**Topical Sermons**

**I. Definitions: What is Topical Preaching?**

A. Topical sermons are often contrasted with expository sermons. (In fact, I do this myself on page 2 of these notes!) This is because most topical sermons are not expository.

B. However, *good* topical sermons are also *expository* sermons—their authority is founded in God’s inerrant Word—so even topical sermons should expound the Scripture. Expository preaching is simply preaching in which a biblical text is accurately explained and applied.

C. What, then, is a *topical* *sermon?* For the purposes of this class, topical sermons are sermons that *expound a central idea from more than one main text* of Scripture. Even more accurately, Greidanus would call this topical-biblical preaching since there is topical preaching which doesn’t deal with the text at all. However, since *every* message should deal with Scripture I will still use the briefer term “topical” sermons.

D. So what is *topical exposition?* Topical exposition is “the communication of a biblical concept derived from several different passages in accordance with the author’s purpose and the subject/complement of each passage presented” (Dallas Seminary class notes).

E. Greidanus helpfully distinguishes the basic types of sermons (p. 12, adapted in the parentheses):

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| --- | --- |
| **Categories** | **Types of sermons** |
| **Biblical Content** | **Biblical****Sermon** | **Non-Biblical Sermon** |
| **Use of Text** | **Textual or Expository Sermon** | **Topical-Biblical Sermon** | **Topical Sermon** |
| **Length of Text** | **Textual Unit (Paragraph or Chapter)** | **Verse or Clause** | **Many Texts****(Multi-textual)** | **Non-Textual (No Text)** |

**II. Advantages: Why is it Important to Know How to Preach Topically?**

A. Most teaching on Christian living is not summed up in a single passage and thus leads the preacher to a type of topical exposition:

1. Theological: Nearly all doctrines are derived from studying the *whole* of Scripture (e.g., the Trinity, angels, the millennium, salvation, etc.). Topical preaching enables hearers to grasp a subject of the Bible as a whole. Gibbs, 268

2. Biographical: Oftentimes passages about a single person are found in a variety of places (e.g., Peter in the Gospels, Acts, Galatians, 1-2 Peter; King David in 1-2 Samuel, 1 Chron., Psalms, etc.). This necessitates covering several key texts.

3. Procedural: A step-by-step method of how to do something (e.g., discern one’s spiritual gift) is generally not given in a single passage.

4. Persuasive: To convince your listeners of an important truth (e.g., abortion, divorce and remarriage) you often will need to address several different passages.

5. Evangelistic: Although many passages are evangelistic in intent (e.g., in John’s Gospel), evangelistic preaching often works well in a topical style.

6. Proverbs: Most of this book must be preached topically as the various proverbs are not grouped by topic. A single proverb does not teach a truth in all its dimensions either.

B. Topical sermons often work well between expositional series and can be preached on special days of the year: Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, National Day, Easter, Christmas, etc.

C. Remember that the worst type of sermon you can preach is the type you preach all the time. Use variety! Even good expository preaching can get old at times, so spice up your people’s pulpit diet with a change.

1. Sometimes an issue that needs to be addressed is not specifically mentioned *at all* in Scripture (euthanasia, nuclear war, abortion, etc.). Topical preaching enables the speaker to present relevant biblical principles that at least indirectly relate to a subject.

**III. Disadvantages: What are Some Potential Pitfalls in Topical Preaching?**

A. Deriving the topic first, *then* the verses, can easily force foreign meanings into texts. Verses can more easily be taken out of context in topical than in expository preaching.

B. A steady diet of topical preaching can convince listeners that the Bible answers every topic with a verse. This simplistic view can lead the people to miss out on the great gems Scripture contains because they falsely perceive the Bible as a systematic theology.

C. With regular topical preaching the preacher tends to only preach on his areas of strength. This is bad for the preacher and congregation alike. In contrast, systematic exposition through books of Scripture reveals our weaknesses and keeps us in balance.

**IV. Procedure: How Can I Preach Topically?**

A. Follow the basic principles of expository preaching: preach a central idea, preach from the text, use full sentence outlining, etc.

B. Adapt the 7-step procedure that makes expository messages effective (pp. 27-28, 109-112, 251):

1. STUDY

a. Choose your Topic (instead of starting with your passage) in light of what your listeners need to know. This is almost like placing your sermon idea up front but can be more general.

b. Choose the Passages: Look up verses that relate to your topic and choose the best 2-4 passages. (You generally won’t have time to develop more than these in your sermon.)

c. Exegete each of these verses in their context, doing so with prayer for objectivity.

2. STRUCTURE (Exegetical Outline)

a. Determine the Exegetical Idea for Each Passage: The subject of each should relate to your topic, of course. Make sure you don’t read your own meanings into the texts.

b. Arrange the Ideas/Verses: Organize the key verses you exegeted so that a basic structure begins to take shape. Place the verses in a logical manner so that they will make sense to the listeners in the order in which you present them.

3. CPT (Exegetical Idea): Write your overall EI that summarizes the EI of each passage above.

4. PURPOSE BRIDGE

a. Submit the Topic to the Three Developmental Questions: Choose from the developmental (functional) questions whether you need to explain, prove, or apply your topic.

b. Determine the Sermon’s Purpose by stating the Desired Listener Response: How do you want listeners to respond to the topic in terms of what they should know, feel, and do?

5. CPS (Main Idea): Convert your EI from step 3 into a single MI to accomplish your purpose (step 4).

6. STRUCTURE

a. Outline the Sermon:

(1) If you are going to differ from a popularly held position then you probably will want to preach inductively.

(2) Main points can be stated as questions. Sub-points then provide the answers. The topic can answer the what, why, how, who, where, and when questions (Gibbs, 270).

b. Plan for Oral Clarity: transitions, restatements, illustrations, applications, etc.

c. Prepare the Introduction and Conclusion. In the introduction, be sure to introduce only the first verse (not all of them) so as to not confuse the listeners.

7. PREACH: Manuscript the message, memorize the subject, MPs and MI, and then practice preaching it until it is internalized.

**“What in the World is God Doing?”**

**Genesis to Revelation—A Sample Topical Sermon (Abbreviated)**

**Topic:** Missions-God's Perspective

**Subject:** God has always been actively concerned in world missions

**Complement:** so every believer should make his decisions based upon how they will fulfill the Great Commission

**Purpose:** The listeners will see God's priority in missions and decide how they can best be used in the fulfillment of the Great Commission

**Attribute:** We Worship Our God of World Concern (Missions-Active God)

**Introduction**

1. A deacon was briefed just before a missionary banquet and cautioned to be very sensitive to guests there from foreign countries who were not accustomed to American culture.

During the banquet, he found himself seated next to an African man who was hungrily devouring his chicken. Trying to think of some way to communicate with the man, the deacon leaned over and said, "Chomp, chomp, good, huh?" The man, gazing back at the deacon simply replied, "Mmm, good."

A little while later the African man savored a delicious cup of coffee, so the deacon leaned over and said, "Glug, glug, good, huh?" The man, a bit uncertain replied, "Mmm, good."

Then the banquet speaker was introduced and—to the deacon's utter dismay—the African man next to him got up, went to the platform, and delivered a flawless message, even with an Oxford accent. Upon concluding, he headed towards the deacon, who was red with embarrassment. The speaker simply replied, "Blah, blah, good, huh?"

2. You might consider that funny only because you've had some embarrassing moments in relating to people from other cultures yourself. Let me assure you, you're not alone.

a. I think of one foreign guest invited to an American family's home for dinner. When offered tea, he confidently tore open his tea bag and emptied the contents into his cup. The hosts corrected him, "Ah, no... You're supposed to put the bag in also." When he was offered some "Sweet & Low" he followed their advice and confidently tossed the sweetener in his cup, bag and all.

b. The point is that we're often uncomfortable with things that aren't that familiar—and missions is no exception. When the average person hears the word "missions" a shudder comes up the spine and ties the tongue! No one wants to show his ignorance.

3. But I also think that maybe missions is scary to some of us because we haven't seen God's view of the subject clearly. Today we're going to learn a bit more about how God views missions, but first we need to define what we mean by "missions." Let's look at what it **isn’t** and what it **is**.

a. Missions is **not** evangelism…(explain).

b. Missions **is** sending forth people from your church to reach people for Christ who are beyond your borders or natural influence. So missions is reaching people who you normally wouldn't or couldn't reach in the normal church ministries (examples).

Sub4. So where we're headed today is to take a look at two things: (1) what God thinks of missions, and (2) what we should do in response. First, we'll see God's involvement in world evangelization as seen in the Scripture, then second, we'll see what we can do.

(First, what does God think of missions/world evangelization? Well…)

**I. Missions is God’s highest priority**.

A. God's missionary concern is first seen way back at the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15).

B. God promises to reach the world through Abraham and the Jewish nation (Gen. 12:1-3).

(Well, did Israel accomplish her purpose? Hardly! But the church has a job now…)

C. Our commission is to reach the world for Christ (Acts 1:6-8).

(Well, that still sounds a bit optimistic, some of you might be saying. I'd like to see this from an infallible source. You got it, because...)

D. God says that the Great Commission will be fulfilled (Rev. 7:9).

1. Revelation 7 says God’s ultimate purpose is to glorify Himself by redeeming a people from every people.

2. Matthew 24:14 teaches the same thing (read).

(Well, we've seen that we serve a missions-active God. He has acted to save mankind even back in Eden, through Israel, and now through the church. So where does that leave us?)

**II. Since missions is God's number one priority, it should be our highest priority as well (MI).**

A. As a church, missions should be our highest priority. There's a couple of diagrams in your bulletin to illustrate this truth (explain ingrown verses outward-reaching churches).

B. As individuals, missions should be our highest priority.

1. Perhaps God wants to use you overseas. You say, "Oh, but not me," but have you ever asked the Lord if that's where He wants you?

2. If God doesn't want to use you overseas then He wants you to contribute to the fulfillment of the Great Commission in this church by giving or missions ministry.

**Conclusion**

M.I.1. Today we've taken a brief tour through Scripture to discover that *since missions is God's number one priority, it should be our highest priority as well*.

2. Maybe you're asking, "I **hear** what you're saying. But what should I **do**?" (Explain)

3. Prayer