on 1 Timothy 6:10

Synopsis

"For the love of money is a root of all kind of evil. Some people eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves in many griefs."

This is a lesson that will always be relevant. It was valid at the time when it was written; even today, money and its power seem to be the way to solve problems.

Why does the apostle Paul speak about money in this way?

1 Tim 6:6-9. Godliness and contentment in this life is the greatest gain. At birth, we bring nothing into this world. When we die we can take nothing to the tomb. Quite different to the people who do not know God, the Christian lives on what is necessary and indispensable. This gives him joy. The desire to become rich is a satanic trap. (it's a snare). This covetousness leads to destruction (Rom 6:23). Let's note how the love of money can lead to terrible sins: Simon tried to buy the Holy Spirit with money (Acts 8:20). Brive (Acts 24:26), is the term used in the Bible. We can also see cases and examples of people who, for the love of money refused salvation; the rich young ruler (Matt 19:16-26), and members of the early church (1 Tim 6:10).

Up to this point we have seen the most outstanding traits of the sin of "the love of money". Now, let's see the other side of the coin. It's not a sin to have riches. There are some cases in the Bible that help us understand this assertion (Job 1:3). We see other Christians who were materially rich (Acts 2:44-46). It is clear then

that the Christian's love is in the Lord and not in money nor in earthly possessions (Matt 6:19-24).

The love of money is therefore, synonymous to changing the object of worship and this is a violation to the first commandment (Ex 20:3). The love of God and the love of our fellowmen are the center of our obedience to God. The love of money is against this solemn truth. The Holy Spirit places within us the opposite of the love of money: kindness and goodness (Gal 5:22). From that point, we can now understand why the love money is the root of all evil.

Analysis

This sermon is based on a biblical passage (1 Tim 6:10). The preacher has done an exegetical study of the text and the results have been interpreted in a contemporary setting. The message is applied to us by pointing out the behavior we must adopt when the love of money be a real temptation to us. The passage is also explained and amplified with other biblical texts. Christ is not explicitly presented in the message.

Sermon Number 5 on Acts 2:46

Synopsis

Perseverance was one of the very important signs of the primitive church and it has continued to be of great importance for the Christian church today in the 20th century.

Jesus spoke of perseverance when he said: "But he that endureth unto the end the same shall be saved." (Matt 24:3) Jesus points out that in order to be saved, one must persevere. One particular thing we find in this text that calls for our interest, is that the first Christians persevered by going to the temple. In this way, we must unite perseverance with the existence of the temple.

After receiving the Holy Spirit, the disciples, who had been filled with selfishness and covetousness, began giving up everything they had. Sharing among themselves all that they possessed. It is important to note what they did in the homes of the brethren, in order that these first Christians would show a true change. They waited for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to transform their lives by removing avarice and disunity.

The church today needs the experience of the first Christians, so that we can love just as they loved. We should give up material things just as they did, and we should share the bread which the Lord gives us with those who are less fortunate.

Jesus asked the Father that we should be one with him, according to John 17:21: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Undoubtedly, when this occurs the entire church will be filled with power.

It is interesting to note the results of receiving the Holy Spirit. The disciples not only shared bread in the house of the believers, but they did so with joy; they were not being forced to work, nor were they trying to fulfill a requirement, but they did these things because it produced in them a rewarding joy.

Christian happiness ought to be a sign of all true Christian. I believe that all Christians who have received the Holy Spirit, and are saved through Jesus, should be happy and joyful.

We can be sure, that if a Christian lives a life of sorrow and sadness, he needs to fervently ask for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That experience will return in him a life of joy.

I praise the Lord for all that happens when a man's life is taken and controlled by the Holy Spirit. He shares what he has with singleness of heart. Singleness of heart was one of the characteristics in the life of Jesus. That quality must be exhibited by every Christian today. The apostle Paul reaffirms this

statement when he writes: " That in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God." (2 Cor 1:12).

Let us pray fervently that Christ baptize us with his power, and that we may be able to live with singleness of heart, and a victorious life in Christ.

Analysis

This passage of Acts 2:46 is studied by dividing it in several parts to explain the concepts of: perseverance, the act of sharing good experiences; and the joyful life of them that live with singleness of heart. Each section, after the explanation is applied to modern believers. The function of the Holy Spirit is emphasized again and again as the One who transforms men's lives. The passage is interpreted literally, but the historical study is superficial. The exegetical study and its interpretation moved the preacher to make a practical application of the sermon to his congregation.

Sermon Number 6 on Ephesians 4:20-24

Synopsis

There are two important steps for the enjoyment of a spiritual transformation. They are:

1. Actions centered in Christ
2. Actions centered in ourselves

Those steps centered in Christ are:

1. To learn of Christ
2. To listen to Christ
3. To be taught by Christ
4. To teach others about Christ.

What does it mean to learn of Jesus? It means to let Him fill up our empty souls.

The second step is centered on listening to Jesus. We must listen to Jesus and absorb his message to us. According to the Bible, the verb "to listen" means much more than the current definition. To listen is synonym of obedience. Frequently we hear this expression: "I listen to the Word of God." When you talk like this, you mean: I accepted the Word of God, I reacted positively, and I obeyed the Word of God.

Bible philosophy can be in contradiction with Greek philosophy when compare the verbs "to listen" and "to see." The Greek philosopher watched things just as they occurred, and later was able to talk about what he observed.

The Hebrew thought is basically rooted in the Bible. It explains man's experience in relation to things, and also in relation to God. This explanation is possible through the verb 'to listen'. The relation of the Hebrew people with God was not only objective, they integrated themselves to all that God had said, therefore, they obeyed.

We listen with the purpose of doing what God wants us to do (Isa 30:21; Ex 7:6, 10, 20).

Why so many Christians do not know or ignore religious rules? Why is there so much separation among the church members? Because as soon as we ask for obedience we are offended. It is a very dangerous thing to believe that we are right by having our own freedom. We are not free, because we still serve to the old self. God's people must know obedience; it is Christ's people; the mission people; the people of the present truth. Time has come when we must go back again to obey the principles of the Word of God.

There are other steps. They are centered in the believer himself (Eph 4:22,24). We need to submit the old man and renew our thoughts. We need to put on the new man. The true Christian does not try to test religion scientifically; he accepts it by faith. He does not demand that revelation be explained through history, sociology or psychology. He does test Scripture against Scripture. He recognizes that the things from God can be only tested through divine principles. He does know that revelation belongs to the Holy Spirit, and that the test of that revelation has come directly from above.

Such a situation does not mean that the Christian runs out of information. He knows the tests and philosophies used to explain the human science; he knows all those methods applicable to these disciplines, but he keeps them all back. He never exaggerates their dimensions nor recognizes any power in them to measure God's things.

The Christian's mind is renewed because of his new way of thinking; because it is now spiritual, transcendent, humble and obedient to God. His renewed mind helps him to follow the apostle advice: (Eph 4:24). The new man is a creation of Christ and lives a life according to his calling, in righteousness, in holiness and also in truth.

Analysis

This message is based on Eph 4:20-24. The preacher analyzes the main point of the passage and brings out a series of explanations with sound applications to our present needs. Significant words are studied: "to learn, to listen, to be taught, to teach, etc.", to clarify what the author intended to say. The context is historical and literally studied. Christ is presented in four important steps. In sum, the discovered message is applied to the church members. The passage is interpreted in a contemporary setting.

Synopsis

- I. A. The Lord had guided his earthly program, almost until the end, according to John 12:1 "Six days before the passover: . . ."
- B. The resurrection of Lazarus reflected powerfully in favor of the Lord (John 12:9).
- C. To point out within the present context that to that time, the priest had not changed their murderous attitude which they inherited from the Devil, according to John 8:44.
- II A. The following day at the supper at Simon's house, Jerusalem was the centre of the greatest display of people in behalf of the great leader. But the main leaders persisted in their refusal against Jesus. (John 12:19) "Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing?"
- B. Neither the disciples nor the big crowd understood well the nature of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem (vers. 16). They thought it was the time to take away the Roman power and rise again David's kingdom.
- C. The triumphal entrance into Jerusalem illustrates Jesus' return to the earth, putting an end to the corruptive kingdoms of the earth (Dan 2:45; Rev 19) "the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed."
- III A. The Lord illustrates the extent of his spiritual kingdom and compares it with the grain of wheat. The excellent grains are present in all the tables of the world. In a variety of forms this grain is prepared by industries to nourish us and satisfy material needs.
- B. There is just one only way the grain of wheat could disappear out of this world, that is, by preventing its grow and cultivation from the soil. Jesus said: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die,, it abideth alone." (vers 24)
- C. This metaphor is very interesting because it has in itself Jesus' answer to the Greek people which were looking for him. They wanted Jesus to visit their country and share the same program he offered to the Jewish people.

In John 12:23 the Lord says: "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." In other words, that Jesus would no more be with the people again healing and forgiving sinners. He now was in preparation for his death. The request of the Greek visitors was not rejected by Jesus, but was assigned to the new church.

The great work of uniting Jewish and Greek was reserved to the early church, and Christians of all generations.

Andrews' and Phillip's politeness must be followed by all of us. Jesus expects that our testimony be as positive today, that modern Greeks may be able to say: "We want to know your God, we want to go to your church.

To achieve confidence and inspiration from a perishing world, it is necessary that each church member be ready to die. He that loves his life will lose it, says the Lord, but following him and serving him are immediate results of dying together with him in baptism (Rom 6:4). Jerusalem, Samaria, and the whole world must be filled with the doctrine of his resurrection.

Jesus demonstrated the effectiveness of his thesis. When he rose from the tomb, he carried on with him multitude of saints, those sleeping in their graves (Matt 27:52,53).

Analysis

This sermon is based on John 12:20-26. The preacher exegetes and interprets the passage in its context. Explanations are given by quoting other Bible text to make more clear and fully what the writer had discovered. The message is well illustrated specially, with the example of the wheat grain. What the text says is applied to contemporary people: Andrews and Phillip are to be imitated, our self must die, we must fill the world with the teaching of Jesus. The why, who, where, and how of the passage is also explained. Christ, as the desire of ages is not presented in details.

Sermon Number 8 on Psalm 1:1-6

Synopsis

According to the classification made by the ancient writers, Psalms #1 and #2 are the introduction to the whole book, the reason why scholars call it "the threshold psalm." However, due to the fact that no clue is given as to tittle or name, or authorship, or time, it is often called "the orphan Psalm". Because of its content it has received the tittle of "Psalm of the two Ways".

This Psalm presents a spiritual law that is amply stated throughout the sacred writings: "that justice leads to victory; and injustice to failure.

The Psalm is a poem divided into two stanzas with a strong contrast between them.

1. Verses 1-3 depict the happiness of the just, who deliberately avoids evil and proclaims his pleasure in the law and God's precepts.

2. Verses 4-6 depict the misfortune of the one whose life does not follow God's ways.

3. It ends with the thought that God will make it possible for the just to reach success, while the wicked will face total destruction.

There is a sharp contrast between those who committ themselves to the service of God and those who don't. The Psalmist, inspired by the Holy Spirit calls them blessed, or "how happy is the man",

1. who pays heed to the will of God; whose ears are receptive; whose steps are obedient; whose hearts are sincere to God.

2. who does not walk on the common ways of life; nor on doubtful paths.

They are presented to the world as different and special individuals, whose lives are lead by high principles and follow a spiritual standard of character. Thus, blessed are those who do not walk on ways strange to God, and who do not conform to worldly, common customs. They are not blessed who choose evil and find pleasure in exerting pernicious influences upon others.

They are not blessed who carry on an easy life, exempt of sacrifices and efforts, accepting a poor spiritual experience, overlooking God's requirements and mandates. According to verse 1, blessed are those who do not walk on the counsel of the wicked or sit in the seat of mockers. They avoid any relation with the wicked and restrain themselves of ungodly practices. The apostle Peter (1 Pet 2:9) calls them:

A chosen people: because they were chose by God for a special mission and service in his name. They were selected by heaven as sons and daughters of God; a nation where God had the best and highest place.

A Royal Priesthood: because the King of the Universe has become their father, thus, they have become a part of the royal family.

Priests: because Christ is the everlasting Priest and they are part of the family of Christ.

Holy Nation: because the presence of God sanctifies them, and they have been separated for a special purpose within God's plans.

People belonging to God: because the Son of God paid the ransom, giving them the hope of life and salvation. Because of these other reasons, the blessed ones find their delight in putting their lives in harmony with God's principles. As true saints, they find pleasure in placing themselves on the side of justice, kindness and goodness. Their joy is in meditating on the law and its precepts, which were given by God for man's wellbeing.

The Psalmist uses the lovely metaphor of a tree, which is planted by streams of water, and whose leaves are permanent. The figure is perfect, regarding the life of the saints, and the works made in their favor by God. The word "planted" suggests determination, favorable ground, carefully cultivated by the planter to ensure wellbeing.

As a result of their consecration and obedience to God, the blessed are promised three great blessings: useful life, vigorous life, and success in everything they do. (See Joseph's experience in Egypt, Gen 37; and Daniel and his friends in Babylon).

In verses 4-6, the Psalmist resorts to the chaff to illustrate the results of an ungodly life. In contrast with a tree, the chaff does not have root; as a dead and useless object, it is subject to the circumstances. Those who do not hold a permanent resistance against evil; and who do not seek sincerely to abandon all that is contrary to a life full of God and his grace, likewise the chaff, will not have permanence and spiritual stability will be missing in their lives.

For our Christian experience to have progress, it is necessary that, as a good tree, it is rooted in God's everlasting promises.

Analysis

This message is an exposition of Psalm 1:1-6. A detailed exegesis has been made and interpreted in a contemporary setting. The preacher uses additional passages to get a more clear explanation of his main passage. The metaphor of the tree is discussed in both sides and the results applied to present believers. Christ's way of salvation and promises are also emphasized through the message.

Sermon Number 9 on 1 John 2:6

Synopsis

To walk with Christ is something sublime; it elevates, and ennobles; it justifies and sanctifies. To walk with Christ is not only for a few moments, or the Sabbath. His who walks with Christ is always accompanied by Christ, lives with Him, studies with Him, works with Him, serves, loves, and forgives.

Our Union With Christ

Faith is indispensable to walk with Christ. According to Paul (Heb 11:6), "Without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is rewarder of them that diligently seek him". The dictionary defines faith thus: "Faith is the first of the three theological virtues; is a supernatural light and knowledge of what we believe without seeing".

In a world saturated by materialism, sex and self-sufficiency, the faith is needed. The Bible tells that God saw that evil was so much on earth and that every thought of men was continuously bad, and that the earth was completely corrupted, because "all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth" (Gen 6:5,12).

It was a big struggle for Noah to preach and maintain his faith in God, but he obtained a great victory.

Only a full trust in God could liberate us from the enemy's attacks. A simulation will not be enough. The armour has to be of genuine faith.

When and How Stop from Walking With Christ

The pride in our heart is accompanied by a strong feeling of superiority and independence. Pride wants glory, dignity with haughtiness. (Illustration about Canwright, an intelligent and brilliant man who succumbed to his pride and arrogance.) His pride separated him from God. "If pride and selfishness were put aside even for five minutes, problems would stop" (EW 17).

David put God into his heart and let Him guide his life. (Ps 16:8).

The Results of Having Walked With Christ

We learn to be meek and humble and to accept Jesus' offer: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28).

We will develop a noble character. When Christ dwells within the heart, the whole nature is transformed. (Illustration of the man who was the terror of his community until he met Jesus and surrendered his heart to Him.)

We live as Jesus lived. "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6).

The success of the children of God is directly proportional to their friendship with Christ. To walk with Christ is to believe and accept his justice; is to live as he lived.

Analysis

This is an outlined sermon on 1 John 2:6. The preacher points out the fact that it is possible to walk with Jesus, but true faith is indispensable to do it. The believer must leave pride, and selfishness in order to walk with Jesus. He emphasizes that walking as Christ did is to believe and accept Jesus's righteousness for oneself. Success depends on acknowledging and accepting these facts.

The sermon does not say how Jesus walked, or what he offers as help to walk as he did. However, it shows what must be done to walk with him. Faith is the answer.

The preacher tries to work around the text, but not in the text itself. Lack of exegetical work prevents the sermon of a better explanation. The illustrations are clear and relevant. Jesus is in the foreground, but his love, care, forgiveness, and compassion for sinners are not presented. An application is made to present needs of the people.

Sermon Number 10 on Acts 11:26; 26:28 and 1 Pet 4:12-19

Synopsis

What does it mean to be a Christian? We may answer this question in many ways; but let us go to the Bible to find a meaningful answer. The word "Christian" is found in only three texts in the Bible.

The first reference can be found in Acts 11:26: "And the disciples were called for the first time Christians in Antioch".

The word Christian seems to come primarily from a Roman officer. The term "Christianos" from a Greek root contains a Latin desisence. A Greek man would have never made that combination; nor a Jewish would have given this name to Christ's disciples. The word Christ, for the Jewish was a translation of the word Messiah, and they would have never recognized Jesus' followers as the Messiah's followers.

We do not know exactly what the word Christian meant, particularly for the first person who used it, but many scholars have tried to define it: the adherent to Christ, those belonging to him; the followers of Christ.

In Antioch the name of Christ was frequently used by his disciples to refer to him. Preaching in this city was very popular, thus the name of Christ spread extensively. As a synonym of disciple, this word pointed out to someone totally identified with Christ. The disciples kept a close connection with their Master, adopted his way of life; shared with him all situations in life. The disciples communicated to others the lifestyle and teachings of Christ.

Christians in Antioch shared all of these things and the Church grew. They exposed Christ and his teachings all over the city. Their lives were so in tune with Jesus that they did not want to be called just disciples: they wanted to carry the name of their Master. If the name was Christ, his followers and proclaimers had to be called Christians.

In Antioch, to be a Christian meant living as Christ lived; talking about Christ, belonging to Christ, following Christ and proclaiming his name without conditions.

The second reference is found in Acts 26:28. In this conversation, to be a Christian is to live as Paul lived. He was a Christian, a name earned in Antioch by preaching Christ. In the conversation with King Agrippa, Paul argues that to be a Christian is to live as he (Paul) lived.

How did Paul live? He believed and practiced Christian doctrines such as:

The first and second coming of Jesus (6-12)

The resurrection of the dead

The doctrine of revelation (Acts 26:13,14)

The doctrine of testifying (Acts 26:16)

Paul completed his speech before King Agrippa by saying that he preached the Gospel (Acts 26:18).

The church's heritage is found in its doctrines and in justification by faith, with repentance and conversion. These principles are presented in connection with the doctrine of salvation. Thus, to be a Christian is to accept all of the Church's doctrines.

Finally Paul declares that all his missionary efforts in Damascus and among the Gentiles intended to bring them to repentance and obedience to God. Thus, to be a Christian was to live and to preach the doctrine of obedience.

The third reference is found in 1 Pet 4:12-19. "But if someone suffers as a Christian... let him not be ashamed". In other words: to be a Christian meant to confront suffering with a Christ-like attitude. The true Christian is not ashamed of suffering because it is not the result of his wrong doing. Suffering becomes a good opportunity to testify for Christ.

Analysis

This is a topical exposition of the word Christian. The preacher used three biblical texts to explain its meaning. The texts are literally and historically analyzed, and interpreted according to contemporary needs. Christ is the central figure, but he is not presented as the forgiver, the redeemer, the Savior. The main point is that the Christian is a disciple. The application is relevant.

Sermon Number 11 on Mark 9:2-7

Synopsis

During that extensive journey some significant events took place: the healing of the daughter of the Sirofenice; the healing of the deaf man at Decapolis (Matt 7:31-34); the discussion with the Pharisees, and the question Jesus asked His disciples about what people said about Him. This took place in Caesarea of Philippi. Luke says that Jesus was alone praying with His disciples, when He asked the question.

Six days later, He took three of them with Him and went to the mount to pray, and there He was transfigured (Lk 9:28). The disciples were Peter, Jacob, and his brother John. Why did he choose them? To understand the reason we must know who these men were:

Peter: Was a fisherman when called by Jesus (Matt 4:18). It was him who recognized Jesus as the Son of the true God (16:16). Upon his confession was the church of Christ built. He reprimanded Christ because of the nearness of His afflictions and death. He also suggested that the Lord build three pavilions on the mount of transfiguration. Later he denied knowing the Lord. After His resurrection, Jesus sent a special message to Peter. At the end, Jesus looked for and asked Peter if he loved him. Peter was then appointed to care for the flock.

John and Jacob: Like Peter, these men were fishermen. At Jesus' call they left their nets and became fishers of men. It was they who asked Jesus to let them ask for fire from heaven to devour the Samaritans who prevented the Lord of spending the night there. They were with Jesus when He went into Jairus' house to bring his daughter to life, when everyone else, except Peter was left outside. Their deeds by themselves show the kind of character these men had developed. Are we to judge them or to measure their behavior?

Witnesses of His Power: Jesus called these men to be with Him. They were witnesses of the many miracles He did. They never doubted Jesus' excellence or authority as the promised Messiah and the King of Israel. They walked hundreds of kilometers defeating weather difficulties and the scorn of the Jews and Samaritans. They achieved such intimate relationship with Jesus that they claimed they could drink the same cup of affliction that Jesus was about to drink. Jesus gave them power: "And He called unto Him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; and they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them" (Mk 6:7, 13). They were preachers of the Word and were successful in spite of their hostile temperament.

No doubt for some reason Jesus gave them more than the other nine. There was no difference regarding the investment of power; they all received the same commission, but on special occasions these men stood out. It may be seen in the biblical narrative, the special relationship that had developed between Jesus and His three disciples.

However, He did not change Peter's arrogance, nor the haughtiness of the sons of Zebedee. but He would lead them to what they needed to correct and satisfy their needs. They would not fail in their attempt to serve the interests of the Kingdom, because it was Jesus Himself who called them and made them fishers of men. The Lord will never call anyone without assuring their success.

On the Mount of Glory with Jesus: It is probable that the disciples never imagined what was going to happen on the Mountain. Luke says that Jesus went up the mountain with His disciples and while praying, He was transfigured before them, and His face changed and His garments shone (9:29).

Matthew's description is more vivid when he says that His face was like the sun, and His garments as white as light (17:2). What a glorious experience! The most glorious thing which they had partaken. They were flooded with the heavenly light, a divine light confirming the power of the Son of God. Not even by the Jordan river at the time of his baptism, was there such a glorious manifestation!

Human Reactions: The three disciples were stunned before the manifestation of the glory of God. However, they were comfortable in the pleasant atmosphere. It was Peter who suggested to the Lord: "It would be good for us to stay here; let us build three pavilions: one for yourself, one for Moses and another for Elijah." when they came down, the disciples had a glorious vision of the Lord and a serious challenge before them. Subsequent evidences show that the efficiency and success of these men depended to a great extent on what had happened on the Mount of Transfiguration. They were the same, but they had a different vision of the Lord and his ministry.

Efficiency depends on the vision we have about Him. Jesus said: "Learn from me", so to study in His school is important. To work in His vineyard as coworkers is helpful because we are in a laboratory where the knowledge is tested. To gain the privilege and skill of being preachers should be a goal for all of us, but much more important is to be transformed by His presence, saturated by His heavenly light which not only shines on our garments, but in our daily experience, our mental attitude, our own nature, our whole life.

The richness of our service as servants of the Lord does not depend on the information and standards we obtain. Neither on the knowledge on different topics and scholastic disciplines, but on the vision we have of our Lord.

Analysis

This message is based on Mark 9:2-7. It is a study of the change produced on the life of the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. The sermon is full of information about the acts of the three disciples. the passage is literally and historically studied. The Christ who saves is presented all over the sermon. The content of the message is fully applied to the present needs of the church.

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