

Public Address in the Bible and the Secularized West: Genre-Sensitive and Culture-Sensitive  
 Sermons from Biblical Speeches  
 Arica A. Heald and Jeffrey D. Arthurs  
 Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

**Abstract:**

The genre of biblical speeches/sermons has been largely ignored in the literature on genre-sensitive preaching, perhaps because of the overlap between ancient and modern public address. Generic homiletic technique is only a starting point, however, to handle this form with insight. This paper describes the literary-rhetorical features of speeches and identifies their rhetorical effects. Eight recommendations are given for preparing and delivering a sermon that recreates those rhetorical effects for contemporary listeners.

Speeches are a prevalent biblical genre. Biblical speeches include Moses' three addresses to Israel in Dt 1-33, the farewell speeches of Joshua (Jos 23-24) and Samuel (1 Sa 12), the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), the Upper Room Discourse (Jn 14-17), and Peter and Paul's many speeches in Acts. The speeches of Paul within Acts 13-28 make up 20-25% of the total word count, and if "placed end to end they approximate the size of Ephesians" (Knox 1954, 23).

Surprisingly then, very little has been written on preaching speeches. Perhaps this paucity has occurred because sermons *are* speeches, and standard preaching method has been considered adequate. Although general homiletical technique is a good starting point, certain aspects of method need to receive focused and nuanced attention when the text is a biblical speech.

This paper will first examine the essence of a biblical speech in terms of situation, substance, and style (Campbell and Jamison 1978, 9-28). We will then offer suggestions on how to prepare and deliver a sermon whose text is a biblical speech.

### **Literary and Rhetorical Effects**

#### **Situation**

Consider two situations. First, a respected, aged leader addresses a new generation of nomadic Israelites poised to enter the Promised Land under his successor. This audience did not see God deliver Israel from Egypt, and it will be susceptible to forgetting God and His Law in the excitement of conquest. Second, a converted Pharisee addresses a group of cosmopolitan Greek intellectuals. This pagan audience is insatiably curious, and the speaker knows that the resurrection of Jesus is the epitome of a new idea that may grip their hearts as well as their minds. Each speaker faces a distinct "rhetorical situation," defined by Bitzer as an *exigence* – "an imperfection marked by urgency" – an *audience* of people who can be agents of change, and a set of *constraints* that can prevent change (Bitzer 1959, 6). Moses, Paul, indeed every speaker, faces unique rhetorical situations such that their respective speeches are radically different. Context matters. That context of exigence, audience, and constraints is termed the rhetorical situation, and its importance cannot be overstated. A speech has an urgency, a purpose, and a

response to a particular rhetorical situation. An excellent speech is an appropriate response to an accurate assessment of the rhetorical situation.

In biblical studies, the term that most closely approximates “rhetorical situation” is “occasional,” and on a continuum of biblical genres, speeches would be the furthest towards the “occasional” end, with apocalypse and epistle nearby. With respect to our preaching, there are times in the life of a church where an urgent need, such as a tragic death or the installation of a new pastor, creates a rhetorical situation similar to that of a biblical speech. Although a high quality, average-week catechetical sermon does not often face exigencies which clamor for response, even catechetical preaching faces “imperfections marked by urgency,” what Chapell calls the “Fallen Condition Focus” (Chapell 2005, 48-54). Good preachers adapt to their audience because they understand that they preach to a specific people at a specific time in history from a specific text.

When the biblical text is a speech, we must be fully conscious of the rhetorical situation. For example, Adams observes that, “The eight sermons and speeches of Paul were each distinct. The difference arose out of the audience, the occasion and the effect upon the audience. . . . He did not use one stereotyped approach” (Adams 1978, 61). Even a comparison of Paul’s forensic speeches before Felix and Festus (Acts 24-25) demonstrate that he responded uniquely to the same exigence, a potential conviction of treason, and constraint, the judge desiring to do the Jews a favor, because other factors were different. Felix was married to a Jewess who was a great-granddaughter of Herod the Great and sister to Herod Agrippa, and he had served in the area for six years. Since Felix was well acquainted with the conflict between Judaism and the Way, Paul succinctly answered each charge brought by the Jews’ lawyer, demonstrated his piety and respect for the temple, and pointedly suggested the real reason he was being prosecuted. In contrast, although the exigence and a constraint were identical, Paul would have been a fool to approach the second man in the same way that he had the first because other constraints were present. Festus was *not* familiar with the area or the Way, and he was anxious not to further destabilize the volatile situation that Festus’ misrule had left behind. Thus Paul adapted to his audience; he provided a brilliant foil to the Jews’ many accusations by avoiding religious jargon and truncating his entire defense to one sentence, “I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.” When Festus asked if Paul was willing to stand trial at the lower Jerusalem court, which would certainly produce a death sentence, Paul again avoided a lengthy defense and simply appealed to Caesar.

### **Substance**

Because a speaker responds to a rhetorical situation, every biblical speech has a purpose that can be discerned during the exegetical process. The “substance” of a genre is its typical, recurring lines of argumentation. Substance is the speech’s persuasive strategies or “content.” Biblical speeches display the following four recurring patterns of argumentation: references to the past, emphasis of biblical themes, use of the enthymeme, and ethos.

Biblical speech-makers frequently refer to the past. Soards has observed that speakers do this in several ways in the book of Acts (1994, 200), but his principles hold for speeches outside of Acts as well. First, both Old and New Testament speeches contain references to past events. For example, both Moses’ farewell speech and Stephen’s martyr speech recount the history of Israel

up to that time. Second, the New Testament speeches amply quote and allude to Old Testament Scriptures. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly quotes Mosaic Law before interpreting it, and Peter's Pentecost sermon includes two direct quotations, Joel 2:28-32 and Psalm 16:8-11. Third, biblical speakers cite important people in the history of Israel for support material. This can be a vague reference to "the prophets" or a specific mention of individuals such as Abraham or David. Paul does both in his speech in the synagogue of Antioch; he directly quotes John the Baptist, and he refers to "the prophets that are read every Sabbath" (Acts 13:25, 27).

Referring to the past produces two rhetorical effects: a fostering of communal continuity and the borrowing of authority. We should not be surprised that biblical speeches consistently refer to the past. Reliance upon authorities is a normal feature of oral cultures. Knowledge is a communal rather than a private possession, so it must be grounded in accepted wisdom, "hence ... the penchant for quoting authorities: these show contact with the sources of the communal heritage ... The oral mind is ... structured to turn by preference ... to the richness of traditional discourse" (Ong 1967, 233). We see this rhetorical strategy and effect in the epistles, which are similar to speeches in their aurality. Ellis estimates that several epistles are nearly half "preformed material" (1999, 116).

Somewhat linked to the strategy of referencing the past, the genre of biblical speeches also includes an underlying emphasis of biblical themes. Covenant, redemption, the sovereignty of God, repentance of sin, and the faithfulness of God are some of these themes. David, for example, publically exhorts the leaders of Israel to keep God's commands so that they experience the blessings of the Mosaic covenant. Immediately afterwards, he reminds Solomon that he also must be faithful to God if he wishes to avoid the disastrous curses of the Davidic covenant (1 Ch 28). Jesus in the "Vine and Branches" section of the Upper Room discourse emphasizes to the disciples among other things that God is Judge and that genuine faithfulness is shown in deeds and character (Jn 15). After Christ's ascension, key themes found in sermons and speeches include Christ's death and resurrection, Jesus as Messiah, salvation of Jew and Gentile, and the work of the Holy Spirit. The generic feature of recurring biblical themes leads Soards to criticize Peter and Paul in Acts for continually "getting off the subject" (1994, 203) of the immediate rhetorical situation to the gospel. In contrast, we would argue that the evangelists considered part of every rhetorical situation to be an opportunity to share the gospel.

The rhetorical effect of emphasizing biblical themes is continuity. Leaders must continually reinforce the core beliefs and values of a community, or the community will forget who it is and why it exists. Biblical speeches in general serve as excellent vehicles for reminding God's people of the truth about God and themselves. In doing so, the audience is reminded that they are part of the story of God; they belong to something bigger than themselves. Similarly, evangelistic biblical speeches introduce the important truths central to the gospel and invite the audience to participate in the story of God in a new way.

Arising from a specific set of circumstances and addressing the needs of a specific audience, each biblical speech uses the form of argumentation that Aristotle called the "enthymeme." Hurley defines "enthymeme" as "an argument that is expressible as a categorical [i.e. full] syllogism but that is missing a premise or conclusion" (1994, 281). This truncated syllogism draws upon the beliefs, attitudes, and values that the audience supplies. Skillful speakers use

what the audience supplies to move them to a new position. This is what Aristotle had in mind when he calls the “enthymeme” a “rhetorical syllogism.” For example, the statement, “Socrates is mortal,” is the conclusion of the syllogism:

Man is mortal.  
Socrates is a man.  
Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

In contrast to this pedantic form of argumentation, a persuader could construct an enthymeme, which draws upon the audience’s common-sense belief that Socrates is a man, stating simply:

All men are mortal.  
Therefore, Socrates is going to die.

The middle premise is deleted because the audience supplies it.

Notice how much is left unsaid in the following argument of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard it said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your [body part] causes you to sin, cut it out. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown in hell” (Mt 5:27-29). Jesus’ enthymemic argument looks like this:

Do not commit adultery.  
Lust is adultery.  
If one body part causes you to sin, cut it out.  
To cut out one body part is better than hell (gehenna).

What he leaves for the Jewish audience to determine is the full syllogism, which they do based on logic and their knowledge of Mosaic Law. One possibility for the full syllogism is given below. Italics indicates the lines the audience provides:

*“Do not commit adultery” is a command in the Mosaic Law*  
*All persons who disobey a command in the Mosaic Law are to be punished*  
*Therefore, all persons who disobey “Do not commit adultery” are to be punished*  
*All persons who disobey “Do not commit adultery” are all persons who commit adultery*  
*Therefore, all persons who commit adultery are to be punished*  
*The punishment for all persons who commit adultery is physical and spiritual death (hell).*  
Lust is adultery.  
*Therefore, all persons who lust are to be punished with physical and spiritual death (hell).*  
*Some body-parts cause some persons to lust.*  
Removal of all lust-causing body-parts prevents lust.  
*Therefore, removal of all lust-causing body-parts prevents the punishment of physical and spiritual death (hell).*  
To cut out one body part is better than hell.

Only with audience participation does Jesus’ conclusion make sense.

The rhetorical effect of enthymemic persuasion is collaboration. The speaker and the audience work together to reach the stated conclusion. Bitzer states that enthymemes “unite the speaker and audience and provide the strongest possible proofs. Owing to the skill of the speaker, *the audience itself helps construct the proofs by which it is persuaded* [emphasis his]” (Bitzer 1959, 408). Thus biblical speeches seem to affirm the communication adage that “the only persuasion is self-persuasion.” For persuasion to occur (not manipulation or coercion), listeners must buy into the speaker’s argument. In a sense, listeners must convince themselves.

In addition to references to the past, an emphasis of biblical themes, and a use of enthymeme, the necessity of good ethos in face-to-face communication contributes to the substance of the biblical speeches. A pastor once advised a younger leader, “You have only as much leverage with a speeches. A pastor once advised a younger leader, “You have only as much leverage with a person as you have relationship.” Sometimes the speaker has a previously established positive relationship and can build quickly on that. Moses seems to have had that privilege.

More often, though, the speaker spends some time, especially at the beginning of the speech, reinforcing and/or establishing his relationship with the audience. Samuel starts his farewell speech with a Q&A session with the assembly that firmly establishes his trustworthiness in his years of service to God (1Sa 12:1-5). Only then does he move into the main body of his speech, the purpose of which is to convict Israel of its sin in asking for a king. David uses ethos as a substantive strategy by prefacing his appeal to Israel's leaders for contributions of gold, bronze, iron, wood, and precious stones for the Temple with the confirmation that he has already donated his personal fortune (1Ch 29). They know that he is not asking more of them than of himself, and they give willingly. When Paul is granted permission to speak to the Temple crowd who has been stirred up to kill him (Acts 22), he first introduces himself as a Jew, a former student of the highly respected Gamaliel, and a zealous persecutor of Christians. Those who think he is just another troublemaker are forced to reevaluate him as a respectable Jew, even an up-and-coming rabbi. Only then does Paul skillfully transition to sharing his Damascus Road experience.

The rhetorical effects of ethos are authority and identification. A pre-existing, positive relationship between speaker and audience creates the space necessary for the speaker to use his authority, as someone with expertise worth hearing and evaluating, for persuasion. As the speaker reveals his own experiences, reactions, and feelings, listeners identify with him. His experiences become their experiences, vicariously, and they naturally align their values and goals with him.

## Style

The Bible presents no single form for the genre of speech. Instead, we see various forms of "sub-genres." For example, covenant ratification and renewal speeches, like Moses' Deuteronomy addresses, follow the suzerain-vassal treaty form: preamble (1:1-5), historical prologue (1:6-4:43), stipulations (4:44-26:19), and curses and blessings (27-30). Covenant lawsuit speeches, such as that in 1 Samuel 12, are similar. The degree to which Greco-Roman rhetorical forms, such as deliberative, epideictic, and forensic speeches, influenced New Testament speeches is debated, but there is wide agreement among scholars that Paul's letters and speeches utilize at least some rhetorical theory from that era (Kennedy, 8-11).

Summarized or verbatim, biblical speeches have flexible form at the micro level as well as the macro. Within speeches we may find parable, poetry, prayer, aphorism, quotation, chiasm, metaphor, or irony. The Sermon on the Mount provides an excellent example, from the aphoristic beatitudes to the Lord's prayer to the parable of wise and foolish builders. Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders (Acts 19) includes the metaphors of his life as a race and of false teachers as savage wolves; Paul ends with a quotation of Jesus, itself a proverb. Perhaps the most prevalent micro-forms arise from the fact that speeches are face-to-face communication. The marks of orality include personal pronouns, parallelism, repetition, rhetorical questions, and exclamations.

Although biblical speeches reflect their dialogic situations, they are primarily continuous discourse. Yet even in the midst of monologue, we should not be surprised to hear of overtones of dialogue. Some speeches are explicitly punctuated by questions, such as the Upper Room discourse, which includes 5 questions of the disciples (Jn 13:36, 37; 14:5, 22; 16:17-18). In other cases, the rhetorical situation includes a question to which the speaker responds. For example, at Pentecost, some of those who heard their own languages being spoken were, ". . .

amazed and perplexed; they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’ Some, however, made fun of them and said, ‘They have had too much wine.’” (Acts 2:12-13). Peter opens his sermon with a promise to answer the question, and his first point dismisses the crowd’s proposed answer.

The rhetorical effects of oral style, with its flexibility and dialogic overtones, are energy, immediacy, and heightened attention. Unlike most genres, or to a degree unusual in most genres, speeches demand, “Look me in the eye.” Speeches are not timeless works of art, universal in theme and archetypal in appeal; they are direct and personal – a living soul addressing living souls in situations marked by urgency. Like modern sermons and speeches, they pulse and swirl with various sub-forms so that the listeners’ minds receive truth from multiple perspectives and styles.

### **Homiletics**

Having described some of the literary/rhetorical features of biblical speeches, we now turn to homiletics. How can modern preachers expound these texts in ways that accurately herald the content and skillfully borrow their form? Happily, most of the rhetorical dynamics of the genre are easily reproduced in modern sermons because sermons are a type of speech. However, while standard homiletical technique provides a good starting point for preaching from speeches, certain aspects of the genre need focused and nuanced attention. Continuing with the headings of situation, substance, and style, this section lists eight suggestions for preaching biblical speeches.

#### **Situation**

1. In exegesis, note carefully the speech’s exigencies and constraints.

Biblical speeches are always set within a narrative context, so the exegete must examine carefully the situations that called them forth. Of course, studying a text in its context is an exegetical truism, but the truism deserves special emphasis here because the most salient generic feature of speeches is their highly occasional nature. Biblical speeches are not art for art’s sake, timeless and universal; they are born in crisis and die with the echo of the fading voice. Accurate exegesis demands that we understand, for example, why Stephen was arraigned before the Council (Acts 7), who were the Gentiles Paul preached to in the synagogue (Acts 13), and why the pagans tried to sacrifice to Barnabas and Paul (Acts 14). Every biblical speech presents, at least in outline form, a situation marked by urgency with exigencies and constraints. Speeches cannot be understood without knowledge of situation.

2. Come up the ladder of abstraction to discover relevance.

Because speeches are highly occasional, they can be tricky to apply. As with biblical narrative which is more descriptive than prescriptive, and as with Old Testament Law, which can be extremely specific and time-bound, the key to applying speeches is to travel from exegesis to application through theology. Warren (1999) and Sunukjian (2007, 27-31) describe this journey.

For example, when preaching Joshua’s farewell speech (Joshua 23), with its time-bound description of the Conquest, its reminder of covenant promises, and its warnings about the idol-worshipping nations, the preacher should demonstrate that Joshua’s God is the same God we

worship. We too are in covenant relationship with Him, and we too are tempted to love the world. In a sense, nothing has changed. In order to find relevance for occasional documents, we must climb the ladder of abstraction to find the text's vision of God and its vision of humanity's fallen condition (Chapell 2005, 48-52).<sup>1</sup> Then we are prepared to descend to our world.

### 3. Use biblical speeches in key moments in the life of your church.

The first two suggestions dealt with “situation” in the text, and this one deals with “situation” in the congregation. Because biblical speeches arose from occasions marked by urgency, perhaps the most natural time to use them is when our communities find themselves in similar situations. Pastors should be ready with a “fitting response.” To be sure, our typical weekly sermons are not often forged in white-hot circumstances, but churches *do* regularly participate in *ceremonial events* such as dedications and remembrances—prime opportunities to reinforce the values of a body; *turning points* such as installations and farewells—prime opportunities to promote the mission of a body; and *tragedies* such as September 11<sup>th</sup> or the passing of a beloved church member—prime opportunities to provide pastoral care to a body. Sensitive speakers will leverage the rhetorical possibilities of those events as Paul did with the Ephesian elders (Acts 20) and as David did at the dedication of the materials for the Temple (1 Chron. 29).

Furthermore, experienced pastors know that tragedy, death in particular, is part of the fallen human condition, so before they find themselves in the whirlwind of ministry surrounding a funeral, they will study passages that aptly address this “imperfection marked by urgency.” They will then be prepared to speak a word of hope and/or warning to listeners who are primed to listen.

## Substance

### 4. Analyze and adapt to the audience's knowledge, beliefs, and values.

This suggestion may appear to be simply a reminder of what all effective communicators do (and did), but in light of the enthymemic argumentation of biblical speeches, it is a crucial consideration when thinking about preaching biblical speeches for two reasons: a) we need to *use* enthymemic persuasion in our preaching to create the rhetorical effects of collaboration and self-persuasion and b) we need to *explain/prove* the enthymemic persuasion used by the speaker in the biblical text. Both reasons require doing audience analysis.

As explained in Section 1 of this paper, biblical speeches are enthymemic, prompting the listeners to use their own knowledge, beliefs, and values to understand and accept the speaker's proclamation. So we also should invite our audiences to participate in forming conclusions. For example, Peter's use of Old Testament texts in Acts 2 is enthymemic because his audience knew and agreed with the Scriptures. Depending on our audience, we may start with Scripture, or we may start with Oprah.

Using enthymemic persuasion is not enough, however, for today's audiences are 2000 years removed from the biblical speeches. The principle of adaptation demands that modern preachers explain and prove the biblical enthymemes. The authors of this paper share Jay Adams' concern that “conservative Christians (unlike Paul) often have assumed too much knowledge and

acceptance of Christian presuppositions on the part of audiences. From Paul, they must learn how to approach modern man, who knows and accepts little more of the Scriptures than the Lycaonians” (1978, 69). We should assume that North American audiences are composed of people who fall somewhere on a continuum from antagonistic towards God to intimate with God. That assumption will prompt us to blend proclamation and catechesis as Paul did in his epistles, perhaps our best examples in the New Testament of “preaching” to the baptized (Thompson 2001, 37-60). That assumption may also prompt us to reduce the volume of content in an individual sermon, spending more time explaining and proving fewer concepts. Too often we assume that listeners are supplying elements of our arguments, elements such as the authority of the Bible and the existence of the immaterial, but in reality, these presuppositions need explanation and defense.

Notice Peter again in Acts 2. Peter did not assume that the Jewish listeners immediately bought the idea of Christ’s resurrection. He knew the very concept of “resurrection” was a point of contention in Judaism. Instead, he used Old Testament texts and personal experience to produce agreement *before* urging repentance.

Robinson’s three “developmental questions” (Robinson 2001, 77-86), expanded and illustrated by Sunukjian (2007, 87-127), help modern preachers analyze and adapt. As our audience listens to a sermon, they are likely thinking:

Robinson

What does it mean?

Is it true?

What difference does it make?

Sunukjian

What do I need to explain?

Do we buy it?

What does it look like in real life?

These questions are arranged in stages. If a person does not understand a concept (stage 1), she is unlikely to believe and act upon it (stages 2 and 3). Similarly, if she understands it, but does not believe it (stage 2) she will not live it out (stage 3). We must not assume too much knowledge and too much agreement. We serve our listeners best by spending adequate time on the first two questions before attempting to move the will.

For example, when we exhort our people to “be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart” as Samuel did in his farewell speech (1 Sam. 12:24), some listeners are asking, “What do you mean, ‘fear the Lord’? I don’t like the sound of that.” Others are asking, “Why ‘fear’ God? Isn’t this just an Old Testament speech, just some old prophet talking about God that no longer applies to us? I don’t buy this idea of ‘fearing God.’” Others are asking, “How? I see how ancient Israel was to fear God, but I have no idea what that looks like in my life and in this church.”

A modern exemplar of audience analysis and adaptation is Timothy Keller at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. Through omnivorous reading in both theological and secular literature, Keller anticipates how listeners will respond to his sermons. He says,

If you know the people to whom you speak, you will know the kind of objections or questions they will be [posing] in their hearts in response to your points. So identify those questions and express them. . . . For example: “Now some of you are saying, ‘Yes, that’s

great for you, but you *have* faith. I wish I could believe in God, I have tried, but I just can't develop the faith!' But friend, your real problem is not that you can't believe in God, but that you are *refusing to doubt yourself*. You are committed to the 'doctrine' of your own competence to run your life. And you believe in it against all the evidence! Come! Admit what you know down deep, that you are not wise enough and able enough to run your own life. Doubt yourself, and you will begin to move toward faith in God" (Keller, 2006).

##### 5. Retell the story.

Biblical speeches consistently refer to the past and reinforce biblical themes. A striking feature of New Testament speeches is their grounding in the Old Testament, and a striking feature of Old Testament speeches is their constant reference to the Covenant. This grounding worked well in the original setting because, as described above, it prompted communal continuity.

How can we reproduce the rhetorical effect of continuity? By retelling the story. This works best as a long-term strategy. Through patient instruction preachers slowly build up knowledge of biblical history, so that listeners can unpack the significance of quotations and allusions. Listeners become capable of responding to biblical speeches as the original hearers did, collaborating with the speaker to construct the meaning he intends. The strategy can also be modified for the short term (that is, in individual sermons) when preachers briefly retell the immediate story/context of the speech, being careful to explain quotations, allusions, and key themes such as the Fall, Covenant, and redemption in Christ.

Presenting the meta-narrative behind quotations and allusions holds special promise for ministry among postmoderns because they long to belong to something bigger than themselves—a history and a people that stretches backward in time and around the world in space. But to help postmoderns locate themselves in that story, preachers will have to retell the story. Thus, when preaching from biblical speeches, a narrative approach may serve the listeners well.

##### 6. Leverage the advantages of face-to-face communication.

Sermons and biblical speeches are both embodied oral communication: a living soul addressing living souls. That dynamic creates rhetorical possibilities unknown in other genres. When a communicator literally stands with his words, ethos takes center stage. As Greek rhetorician Isocrates said, "Who does not know that words carry greater conviction when spoken by men of good repute than when spoken by men who live under a cloud, and that the argument which is made by a man's life is more weight than that which is furnished by words?" (*Antidosis* 2:239). Following the Greek and Roman rhetoricians, Augustine concurred: "The life of the speaker has greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of eloquence" (Augustine 164).

Listeners cannot, and probably should not, separate ideas from the persons recommending those ideas. Three implications follow. First, preachers should acknowledge and use their relationship with the listeners. Pastors, as opposed to traveling evangelists, have a special advantage here because, as shepherds, they live with and watch over the sheep. They are undershepherds of the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5: 4), so they should speak personally, passionately, and pointedly to

those under their care. In contrast, when a modern preacher has little prior relationship with the audience, he or she should follow Paul's example in establishing rapport in the introduction (see Paul's speech to Agrippa, Acts 26:1-3, and his speech to the Greeks in Athens, Acts 17:22-23). The modern situation demands it, and when preaching from a biblical speech the form of the text warrants it.

Second, preachers should use testimony and self-disclosure. Just as Paul used his testimony effectively as a vehicle for gospel proclamation (Acts 22, 24, 26), so can we. Just as Jesus opened his heart to the disciples on the night of his departure (John 14-17), so can we. The rhetorical effect of identification, so vital in embodied communication, occurs when we do this.

The third implication of face-to-face communication arises from its genesis in dialogue. In the Bible, listeners sometimes interrupted a speaker's monologue (see John 14:5-14), but even when their questions merely simmered in their minds, speakers recognized and addressed those questions. We should do the same, thereby reproducing the rhetorical effects of heightened attention, participation, contemplation, and adaptation to the listener's needs. When a listener becomes a dialogue partner, he or she invests in the speech act.

The example above from Timothy Keller demonstrates his technique of preaching even a monologue dialogically. His goal is to articulate the listeners' questions fairly and clearly, even more clearly than they could themselves. He does not tear down straw men.

## Style

### 7. Use a variety of forms.

The genre of biblical speeches should convince us once and for all that "sermon" cannot be reduced to a single form. As stated above, the Sermon on the Mount is a cornucopia of minor forms fused as a single address. Preachers of speeches, borrowing the dynamics of the text, should feel free to mix and match, and cut and paste elements like illustrations, dialogue, visuals, testimony, and poetry. Of course, all of these elements must contribute to the unity of the whole. Furthermore, our freedom to use various forms is not license to confuse or dazzle. Form must complement the content and serve the listeners. Just as Moses' covenant speeches were likely recognizable to the audience as suzerain-vassal treaties, so should our listeners recognize our sermons as authoritative teaching.

A particular form common in the first century, the synagogue homily, may hold special promise for postmoderns because they have been taught to think multi-perspectively. The synagogue homily, exemplified in the books of James and 1 Peter (which were probably sermons or collections of oral statements), was organized by theme, catch-phrases, and even sound values. Such sermons do not march toward destinations, they waltz. The result is a multi-perspectival, even kaleidoscopic, approach to topics. Rob Bell of Mars Hill Community Church, Grandview MI, takes this approach. His sermons are highly unified around a single statement or image, but they rarely if ever unfold as three points and a poem or even as major premise, minor premise, and conclusion.

### 8. Read the text aloud (and read it well!)

Remembering that the genre we are dealing with was originally oral communication, our final suggestion deals with holistically presenting the text. Sometimes the biblical text gives tantalizing glimpses into its original aural and visual aspects, as when it states that Jesus “sat down” to teach (Matthew 5:1), Peter “raised his voice” (Acts 2:14), Paul “motioned with his hand” (Acts 13:16, 21:40), and Nehemiah “shook out the folds of his robe” as he accused the nobles (Neh. 5:13). At other times the laconic biblical text leaves us to imagine voice and bearing as when Jesus excoriated the Pharisees (Matt. 23).

Communication designed for the ear and eye should be presented skillfully through the ear and eye. This is true not only for the congregation when they hear the text read in church, but also for the preacher as he or she prepares in the privacy of the study. Read the text aloud! Release the aural, visual, and even kinesthetic components of the text which are caged in the printed page. For example, if the rhetorical situation was one of controversy and debate, hear it and feel it in your muscles. Release the emotion and interpersonal dynamics of the original face-to-face communication. If the rhetorical situation was one of tender pastoral warmth, allow your voice and face to reflect it. If the original speaker addressed a large crowd, lift up your voice, and stretch out your hands.

Oral communication is a communal event, and when we read speeches aloud the dynamics of the original event live again. We create community. As pastors speak and listeners attend, the spoken word creates possibilities for communion impossible with mere printed words. Furthermore, by embodying texts which were originally embodied—the speeches of the Bible—we identify ourselves with the speakers of the past, demonstrating our unity with them in the grand metanarrative.

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### Notes

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1. See also the helpful discussion of "three levels of meaning" in biblical narrative in Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 91.